

**Excerpted Notes from the December 7, 2009 University Faculty Meeting Minutes**  
DRAFT [for approval at the next Faculty meeting, 2/8/10]

**Council for Equity and Community (CEC) Report:** Professor M. J. Bishop was introduced by President Gast, who encouraged discussion within a regular University Faculty meeting on this important topic. Prof. Bishop began her presentation with the comment that this was the first report ever to the Faculty from a University standing committee with the charge to promote equity and community at Lehigh. The committee members represent a wide range of Lehigh community members across campus, faculty, staff both exempt and non-exempt, grad and undergrad students. This group was formed as a result of several campus-wide initiatives, some of which originated almost 2 decades ago in the June, 1990, report of the Commission of Women and Minorities. There have been numerous reports and surveys on diversity, most languishing in the archives. The CEC website, “Achieving Equity and Community at Lehigh,” was created in spring ’09 to make these and other resource materials available to as wide an audience as possible. The CEC has focused on 4 major areas to provide some direction to the discussions and recommendations that are now in process: Curriculum in the classroom, research and other key broad learning/academic foci, recruitment of new community members at all levels (students, faculty, staff), and inter-group relations to engender mutual respect, safety and equity among all University community members. Today’s discussion will be directed towards the accountability that each and every community member must bear for the success of any initiatives implemented.

A number of the objectives set forth in the 1990’s reports still need to be pursued actively in response to the demographic trends identified in these reports whereby Lehigh had to increase and improve diversity in all of its dimensions on campus. We are still attempting to deal with similar if not identical root causes of the human tendencies that hinder our improvements. There have been extensive and long running “blame games” that identify others or other groups who are at fault as the basic instigators of ill-will in this regard. We have tried an approach that attempts to deconstruct or disaggregate the main problem into a series of smaller ones that can be resolved individually. However, the CEC realizes that there has been some definite progress on individual issues, but only slowly and incompletely with regard to the size of our problem that needs attention. Prof. Bishop posed the following questions for our discussion:

- “What is your own level of commitment to resolving these issues? To what extent is equity and community “front-of-mind” in everything you do as a member of the Lehigh community?”
- Where do we want to be with regard to these issues in another 20 years? 10 years? 5 years? How can it be different this time?
- What do we need to [do, have, be, understand] in order to get there?
- What should our next steps be? As individuals? As a faculty? As administrators? As students? As staff?”

She then introduced three concerned students each of whom made brief presentations to illustrate specific points as discussion starters.

Dominique Hugg mentioned the reprehensible behavior of some Lehigh students after the fall 2008 Presidential election, students who created a negative, defamatory and accusatory atmosphere that had no place in a community that promotes acceptance of a wide variety of viewpoints among its members. She stated that Lehigh needs a vice presidential position for equity and community (VPEC) who would be charged with proactive changes instead of the reactive changes we have relied upon in the past. This

top-down approach would be a good start towards introducing meaningful change. She appealed to the faculty for ideas and recommendations for the 19 and 20 year-olds who are looking for direction to make the changes needed. Karl Brisseaux also advocated the establishment of a VPEC position, which also was strongly supported in the 2007 Lehigh-wide campus climate survey. As our oft-quoted metaphor of the “Lehigh family” suggests, we need to develop these types of relationships to improve our community for future students. We need to avoid temporary fixes or relying on the regular turnover of students and faculty to “buy extra time” to institute change from our leadership. Khalil Uqdah commented that Lehigh’s aspirations as a leading university requires demonstration of commitment through an assertive, responsible and fully-charged, centralized leader within the senior management. All Lehigh students who seek jobs in the “real world” need to be trained as active change agents as they enter their future career paths. In addition, while there are staff members in the Global Union to help in this regard, international students also are part of our diversity efforts and need the advocacy of a VPEC. Unfortunately, as Prof. Bishop has amply illustrated with her pile of previous Lehigh diversity reports, with their recommendations we have seen recycled so many times, there has already been too much talk, and a person who reports directly to the President is long overdue. There are too many students from too wide a variety of groups who feel as if they are unwanted guests at Lehigh, rather than members of “the family.” These young Lehigh colleagues received a warm round of applause from the audience.

