

**Council for Equity and Community**  
**Summary of Activities**  
**September 10, 2008**

The Council for Equity and Community (CEC) was convened for the first time at a meeting on March 26, 2008. President Gast charged the Council with its responsibilities, briefly reviewing the historical developments that led to its formation. Lehigh trustee Ralph A. Thomas was also present at the meeting, discussing the relationship of the CEC and its activities to that of the recently established Board of Trustees subcommittee on equity and community. At its second meeting on April 16, the CEC organized itself into four sub-groups (each of them addressing singly or in combination items from among the seven goals initially established for the CEC). The first group deals with curriculum and co-curricular activities as well as with research and scholarship; the second with recruitment and retention issues (for students, faculty, and staff); the third with institutional practices and group relations; and the fourth sub-group will focus on external relations. The full CEC met on a bi-weekly basis throughout the summer (and continues to do so). The sub-groups have been convened separately and as needed in order to execute assigned tasks. Leon Washington from the Office of Admissions and Financial Aid, Charles Smith, one of the university's ombudspersons, Jacqueline Matthews from Human Resources, and Allison Ragon from the Office of the First-Year Experience have each, on separate occasions, been invited to participate in the Council's discussions. Chief of Police Edward Shupp will be joining us for one of our meetings in early September.

The Council has made significant early progress on some agenda items. We have drafted a brief syllabus statement about the desideratum for a learning community at Lehigh, and the mutual responsibility that faculty, staff, and students share in fostering it. The chair of the university's Educational Policy Committee has been asked to place the discussion of this statement on that committee's agenda for its next meeting in September. By the end of 2008 it is our hope that this statement will have been discussed and adopted by the entire faculty. A white paper embodying the proposal for a faculty development seminar has been drafted and recently submitted to President Gast, who has approved support for a pilot version in spring 2009. This seminar would involve faculty who are interested in designing new courses or adapting old ones for the purpose of better educating students about issues of diversity, as well as fostering a better understanding of phenomena such as racism, sexism, ageism, homophobia, religious intolerance, and various forms of social and economic injustice. It would also help faculty to develop strategies for ensuring that their classrooms remain open and hospitable environments for learning and the exchange of ideas. Conducting such seminars over the next several years would help dramatically to transform the Lehigh curriculum "from the ground up." We have also begun discussions of an equally dramatic "top down" approach, i.e., the recommendation of fundraising for the creation of endowed chairs in strategic areas (e.g., Africana Studies, Women's Studies, Latin American Studies, and Asian Studies). The combination of these two strategies could produce a sea change in the learning environment at Lehigh, attracting a wider range of undergraduate and graduate student applicants, while greatly enhancing our efforts to recruit new faculty and staff.

Issues of student recruitment have been at the forefront of our early deliberations. The conversation with Dean Washington focused on the creation of a new question for the undergraduate application (one designed both to help us learn more about the applicant's commitment to building an equitable, hospitable, and diverse community and to signal Lehigh's own dedicated effort to become such a community). We also discussed the need to better train student tour guides and to use campus tours much more effectively as a means for communicating the university's vision and aspirations. Consequently, we will be proposing in the very near future some significant changes both in the Lehigh application materials and in the procedure for recruiting and training student tour guides.

Strategies for the targeted opportunity hiring of minority faculty and staff have been discussed and will eventuate in some specific proposals forthcoming.

In the twenty-first century, so much of our communication with outsiders occurs in virtual space. One of our sub-groups is focusing the bulk of its attention on creating an effective web page presence for the CEC in particular, but also for the university in general with respect to issues of diversity and equity. A complete redesign of these relevant web pages and of their interconnection should be completed by the end of the academic year.

Recruiting a diverse community of students is a fruitless exercise if we then proceed to "drop the ball" once they arrive on campus. The discussion with Allison Ragon focused on strategies for effectively transforming the orientation process for first-year students with respect to the better communication of Lehigh's vision of a diverse community; we also need to communicate our expectations concerning each student's responsibility for contributing positively to such a community. Recommendations for specific changes in orientation provided for students in the forthcoming class of 2013 will be developed and proposed after deliberations with Ms. Ragon and her colleagues have been completed.

One of our sub-groups is exploring the resources supplied by the NCBI (National Coalition Building Institute), toward the potential end of inviting them to campus to conduct training sessions for select groups of staff, faculty, and students. (We also want to learn more about a recent NCBI grant awarded to the City of Bethlehem police department, i.e., what was proposed and how the grant is being utilized.) In addition, the CEC is providing support for Lehigh staff to attend two forthcoming events: an SJTI workshop at Cornell University on October 3 ("Creating Social Justice on Campus: Best Practices and Lessons Learned") and a conference on "Diversity, Learning, and Inclusive Excellence: Accelerating and Assessing Progress," in Long Beach, CA, October 16-18, sponsored by the AACU.

Actions speak louder than words, and the CEC remains committed to generating recommendations for both long-term and short-term actions that can help to transform Lehigh into a more just, equitable, and inclusive community. But we recognize also that words can sometimes function as powerful verbal actions, that how we speak about ourselves and to each other can also have tangible effects on our community. With that in mind, the CEC continues to reflect on the language that we use. The syllabus statement is one example of an attempt to use language gently to shape the learning environment in our classrooms. In addition, we have contacted offices within each of the four colleges, urging them to use consistently the

university's current diversity statement on all application materials, in appropriate web page locations, etc. Finally, we intend before the end of the semester to complete the final draft of a brief new statement that articulates more clearly what sort of community Lehigh aspires to be, what we mean by "diversity," and precisely why we value it (as something more than a commodity that we can sell to students paying tuition), as well as describing the various and subtle forms that oppression takes and our commitment to resisting it.

We also propose this semester to conduct an inventory/audit of all the individuals and offices at Lehigh that have been charged to implement programs related to diversity or have responsibility for ensuring that the university is a hospitable and equitable community. In conjunction with this audit, the Council is engaged in the careful consideration of the UDLC's November 2007 Benchmarking Report, with its proposal for the creation of a position at Lehigh for a chief diversity officer (a Vice President of Equity and Community). Our goal is to determine the ideal administrative structure for creating/maintaining a diverse and equitable university community at Lehigh.

Finally, we have begun to examine existing standards for Greek life at Lehigh with respect to diversity, multicultural awareness, community service, etc. This is the first small step in the creation of a proposal to make residential and social life on campus more inclusive and hospitable to persons of various types and backgrounds—certainly such a plan cannot ignore the massive significance of the role played by the Lehigh Greek system in shaping campus climate.