

Committee on Diversity
Minutes
March 25, 2013

Committee members in attendance: Carolyn Weisz, George Tomlin, Amy Ryken, John Lear, and student member Hannah Smith; Visitor Ellen Peters, Director of Institutional Research.

Meeting called to order by Chair Amy Ryken at 8:34 AM.
Corrections to the minutes for March 11th put forward.

Announcements:

George Tomlin announced that OT/PT was hosting visiting students and their professor from Japan.

On Tuesday the 26th, Race and Pedagogy funded "Multicentricism: A Fresh and New Way of Perceiving Diverse, Complex, and Changing Dynamics in our Environment" by Dr. Chiyuki Shannon and Dr. Thelma Jackson.

April 10-12, the Spanish Program is sponsoring Spanish Matters: Father Alejandro Solalinde will be speaking about the challenges facing migrant workers en route to the United States.

Ellen Peters announced that the senior survey will launch in April and asked all attending to encourage students to take senior survey.

It was suggested that she send out a reminder on the Student Diversity Center listserve to announce survey.

A Wednesday at 4:00 session has been reserved April 3rd to open up faculty discussion on a diversity requirement.

Meeting:

Ellen Peters will be running some round table discussions with Seniors. Because this year's focus group is only exploring foreign language and the upper division requirement, there will be time to ask some questions about diversity in the curriculum. Next year's round table's will discussion the core curriculum overall which is a more suitable time to discuss the possibility of an overlay requirement on diversity. Because there is room for getting input from some seniors, she was coming to the meeting to get a sense of what sorts of information the committee would find valuable.

There followed a free-flowing discussion of the sorts of questions that could be asked in the time allotted. After discussion, the committee felt that they should be guided to a definition of diversity as they may have had a large amount of diversity content in their classes, but unless it was specifically labeled as such, they might not have realized it.

Also, asking them to first define what they understood “diversity” to mean was ultimately ruled out due to time constraints.

Questions along the following lines were suggested:

What have you learned in particular areas of the curriculum?

Would they see an overlay class as a burden or opportunity?

Had they taken classes that had some diversity component?

What do they think they had learned from it?

What did they still feel they lacked in terms of understanding?

The discussion transitioned at this point into a discussion of the document prepared by Amy Ryken and Carolyn Weisz for presentation at the Chairs meeting pitching a possible diversity requirement that would be an overlay with one or two classes already in the core curriculum.

To qualify as a class for the Diversity overlay, it would need to provide sustained engagement with issues of diversity in an intentional and visible way. The question was raised as to how much this meant both from the point of view of a professor designing such a class and from a member of the curriculum committee evaluating such a class. This, of course, would need to be decided.

Another important approach is from our goals for our students:

What difference would we like to see in students who had taken a diversity overlay class or classes?

They are more curious?

The class increased their awareness?

Ideally they will understand that race is one issue among many in society and that diversity is not simply “code” for race. Specifically, it would be nice if they could recognize difference and understand better the distribution of power and resources and how this often reflects systems of privilege for some and exclusion for others. A possible benefit of this last approach is that most students can recognize resource allotment if it is demonstrated to them systematically, and such a recognition is open to a wide variety of political and moral responses.

The importance of language again came up in relation to the term “social justice” which some people worried might be read as the civil rights movement or as pushing a particular world view. It was thus suggested that we shift from terming it a diversity requirement to a diversity and equity overlay requirement.

Because student activism has been a primary driver behind the exploration of a diversity overlay, Hannah Smith and Amy Ryken are investigating the possibility of getting a statement from some of the students who are most involved in this issue to help the Chairs see the goals behind the push for the overlay.

Meeting was adjourned at 9:55.

Respectfully submitted by Aislinn Melchior.