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Committee on Diversity
Minutes
February 11, 2013

Committee members in attendance: John Lear, Mark Martin, Aislinn Melchior, Amy Ryken (Chair), student member Hannah Smith, George Tomlin, and Carolyn Weisz.

Meeting called to order by Chair Ryken at 8:33 AM.
Minutes from the previous meeting unanimously approved.

Announcements:

Weisz will bring a request for a curricular conversation on diversity at a future Wednesdays at 4 session (probably April 17th) to Prof. Nancy Bristow, who will forward it to the Wed. at 4 planning group.

Ryken announced that the Board of Trustees will hold a 2-hour workshop on diversity and inclusion at its meeting later this week, representing substantial attention by the Trustees. The purpose is to inform the Trustees about demographic changes in applicants, pedagogy and access, and campus climate survey results. Five faculty/staff/students will facilitate small group discussions. Ryken hoped there would be openness as to the resources needed to address the issues, and noted that quantitative survey data can be complemented by comments reflecting the degree of pain some students feel. Weisz affirmed that she viewed the survey as a precarious sole source of data on the campus status of diversity and inclusion, but adequate as a conversation opener. Lear noted that at the general faculty meeting was a discussion about the many challenges to the university: financial, demographic, curricular diversity, and that these posed an opportunity as well as a risk.

BERT Update:

Martin and Weisz provided it. Martin expressed dismay at the volume of graffiti on classroom desks that was demeaning or offensive in nature toward particular groups. The suggestion was made to have faculty proactively email their students about how damaging it is, as well as how costly to remove. Committee members heard figures on the incidence of sexual violence on campus. Weisz asserted that as such figures are markedly under-reported, caution should be used in disseminating them. To a comment that the issue might be addressed in freshmen seminars, Smith noted that they are already packed full. Ryken informed the committee that Debbie Chee leads a counseling workgroup on sexual violence on campus. It was proffered that the language in the university sexual harassment policy is unhelpful for a community member in immediate crisis. A three-fold strategy of improvement is being pursued:
Awareness...Prevention...Action.

Martin and Weisz reported that a new on-line sexual harassment tutorial for faculty, staff, and students is supposed to be better than the previous one. Ryken spoke again for the campus accessing multiple sources of evidence for portraying a more accurate picture of the status.

Diversity Requirement:

Ryken told the committee she had spoken to Dean Bartanen about including a discussion of this topic at the Fall Faculty Conversation, and that Bartanen said she would talk to the president about it. There may also be time at the deans/chairs/program directors meetings on March 13th or April 24th for a discussion. It was noted that it helps to communicate with chairs beforehand about an upcoming discussion so that they can poll their department colleagues.

As for the assembled diversity curricular responses of departments in their five-year reviews, Ryken asked how should they be framed so as to best analyze them. Should one start with the university mission statement (“a deep awareness...”). The department modal response was of diversity as “multiple views.” Melchior saw value in the breadth of approaches across all departments that would be useful for chairs to see. Discussion of a potential diversity requirement could be engendered.

Martin expressed concern that faculty might resist a requirement. Weisz noted, though, that studies have shown that when requirements are set with firm administrative backing, that people do change, and then feel justified in what they have done. The curriculum/co-curriculum link is very close. For example, one of the recent chief diversity officer candidates suggested a required internship where students encounter diversity.

Lear noted that in his last department review faculty operated without guidance for answering the diversity question, and they inadvertently left out one aspect they could have written about. Weisz advocated providing chairs with an integrated model of curriculum-recruitment-retention-co-curriculum to capture the whole educational experience reaching every student. Smith raised the question of whether departments could make clear to their students why they are doing what they are doing in the realm of diversity- to which there was general affirmation. Lear suggested embedding a link in the curriculum review document’s question on diversity showing different models for how to address it. Such a resource could be helpful for departments seeking guidance. Weisz and Ryken resolved to draft a brief communication for department heads indicating the breadth of issues, scope of activities, and ways of framing the diversity question, and to bring it to the next meeting. Ryken volunteered to inform the Curriculum Committee about what this committee is working on.

Chair Ryken reminded committee members that the next meeting will take place in the McCormick Room in Collins Library.

Meeting was adjourned at 9:30 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

George Tomlin