

Committee on Diversity 2017-2018 Annual Report

Submitted May 5, 2018 by Stuart Smithers, Committee Chair

Committee on Diversity members 2017-2018: Mike Benitez; Vivie Nguyen; Geoff Proehl; Sam Liao; Jennifer Utrata; Melvin Rouse; Stuart Smithers (chair, spring); Kristin Wilbur (chair, fall); Layth Sabbagh (student, fall) Juan Carlos Esquina Ortega (student, spring)

Report

At the conclusion of the 2016-2017 AY, the COD made the following recommendation:

“Recommendations for charges to the COD for 2017-2018:

1. Continue work with the PSC to support the need for addressing bias in course evaluations and contribute to the development of an education strategy if this is the decision of the PSC.
2. Continue to advocate for and support diversity-related campus initiatives that could benefit from the support of standing committees of the faculty.
3. Support and assist as needed with the Spring 2018 Campus Climate Survey and upcoming University Strategic Plan process.”

According to the minutes of the COD meeting of September 20, 2017, Prof. Jung Kim, as Senate liaison, provided the AY 17-18 charges: “...continue with committee charge #1: to serve the university’s goal of increasing the social diversity of the campus and the Faculty Senate charge #3: Develop and implement a strategy to educate students about bias in course evaluations.”

Regarding Charge #3: Bias in Student Evaluations of Teaching

This charge was a continuation from the previous year, which included a meeting with Jennifer Neighbors, then chair of the PSC. During the fall semester the committee discussed this charge, raising issues regarding the scale of the problem and the inadequacy of approaches that would actually eliminate or even sufficiently educate students regarding bias. Utrata and Liao were especially helpful providing the committee with data and review articles. As the senators know, this issue was also addressed by the PSC. During the spring semester PSC chair Amanda Mifflin invited Benitez, Smithers, Liao, and Utrata to join the PSC for a meeting to discuss

the question of gender and racial bias, its influence on student evaluations, and research indicating that student evaluations do not measure teaching effectiveness. At that meeting it was suggested that the PSC raise the problem with the full faculty. The item was added to the faculty meeting agenda for Wednesday, April 4 and the discussion was continued at the next faculty meeting. The COD expressed concern over the meagerness of resources (time, staff, and money) available for addressing problems like this. In the COD's April meeting 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*** (for obvious reasons of fairness, but also due to liability concerns). In that regard, Liao cited additional recent research that suggested student evaluations may not only be ineffective but also legally discriminatory. The committee was generally concerned over the potential for a lack of forward movement in addressing the issue in a timely manner, with members noting that the effort to address these bias 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.

There was consensus on the committee that this issue must also be made a priority at the administrative level of campus governance and that more resources are needed 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.

Regarding Question #6:

The COD was surprised to return to the issue of Curriculum Committee's review and adoption (or non-adoption) of new language and guidelines for Question #6 in departmental reviews. Benitez and Smithers (as chair) were invited by Martin Jackson to discuss the matter with Ben Tromly (as chair of the CC). The COD sent its final recommendation to the CC at the end of AY 16-17, and had imagined that the matter had been resolved. After reviewing and discussing the previous years' work (including the draft of changes primarily drafted by Prof. Liao and approved by the committee), the COD reaffirmed its conclusions and suggestions – prior to the meeting with Tromly and Jackson.

As senators know, the CC met after the April 12 meeting with Benitez and Smithers, discussing and adopting three resolutions on the Charge (which resolutions are now before the Faculty Senate):

“Move to recommend that the Committee on Diversity appeal to the Faculty Senate to engage the full faculty in determining the best faculty governance process for having each department, program, or school report on its engagement with the Diversity Statement and the Diversity Strategic Plan.”

“Move to recommend to the Faculty Senate that it engage the full faculty in determining the best faculty governance process for having each department, program, or school report on its engagement with the Diversity Statement and the Diversity Strategic Plan.”

A final motion was passed to “include a hyperlink to *Threshold 2022: Cultivating a Culture of Inclusive Excellence* in the existing Question #6, in addition to a link to the Diversity Statement.”

As noted by Tromly: “The CC supports mechanisms for promoting and evaluating diversity in the curriculum, and agrees that the existing question 6 does not encourage thoughtful responses. However, the CC decided that the form of question 6 would best be handled as part of a larger discussion of diversity that would involve the full faculty.”

The COD will vote at its final meeting on whether or not to endorse the resolutions from the CC. My sense is that that the COD will indeed approve endorsement of the CC’s three resolutions regarding Question #6.

Regarding Charge #1: Increasing Social Diversity on Campus

Finally, and returning to AY 17-18 charge #1 (“...to serve the university’s goal of increasing the social diversity of the campus...”), in one spring meeting we discussed at length the faculty meeting presentation by the VP of Enrollment. We noted the discussion related to the “UPS 3” and the anecdotal impressions reported by admissions counselors. This led the committee to wonder about efforts by admissions officers to recruit students of historically minoritized backgrounds beyond the consolidated efforts and resources contained in the Access, Posse, and TPS programs. In that vein, committee members were also concerned about retention efforts and resources for minoritized students who were not affiliated with those programs. The committee chair reached out to Laura Martin-Fedich, but the meeting was delayed until the fall.

At several points during our discussions this year the committee came up against the problem of resource allocations, also noting that commitment is demonstrated in and through budgets. While entirely sympathetic to budgetary demands, the COD considers the current resources for minoritized faculty mentoring/thriving and minoritized student retention/persistence to be inadequate. We particularly feel the need to be mindful that the university has hired at over 50% FOC in tenure lines over the last three years and the need to be attentive to these hires coming up for tenure in the years ahead. These hiring results also reveal a clear need for prioritization and commitment to material resourcing/funding/capacity to support mentoring and retention efforts.

These discussions also helped the committee consider tasks for next year.

Next Year, AY 18-19

For next year the COD would like to recommend the following charges:

1. To study the origin and history of the Committee on Diversity to date; to reexamine its significance to the faculty and to the university's goals and mission; to reimagine, clarify, and develop, officially, the committee's function and goals.
2. With regard to the above efforts, and while studying data from the Campus Climate Survey, study retention and persistence rates for minoritized students and faculty, develop strategies of support, and advocate for resources wherever the committee deems resource allocation is necessary.
3. To engage the Admissions Office regarding strategies and approaches to minoritized students who are not in the Posse, Access, or TPS programs.