

Diversity Committee minutes
November 21, 2003

Present: Gibson, DeBenedictis, Bartanen, Notrica, Scott, Washburn, Ludden, Biggerstaff, Macey (chair), Brazell, Sousa

There were two announcements.

1. The Student Diversity Center is encouraging students, faculty, and staff to read *Angels in America: Millennium Approaches* over the winter break as part of its "UPS Reads" program. The Center will sponsor a series of discussions of the play next semester.
2. The Office of Spirituality and Justice will be sponsoring (at this point, has sponsored) "Reflections of Light," a series of observances of wintertime holidays and holy days, during the first week of December.

The committee briefly discussed a concern the chair had heard expressed concerning the "jarring" appearance of a substantial number of crosses on campus associated with the School of the Americas protest and the Day of the Dead altar in Wyatt Hall. After some conversation about this, the committee agreed that it would not take any steps to bring those concerns to the sponsors of these events.

The committee then turned to a discussion of its charge from the Senate to "consider 5, 10, 15, and 20-year benchmarks for both recruitment and retention of students, faculty, administrators, and staff of color."

Sousa brought a set of questions he hoped would focus the committee's discussion. These questions are reproduced in these minutes, along with a record of the committee's discussions related to these questions.

1. "What work was completed in 2002-03?"

Committee veterans reported that no work had been completed on this issue last year.

2. "Has the Committee committed itself to 'benchmarks' (which we took to mean as quantitative goals for minority recruitment and retention.)?"

Scott and others noted that the Diversity Committee did commit itself to goals in its May 1990 recommendations to the president. In light of the charge to "consider" benchmarks, Sousa wondered if the 2003-04 Diversity Committee is also committed to such goals.

3. "Do benchmarks make sense? What are the purposes of 'benchmarks' as opposed, to say, annual reporting? Does the Diversity Committee anticipate that benchmarks will be effective in shaping priorities in student recruitment, admission, and retention efforts or in staff recruitment and hiring? If so, what are the mechanisms that will make

benchmarks effective? If not, why would we spend the time and effort to develop benchmarks?”

Responses to these questions took two general forms. Sousa wondered what methodology the Committee could use to establish realistic benchmarks, and whether these goals were likely to be effective. He asked whether it might be more sensible to develop an annual reporting system with publicized results in which we would track our progress or lack of progress in diversifying the campus. Washburn also wondered about the effectiveness of benchmarks set by the Committee given that other offices would be responsible for taking the actions necessary to achieve those goals. Gibson noted that the University already has a goal of increasing diversity, and that some sort of annual reporting system for accountability might be useful.

Scott argued that it is important to have goals to strive for even if we are unlikely to reach them, and suggested that it was important for the Diversity Committee to set such goals. Bartanen stated that realistic goals and regular reporting are valuable and that goals need to be set in the contexts of challenges we face as a private, selective college and of the pool of high school graduates.

Brazell then noted that whatever the enrollment numbers, the experiences of minority students enrolled at Puget Sound were crucial for those students, for the campus community, and for the institution’s ability to recruit more minority students. A discussion of whether it was more important to focus on the question of benchmarks and enrollment figures or on issues of campus climate ensued, with Notrica pointing to a letter recently received by the Student Concerns Committee (see below) as evidence of serious campus climate problems.

Members of the committee agreed to bring their best ideas about how to proceed to meet the Senate’s charge to the next meeting.

The meeting closed with a discussion of the letter submitted to the Student Concerns Committee. The anonymous author of the letter charged the institution with racism and homophobia and asserted that the University of Puget Sound is “drenched in whiteness.” Student leaders will be addressing the issues raised in the letter. Dean Bartanen asserted her hope that the discussion surrounding it would provide information to students about the variety of supports that are in place for students feeling frustrated with institutional culture and practices.

Respectfully submitted,

David Sousa