

Council for Equity and Community Summary of Activities

September 2009

MEMBERSHIP CHANGES

This fall, the CEC welcomed two new undergraduate student members, Temitope Adekanbi (Sophomore) and Christopher Cassidy (Junior) and marked the departure of Michael Callendar '09 and graduate student member Jill Franco. We are excited to have Temi and Chris join us and cannot thank Michael and Jill enough for their hard work as part of the Council's founding membership. After identifying the need for an additional graduate student on the Council, the CEC sought and received approval from President Gast to add a second graduate student member, and therefore will be recruiting two new graduate student members in the Fall '09 semester.

ACADEMICS

The Council continues to lead a number of projects and initiatives on the academic side. For example, the Spring 2009 semester faculty development pilot seminar, led by CEC members Dr. Jackie Krasas and Dr. Yaba Blay, was a success. Participants were guided through the process of developing a new course (or redesigning an existing one) that would incorporate issues of diversity and multiculturalism and/or involve service learning. Plans are underway for continuing the seminar for AY09-10.

We continue to work with Dean Anne Meltzer (College of Arts and Sciences) on behalf of the relevant academic programs, or RAPs (such as Africana Studies, Women's Studies, Asian Studies, and Latin American Studies), so they get the resources they need to be vibrant contributors to the academic climate at Lehigh. The consensus is that now is the time to do something about them, during the implementation phase of the strategic planning process. We want to ensure that the RAPs get all the support they need for sustenance and growth. A near-final draft of our recommendations that has been approved by the RAP directors will next go back to Dean Meltzer for final comments/feedback before it is submitted to Provost Farrell.

COMMUNICATION

As planned, the CEC launched a new "Achieving Equity and Community at Lehigh" website in spring '09. The strategy behind developing a new site included capturing the university-wide goal of achieving equity and community while also communicating the goals and work of the CEC. The new site includes links to valuable resources, news about diversity-related initiatives across campus, and information about how members of the campus community can contribute to advancing the goals we set as a Council and those we have set as a university. The website plan includes adding new content on a regular basis, such as a listing of social justice courses available in the Lehigh curriculum, recruitment and retention figures, and comparisons to peer institutions on a variety of indicators. We encourage the Lehigh community to visit the site often for the latest information and additional detail on CEC activities. It can be found at <http://www.lehigh.edu/diversity>.

Over the summer, we engaged in conversations with General Counsel Frank Roth, Vice Provost for Student Affairs John Smeaton, and Police Chief Ed Shupp about the content of the campus wide email “safety bulletins” issued by University Police to alert the students, staff, and faculty to urgent safety issues. Our growing concern has been that, very often, these bulletins have identified the race of the perpetrator with no additional descriptors. This practice contributes to a campus climate that fears underrepresented minorities and marks them as “suspect.” While the law requires that the police report any descriptive information that the victim provides, our contention is that the campus police need to follow up such descriptions with requests for additional information such as “What makes you say the person was Hispanic?” Chief Shupp and Vice Provost Smeaton have agreed to work harder on crafting these messages in a way that balances our need to foster a more inclusive community and our reporting requirements under the Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act. So far, we believe the messages that have gone out this academic year have done a good job of that. More information about what needs to be included in safety bulletins is available on the new “timely warning” page of the University Police website at http://www.lehigh.edu/~inlpd/timely_warning.shtml.

We also worked this summer with the University Harassment Policy Committee on clarifying the content of their web-based materials and making the delineation clearer between their efforts/services and the mission of the CEC (e.g. the CEC is not an incident response group).

We have had a preliminary meeting with the new Assistant Vice President for Communications, Jennifer Tucker '91, about the nature of campus communications and the choices that are made about what is and is not “newsworthy.” While we have made strides in this area (and even managed to get front-page billing with an “Equity and Community” icon on the lower-right corner of the University’s external homepage!), there is still much work to be done here and we are looking forward to working with Jennifer on these issues.

Lastly, in the area of communications, we plan to work this fall with the University’s senior leadership to explore ways students might have improved access to the President and upper administration to voice concerns and raise issues.

STRATEGIC PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

We have been working with the “shepherds” of the Strategic Planning Implementation Group (SPIG) to come to consensus about the most effective ways that the CEC can be involved in the plan’s implementation so that conversations about equity and community are tightly integrated throughout. Currently, the CEC is listed in the latest draft of the SPIG framework for moving forward as being involved in only issues related to recruitment, student affairs, and partnering with the community. While the CEC is very pleased to be slated to play an advisory role in those aspects of the implementation, we believe the CEC also has a valuable role to play in discussions surrounding resource analysis, the evaluation of the University’s research agenda, long-range academic planning, and fundraising/campaign planning. We are currently lobbying hard for “a seat at the table” in those discussions as well.

