

University Committee on LGBT Issues
March 19, 2004

Present: C. Andrews, J. Altman, C. Burnside, K. Fields (HR, guest), J. Levy (SSW, guest), E. Lewis (SSW, guest), M. Miller, M. Moon, B. Munjas, S. Watstein (recorder)

Absent: D. Benson, J. Bradford, M. Brown, W. Fahey

Excused Absences: R. Buehler, D. Fillmore

Agenda items included discussion of Diversity and Equity, SMSA, Queer Action, domestic partnership initiatives (Faculty Senate, School of the Arts), the April meeting, EEO/AA sensitivity training, committee Web site, and our next meeting. Micah McCreary was on the agenda, but schedule conflicts delayed his arrival.

Equity and Diversity

Burnside and Watstein provided an update from the March 11, 2004 Diversity and Equity Committee meeting. Most of the meeting was spent discussing a draft resolution on the provision of spousal benefits to domestic partners through a domestic partner benefits program for those benefits under the auspices of the University. Reports from sub-committees (Recruitment, Retention, and Access) followed. Unresolved issues: status of our sub-committee; appointment letters; Committee's stance on student membership; rules governing our sub-committee's membership. Burnside and Watstein are meeting with Dean Langston on March 31, 2004 to discuss these and other issues.

Domestic Partnership Initiatives

School of Social Work resolution: C. Andrews provided an update as to the status of this resolution. It is being discussed by senior administration. There may be light at the end of the tunnel - - it appears "baby steps" might be taken.

Faculty Senate: M. Moon had previously (March 18) emailed materials (draft resolution and Q/A) to committee members as to the status of the Faculty Senate's debate on this issue. She stated that it was a good time to do some grassroots work, and noted that Senators should be bringing this back to their constituents for feedback and further discussion. She noted too that some edits will come to the Faculty Senate.

School of the Arts: C. Burnside reported that all 15 units in the School of the Arts responded to an email sent to the 15 chairs and area heads by the Dean concerning the issue of domestic partner benefits at VCU. He noted that eight of the responses were strongly in favor of the issues, four reported favorable reaction, but with some qualification, and four remaining units expressed a myriad of concerns. Burnside noted that looking at this response, it is safe to say that the majority were either strongly in favor of the issue or were in favor of supporting the issue with some qualification.

EEO/AA Sensitivity Training Materials

Burnside and Watstein reported that they were scheduled to meet with both J. Williams and V. Williams, EEO/AA, on March 23, 2004 to discuss proposed sensitivity training on LGBT. Training is designed in support of the University's commitment to non-discrimination. Draft training materials were mailed to members earlier in the week (probably too close to the meeting to allow for sufficient time to review - - sorry folks!).

Enthusiasm about the EEO/AA initiative was expressed, and the importance of our involvement in both materials development and training emphasized. A wide range of concerns were expressed about the materials - - title appears to be mismatched with the content; focus is unclear (sexual orientation vs. gender identify vs. diversity); "sexual orientation" is not the right umbrella; content is too simplistic; ditto for the graphics. Questions were raised about the target audience, and whether or not this would be mandated or be a soft requirement, similar to the sexual harassment training. The need to focus on intended audience was stressed, i.e. what does this mean to me, as an employee of VCU? Folks noted that many people are clueless that they work with gays, lesbians, bisexuals. The suggestion was made that the focus of the training be on discrimination, which is the orientation of EEO/AA, as opposed to on sexual orientation or gender identify. The aforementioned could be nested under a module on discrimination. A suggestion was made to include material on age discrimination, race discrimination, discrimination against persons with disabilities, etc. Interest in incorporating case studies was also expressed. The training should complement that done by Safe Zone and Human Resources.

The group recommended that a sub-committee be established to work with EEO on this important initiative. K. Fields volunteered to work with the group, which will include Burnside and Watstein as well as the two School of Social Work guests, J. Levy and E. Lewis.

Membership

Issues which surfaced at our February meeting made a return appearance - - if we are a formal sub committee of Diversity and Equity appointment letters are needed to validate this status, for example, and how do we grow our membership? Will formal status (as a sub-committee) effect membership? "Outreach" appears to be one of the answers, but to whom? By whom? What's been effective in the past, and, conversely, what's not been effective in the past? Should attendance at meetings be required? Membership is the focus of the April meeting; the roster will be adjusted accordingly. Students will be asked to join us; sentiment favored representatives from the Academic Campus and the Medical Center, from the undergraduate and graduate ranks. Support was expressed for inviting the SMSA president. Burnside and Watstein will check whether Diversity and Equity has a policy on student membership.

Web

Nothing to report here. Note the February minutes: "Although the proper location for our Web site has not yet been finalized, we are closer to a URL! Logical spots include off the Office of the Assistant Vice Provost for Diversity's page, <http://www.vcu.edu/provost/diversity.html>, and off the Diversity and Equity page. The group expressed interest in how many clicks away from the home page both locations are."

Housekeeping and Happenings

The next committee meeting was set for Friday, April 16, 2004 at 12 noon in the James Branch Cabell Library.

Trans Politics and Social Issues March 24, 2004, 7:30 P.M. Alice Haynes Room, Tyler Haynes Student Commons, University of Richmond

Barbara Smith, "The Truth That never Hurts: Thirty Years of Writing and Organizing for Social Change," Thursday, March 25, 2004, 7 - 10:00 P.M., Business Building Auditorium

"Rage is not a 1-day Thing", Wednesday, March 31, 2004, Shafer Street Playhouse, 7-10:00 P.M. (a documentary theatre play - - "The Untaught History of the Montgomery Bus Boycott")

Forum on Domestic Partnership Benefits in Virginia Higher Education, UVA, Saturday, April 3, see <http://www.indorgs.virginia.edu/uvaprider/viewnews.php?newsID=47>

What Makes our Teaching "Anti-Oppressive" Wednesday, April 7 (SSW and CTE), 11:00 a.m., Founders Room, Siegel Center

Day of Silence: April 21, with a breaking the silence event scheduled for 7 p.m. in Capital Ballroom C. Numerous campus groups are involved in this.