

April 2, 2018

Committee on Diversity (CoD) Meeting Minutes

*Present at the Meeting:* Michael Benitez; Sam Liao; Geoff Proehl, Melvin Rouse; Stuart Smithers (Chair); Jennifer Utrata.

*Note taker:* Geoff Proehl

1. Meeting called to order by Smithers at 9:06 A.M.

2. Minutes approved

3. Smithers, Liao, and Utrata reported on their meeting with the Professional Standards Committee (PSC) with respect to the question of gender and racial bias, its influence on student evaluations, and research indicating that student evaluations do not measure teaching effectiveness. This item is on the agenda for the next faculty meeting: Wednesday, April 4. Benitez asked how the PSC was going forward with the issue. Utrata reported that PSC was planning to explore the problem of bias and student evaluations, as well as suggest some ways to address the issue at the faculty meeting. Utrata felt that the meeting with the PSC had been effective and that the committee seemed responsive to the CoD's concerns. Benitez also shared information he had on how the issue was moving forward, as well as his concern over the meagerness of resources available for addressing the problem. Utrata noted that research shows student evaluations do not address teaching effectiveness, and that they should not, therefore, be used in tenure and promotion decisions. Discussion followed on the degree to which the PSC understood the essence of what the CoD was suggesting. Liao cited additional recent research that suggested student evaluations may not only be ineffective but also legally discriminatory. (Liao forwarded the relevant article to committee members.) Smithers suggested committee members attend the upcoming faculty meeting as a follow-up move to the committee's work on this issue.

Benitez mentioned his concern over the potential for a lack of forward movement in addressing these concerns. He would like to see Puget Sound take serious steps to address this issue but noted a paucity of critical material support being allocated for that purpose. He suggested the effort given to address these issues needs to be similar to that devoted to developing and adopting the KNOW requirement, which began with Burlington funding for a group of faculty and staff to develop the KNOW proposal over an extended period of time.

Benitez, Utrata, and others underscored the need for chairs and leaders at the department level to be aware of the problems surrounding bias and student evaluations in tenure and promotion decisions. In addition to this, Benitez noted that this issue must also be made a priority at the administrative level of campus governance. There was a consensus that the committee should endeavor to move the conversation forward by advocating for resources to support the work that will be required to eliminate issues of bias, particularly as related to the use of student evaluations in tenure and promotion deliberations.

This led to a side discussion about the relationship between scholarship and teaching, the critical role teaching plays in earning tenure, and the relative lack of teacher training in graduate programs.

4. Smithers moved the committee on to the next agenda item. Associate Dean Martin Jackson had notified Smithers that the Curriculum Committee (CC) had not acted on the CoD's recommendation to change the wording of question #6, the diversity question, for departmental curriculum reviews.

This took the committee back to work done in the last academic year (2016-2017). Jackson was tracking whether or not the CC had addressed the recommendation from CoD. Liao then forwarded to the committee the draft of the revision he had done for the committee in the fall of 2017:

*The work of diversity at Puget Sound seeks to account for and redress deeply embedded historical practices and legacies, forms of cultural and social representation, and institutional policies and processes that can systematically exclude groups or individuals from full participation in higher education and the considerable benefits it offers. (Threshold 2022: Cultivating a Culture of Inclusive Excellence; 2016 Annual Report, p. 1)*

Diversity includes attention to identity characteristics such as age, disability, sex, race, ethnicity, religion/spiritual tradition, gender identity and expression, sexual identity, veteran status, job status or socioeconomic class, nation of origin, language spoken, documentation status, personal appearance and political beliefs.

Diversity also includes attention to processes such as design of the curriculum, hiring and retention practices, assessment of performance, and any other day-to-day decisions made within the institution.

How does your department, school, or program demonstrate diversity as defined?

Benitez noted that one of the concerns around the diversity question was that "recruitment and retention" of students and faculty, as in "hiring and retention practices" was not in the purview of the CC.

Given a degree of confusion around the process of forwarding this resolution and the CC's response, Liao noted the needed for a better way of tracking these conversations. He further recommended we strongly endorse the above wording and inquire as to why it was not acted on. Benitez suggested, with respect to concerns about what the CC can or cannot ask a department to address in a curriculum review, that departments need not feel as if they need to address every aspect of the question as written, that what the question primarily provides is an opportunity for reflection.

Smithers noted that he did not know why the suggested revision was not accepted.

Benitez endorsed the revision as in line with the university's diversity plan. He understands the concerns regarding what may or may not be expected in a curriculum review, but asserted that at a foundationally level, diversity in all departments has to do with hiring and retention. At a minimum, curriculum reviews must address how we serve students, and that the holding and retention of students is a crucial concern.

Jackson will contact the chair of CC and attempt to clarify where we are in the process of adopting the CoD's proposed revision of question #6.

5. Smithers noted that the committee will have one more meeting this semester before he submits our annual report to the Faculty Senate. Benitez suggested that the year-end report to the senate might seek to clarify the role or work of this committee, including its relationship with the senate and other committees on campus. Liao noted that at Wellesley a black task force sits on various committees including faculty advancement. This is one way in which the diversity committee might have more influence. Along the same lines, Benitez mentioned the possible role committee members might play as diversity liaisons in searches. Smithers called attention to the dangers of the diversity committee being enclosed and isolated from the work of the campus as opposed to moving out into the larger campus community. Utrata notes that this committee does not have much power compared to others on campus, as evidenced by the inaction of the CC in response to the committee's revision of the diversity question for curriculum reviews. Smithers suggested that the committee could use its year-end report to shape the following year's charge. There was a general consensus in support of this notion.

Benitez noted a sense of waiting across campus with respect to new initiatives until the new strategic plan comes out. With respect to making meaningful changes, Smithers also observed that material resources will be tight, as universities face challenges fundamental to their survival.

On this note, Smithers adjourned the meeting at 10:06 a.m.