Additionally, in support of our recommendation that the University form a full-time, cabinet-level position aimed at improving equity and community on campus, in September the CEC presented a comprehensive benchmarking report on “best practices” for the administrative structure of Lehigh’s peer institutions and targeted industry leaders in this area. The project was led by Dr. Henry Odi, who researched and authored the extensive study, which included an “inventory” of all multicultural and diversity curricula, offices, services, and other programming available at Lehigh.

NEW INITIATIVES

National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education

At the CEC’s urging, Lehigh has joined the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education over the summer. This will not only give us access to valuable contacts, resources, and information in the area of diversity and inclusion, but it will help further lay the groundwork for a possible VPEC at Lehigh.

Equity and Community Related Program/Project Support

The CEC has put together a “funding request” procedure for staff, student, and faculty campus groups to seek resources for equity and community related program support, educational initiatives, and research that helps advance our work. To be eligible, funded programs/projects must have a significant impact on campus life and be open/available to the greater campus community.

Employment Equity/Staff Issues

Over the last few months we have begun to turn our attention to issues of employment equity and the “status” issues that were identified in the 2007 Campus Climate Survey. Among the concerns we are addressing is the lack of representation that non-exempt (hourly) staff have in major university committees; because they are seldom part of these higher-level meetings, they are not able to contribute when important issues are debated. To start, we have requested approval from the President to add two non-exempt staff positions on the CEC and will begin recruiting for those individuals shortly. We plan to meet later in the fall semester with the Employee Relations Advisory Committee (ERAC), which comprises non-exempt and exempt staff members, to see how the CEC can facilitate staff having a stronger voice across campus.

In a related vein, we have also had meetings with Vice President for Finance and Administration Peggy Plympton, Assistant Vice President for Human Resources Jackie Matthews, Director of Budget Steve Guttman, and others to discuss employment equity within the context of addressing the economic downturn --particularly decision making by the new “vacant position review group” and the ways in which budget-cutting measures are being communicated to the campus community.

Greek Life

The CEC invited Director of Fraternity and Sorority Affairs Tim Wilkinson and Associate Dean of Campus Living and Student Conduct Tom Dubreuil to a September meeting to discuss the fraternity/sorority accreditation process and the leadership role that the Greeks can play in enhancing equity and community on campus. We will be working with them to enhance faculty involvement in Greek life and to explore ways in which the

CEC might become more involved as well. Among the ideas we will be pursuing is finding ways to connect the new Faculty Committee on Student Life with Greek life, adding a CEC representative on the accreditation committee, and establishing some sort of an award or acknowledgement for the fraternity/sorority that exhibits exemplary effort toward enhancing equity and community on campus that year.

Religious Diversity

The CEC has begun conversations with the Chaplaincy Services Office to explore ways that students from non-Judeo-Christian traditions are more included. In addition to the possibility of convening a “topical subgroup” on campus religious diversity issues (see “Campus-wide Dialog,” below), we are also considering supporting Chaplain Lloyd Steffen's proposal for a title change in that area to something that is more inclusive of all religious traditions (like "Dean of Religious Life" or something similar). Additionally, we plan to follow-up with appropriate decision makers on the progress of the new Islamic Studies program.

On- and Off-campus Safety

There is a growing concern among members of the campus community over the extent to which University Police and the Bethlehem Police are able to protect our students –both on and off-campus. This semester we will begin exploring the issues and possible solutions for improving on- and off-campus safety.

Campus-wide Dialog

And, finally, we will be exploring ways in which the CEC might extend its reach and begin the process of “engaging the entire campus in dialog,” as requested by President Gast in the September 17, 2009 campus-wide Town Hall meeting. Rabbi Seth Goren, Associate Chaplain and Director of Jewish Student Life, has suggested the creation of “topical subgroups” that would meet to discuss issues around specific diversity categories such as religion, race/ethnicity, gender/sexual orientation, disability, socio-economic status, faculty/staff relations, and others. While these groups would have some structure and a CEC-recruited leader, their agenda would be largely participant driven. The idea would be for them to identify key issues within their assigned topic, establish priorities, seek solutions, and implement change under the “coordination” of the CEC.