

University Committee on LGBT Issues
April 16, 2004

Present: D. Benson, M. Brown, R. Buehler, D. Fillmore, J. Levi, M. Moon,
B. Munjas, S. Watstein (recorder), J. Williams,
Absent: J. Altman, J. Bradford, W. Fahey, M. Miller
Excused Absences: C. Burnside

Agenda items included discussion of current legislative issues (HB 751), our sub-committee status, domestic partnership benefits matters, EWEQ/AA training, the Web site, SMSA, membership and calendar.

HB 751

Recent activities stripping contract rights for gay Virginians were discussed, notably, the anti-gay civil unions bill ("Marriage Affirmation Act" introduced by Delegate Bob Marshall [R-Manassas]) recently codified in the state. The law prohibits the recognition of civil unions, domestic partnerships, partnership contracts, or 'other arrangements' between same-sex couples that purport to bestow any of the benefits of marriage. The law, characterized by foes as "mean-spirited" and "anti-gay" and "anti-family" is unusually broad, something which has far reaching implications. The law will likely be challenged in every appropriate forum. D. Mason, from Equality Virginia (<http://www.equalityvirginia.org>) will join us at our May meeting. Equality Virginia is in the forefront of this fight and EV condemned the vote by the General Assembly immediately after it was known.

EEO/AA Sensitivity Training

J. Williams provided insight as to the EEO perspective about this training. The training will be part of a series of trainings from EEO, to include sessions on, for example, disability awareness and sexual harassment. These sessions are not mandatory, but strongly encouraged from a legal standpoint. The target audience for the sexual harassment sessions has been faculty and staff; this is the likely audience for the sexual orientation session. Concern was nonetheless expressed as to implementation with students; this is not the purpose of this training.

Developmental issues were considered, including training length (half the time we - - K. Fields, D. Fillmore and S. Watstein, had for the fall Human Resources training) and content - - the use of case studies (a more interactive mode), the use of factual information (statistics etc.), the challenge of addressing attitudes and values, and of working with adult learners. The use of a "Did You Know" type handout was considered, as was the use of a 10-item True/False instrument - - both would serve to dispel myths and stereotypes about LGBT, and serve as reality checks for participants and facilitators.

Finally, a discussion of how to bill or promote the training was held. The use of the phrase "sexual orientation" was considered, with some members expressing concerns about that language, and others noting the tie-in with legal (non-discrimination) nomenclature, trends, etc.

Point persons within the group are C. Burnside, D. Fillmore, S. Watstein, and J. Williams. K. Fields represents Human Resources and brings significant training experience to the table.

Diversity and Equity Committee

Core questions derive from our status as an official sub-committee of the Equity and Diversity Committee, chaired by N. Langston, School of Nursing. Are there student representatives on other presidential committees? Ditto for staff representatives? What is the organizational purpose of Diversity and Equity? M. Moon suggested we revisit our original discussion about where this group should live; she stressed that she doesn't want staff and students to feel disenfranchised again. Other questions were raised, e.g. how do folks find out about our sub-committee? Are our meetings open? How can we make certain that staff and students are engaged in our discussions? How should we best promote ourselves? It was agreed that S. Watstein and C. Burnside will return to N. Langston with these questions.

Domestic Partnership Initiatives

J. Levi provided an update as to the UVA forum on Domestic Partnership Benefits in Virginia Higher Education on Saturday April 3. Soft vs. hard benefits were covered at the forum. The importance of alliance building among schools was stressed.

Faculty Senate Domestic Partnership Initiatives

S. Watstein provided an update as to the Senate's discussions and actions re: L. Cramer's and K. Murphy-Judy's proposal re: domestic partner benefits. A vote on the proposed resolution was taken at the April 6 meeting; the resolution passed.

School of Social Work Domestic Partner Benefits Resolution (R. Buerlin)

R. Buerlin shared updates with the group in March; no further developments were noted.

VCU Libraries on Domestic Partner Benefits (S. Watstein)

Watstein noted that the Libraries are in the process of reviewing its circulation privileges. It is expected that borrowing privileges will be extended to domestic partners. For more about borrowing privileges, visit <http://www.library.vcu.edu/circpriv/>.

School of the Arts Domestic Partner Benefits (S. Putman)

S. Putman was not present to provide an update.

Web

D. Benson reported that he's having difficulty with format issues and with access to files on the server. S. Watstein offered to contact the Office of the Assistant Vice Provost for Diversity, M. McCreary, for approval to locate our page off theirs, <http://www.vcu.edu/provost/diversity.html>. We also want to link off the Diversity and Equity page. In our previous meeting we'd expressed interest in how many clicks away from the home page both locations are. This has not been resolved.

SMSA

[This was on our agenda, but I'm not sure we covered it!. Anyone able to help?]

Membership

[This was also on our agenda, but I'm not sure we covered it!. Anyone able to help?]

Housekeeping and Happenings

The next meeting was set for Friday, May 21, 2004 at 12 noon in the James Branch Cabell Library.

