

Senate Diversity Committee Meeting

Minutes of September 12, 2013

Dodd Center Room 162

10:00 AM- 11:30 A.M.

In attendance: Sandra Bushmich, Alice Fairfield, Maria Luz Fernandez (Chair), Katherine Johansen (ODE), Diane Lillo-Martin, Margo Machida, Maria Martinez, Jeff Ogbar (Vice Provost for Diversity) Morty Ortega, Mark Overmyer-Velazquez (Diversity Strategic Planning Committee), Willena Price, Eugene Salorio.

1. The Committee met with Mark Overmyer-Velazquez, Chair of the Diversity Strategic Planning Committee (Jeff Ogbar and Elizabeth Conklin are co-heads of this committee) Mark's main purpose of this meeting was to hear from the Senate Diversity Committee on their ideas on strategic goals to improve best practices. Before this meeting he had sent to the committee three basic questions to discuss.
 - a. How do you define "diversity" from the perspective of your group unit?
 - b. What do you see UConn's biggest challenges to improve diversity?
 - c. What do you see UConn's greatest strengths for improving diversity?
2. The definition of diversity generated several discussions. Willena indicated that there was a definition that was created in 2002 for the Board of Trustees: "*Diversity encompasses the presence and participation of people who differ by age, color, ethnicity, gender, national origin, race, religion, and sexual orientation; and includes those with disabilities and from various socio-economic backgrounds. It encompasses not only individuals and groups, but also thoughts and attitudes. The fabric of diversity at our University must be woven in thought and in experience within a climate in which diverse views are welcomed and respected and in which there is a commonality that comes from working together to effect constructive change*". Gene Salorio indicated that a more pro-active tone needs to be added to this definition that includes "active involvement" and "having a voice", two points that everybody agreed upon.
3. In reference to the biggest challenges that were identified to improve diversity, recruitment, climate and retention of diverse populations were at the forefront of the discussion. Several arguments followed on the challenges involved in recruitment. This has been discussed in past meetings but it is a consensus that a "good faith effort" to increase the pools and the potential hiring of diverse candidates is not enough and that there have to be some sort of accountability such as specific guidelines that search committees, department heads and deans should follow to ensure that diversity goals are met. It was also discussed that the diversity goals should be based on US/Sate demographics and that the best practices used by our "aspirant institutions" should be reviewed and followed. The challenges that UConn faces regarding retention and climate (that are inter-connected) followed. The Committee believes that the University has a responsibility to

ensure retention of diverse faculty and that climate issues do exist as documented by COACHE evaluations to non-tenured track faculty as well as a number of anecdotal stories.

4. When the greatest strengths of UConn to improve diversity were brought to the table, there were some positive aspects that are currently happening that can be attributed to current Administration including the creation of the office of the Vice-Provost for Diversity and all the initiatives generated this office that are aimed at diverse faculty, staff and students. Susan Herbst also has indicated in different forums her commitment to civility and to diversity. As an example, she has been discussing the idea whether practices followed by search committees should be institutionalized to ensure diversity goals for UConn. It was also mentioned that phone calls made by search committees (as many as 25) are an important piece to diversify pools although this method be viewed as intrusive by department heads and deans.
5. As a final discussion, the committee members expressed an interest to meet with Provost Choi to hear from him directly his vision on UConn's diversity plans. Maria Luz agreed to communicate with him to schedule a meeting in the fall semester.
6. The meeting was adjourned at 11:20 am

Respectfully submitted

Maria Luz Fernandez, PhD
Chair, Senate Diversity Committee