Prof. Bishop opened the floor for discussion. Prof. Narizny asked how we would know progress on diversity has occurred. What would resolve or meet the concerns we now have? In what specific ways have we failed? Does globalization, which Lehigh does well, not fit towards meeting diversity goals? Prof. Morgan responded that the next survey of the Lehigh community could show fewer complaints about diversity issues. However much the international students are already assisted on campus, this does not help US student groups that are marginalized. Prof. Lasker, as one of the authors of the 1990 report, mentioned that that early report had included very specific numerical goals. Has the CEC made any comparisons between these goals and our current numbers? Prof. Bishop replied that they have not yet done this because some of their concerns are qualitative in nature and difficult, if not impossible to quantify. They have not determined a picture of the end state of their committee charge. Prof. Cates opined that we may never arrive at a stabilized set of characteristics and we might worry about ourselves if we think we have “arrived” at such a state. We need to start and move forward with both some quantitative and qualitative goals to determine what impact the CEC will have on our community. Along the way, we continually need to ask ourselves whether there are still some groups who feel discriminated against and marginalized. Prof. Lasker observed that the VPEC issue was addressed in 1990 and for some time there were 2 individuals in the Provost’s Office charged with coordinating, directing and improving diversity across the campus. Now, no one appears to be doing these promotional jobs. Are these recommendations for a VPEC heard by Lehigh’s senior management?

President Gast said that these are valid concerns and that she is glad to hear them from students. We are not ignoring these issues but are weighing the change agent and leadership efforts carefully. Some benchmarking has been done to determine what would be the expected outcomes from a single individual, because the problems and issues are so complex and varied. What should be the characteristics of the person to be a/the change agent? Not only do we need to consider the person generating change, but also the receptors of the changes. This person will have to work with faculty, staff, students and others in a very broadly based constituency. The challenge within an academic institution is very different than in other organizations. It is possible for one major group to become disaffected and thereby create an unworkable situation. There is no single “magic bullet” by which the academy can be redirected quickly and uniformly, as an institution that operates by consensus and cooperation. Prof. Kashi Johnson observed that we need consistent ongoing action to take place for

progress to occur. What will be the vehicle for Lehigh to move forward? If not a VPEC, then how will we address this issue? Prof. Morgan, as a CEC member, commented that, for some time now, the CEC has essentially served in the “role” of a VPEC. The CEC has met with a wide range of groups across campus to become informed about their concerns. But CEC members have full time jobs of their own and are particularly challenged to achieve their own responsibilities and goals in addition to sustaining the mission of the CEC. Also, no one from the CEC is ever “at the table” when major decisions are made or issues are discussed... like introducing a new senior staff position. Prof. Fry offered that it is a daunting task to overcome prejudice. Do other institutions have such a person [VPEC]? Prof. Bishop responded that there have been numerous benchmarking studies that supply information about the myriad institutions that have a VPEC or similar position, the most recent one for the CEC by Henry Odi, Executive Director, Academic Outreach Office, during the summer, 2009. This report will be available on the CEC web site soon.

Prof. Lasker asked whether there is any chance of this position being established and noted that it might make sense to commit to the idea of the position first, then work out the structure, job description, and other details. President Gast explained that we are following up on the benchmarked schools to find out about their specific, real outcomes achieved by the person in such a role beyond their title, salaries, orientation of changes for faculty, staff, students, etc. We need to know what works, what doesn't, because unfortunately, these efforts are not always successful. Prof. K. Johnson asked whether this benchmarking process will lead to a “yes/no” decision on a VPEC. President Gast responded that it would and that decision would be forthcoming as soon as possible. As a point of information our student colleague Khalil said that in the last 5 years, 30 schools have established a VPEC, for example Vice President Shirley Ramirez has been appointed at Lafayette College. Provost Farrell commented that he wants to give change a chance at Lehigh. Student colleague Khalil suggested in this direction that it would be important to train faculty to handle certain situations in the classroom. He also offered that the students have already created a list of characteristics that would be advantageous for a VPEC. Another faculty colleague asked whether there was a backup “Plan B” from the Lehigh administration for another option or alternative to a VPEC. Prof. Sivakumar observed that “a problem well-defined will be a problem well-solved.” Prof. Bishop reported that the CEC has worked very hard over the past 18 months with the bulk of the work being project-management oriented –following-up on projects, attending meetings, addressing emails, and the like. Having a full-time VPEC Office to manage these efforts would offer a centralized, sustained approach to this issue. Student colleague Karl observed that most of the Diversity Committee Board meetings have been held sequentially with administrators, student groups, etc. It has been a very difficult task to keep all of the information and suggestions coordinated. Unfortunately, it often has been a too-disaggregated and atomistic process. When can we all sit at the same table to think together and make a decision? Prof. Bishop responded that we need a sustained effort by a specific group or person, not just volunteer members of the CEC. She is concerned that these issues be kept in front of everyone all the time so that everyone will be consciously accommodating change. Prof. Hyclak commented that it is critical to have the ‘right person’ in the “right place in the organization” in order to be effective and successful. That person’s peers and to whom s/he reports is essential to success.

President Gast thanked all of today’s participants for their comments and serious discussion of this critical issue as Lehigh moves forward in the future.