

Final Report from Diversity Task Force

To: Dr. Margaret Madden
Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

From: Members of the Diversity Task Force -- Marsha Baxter, Dennis Conrad, Sheila Marshall, Rick Miller, Susan Stebbins, Chris Strong, John Youngblood

Re: Final Report

Date: July 11, 2006

The Diversity Task Force began meeting in November of 2005. Its charge was to make recommendations regarding the 2005 -- 2006 College goal that reads, "Develop a long-term strategy to alter the campus culture in relationship to diversity and inclusion." This goal is rooted in the recommendations found in the Visioning Refocused Final Report.

The Diversity Task Force (DTF) engaged in a variety of activities in an effort to 1) understand the current state of affairs, 2) identify the areas that must be included in a diversity plan, 3) identify what it is we want to achieve, to avoid, to preserve and to eliminate in each of those areas, 4) understand the human dynamics related to change, and 5) develop a set of goals and objectives that will move the campus forward.

Our discussions were informed by pertinent campus documents [Institutional Vision (1999), A Refocused Vision for Potsdam (2004), the report summary from the Achieving Diversity Task Force (2004), the Equity and Diversity Council survey of faculty results (2002)] as well as external resources. Four topic areas were identified as pertinent in our original discussions: assessment and recruitment, curriculum and scholarship, campus climate and institutional transformation. In a January 2006 retreat, members spent considerable time defining each of these areas and brainstorming what it is that we, as an institution, would endeavor to achieve, to avoid, to preserve and to eliminate in each. The results of that strategic assessment exercise (appendix A), as well as a review of the themes that cut across all four topical areas, brought to light a variety of concepts and conflicts and guided our work through the next stages. The next several meetings were spent identifying actions that would bring our aspirations in each topical area to fruition (Appendix B). These energetic and sometimes contentious discussions gave us firsthand experience of the intricate and complicated web of knowledge, experience and emotion that come with the exploration of issues related to diversity. The passion of the interaction, in the end, helped us to

produce a report that identifies actions to better our campus grounded in strong ideals.

The report of the Achieving Diversity Task Force (Visioning Refocused -- 2004) defines diversity as, "a composition of many individuals, each having unique attributes based on a variety of social, physical, and cultural characteristics. Included among, but not limited to, these attributes are race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, gender, age, sexual orientation, marital status, veteran status, disability, ideology, talent and socio-economic status." While the DTF did not formulate a new definition of diversity, we worked to identify the ideals that should guide our work in advancing our goals. These ideals include:

- Respect for and recognition of the contributions people make to our community, regardless of the attributes described above,

- A level of inclusiveness that embraces the principles of social justice and the real, complex issues facing persons based on the attributes described above,

- An understanding of the values we ascribe to these attributes within our community, and

- "An extended and comparative exploration of diverse peoples in this society, with significant attention to their differing experiences of U.S. democracy and the pursuits--sometimes successful, sometimes frustrating--of equal opportunity". (American Pluralism and the College Curriculum: Higher Education in a Diverse Democracy, Association of American Colleges and Universities, 1995, pg. 25).

It is our intention, then, that the College's mission related to diversity would be the creation of a community committed to justice, civility, equity and inclusion, one that is informed and committed to action in pursuit of these ideals. Members of this community understand that each individual contributes uniquely to the whole and that enhancing diversity benefits all members of the community, not just those from underrepresented groups. Community leaders at all levels model civil discourse and authentic dialogue in the exploration of our world. The ethos of this community is rooted in trust and in respect for the dignity of each member.

The following goals and objectives will lead us to the realization of such a community. It is our recommendation that a responsible person(s) be charged with each objective and that regular assessment of progress is

made. In addition, these goals are designed to commence within the next academic year.

GOAL 1. DEVELOP AND COMMUNICATE ADMINISTRATIVE PROCESSES AND INITIATIVES

Objectives:

1. Develop and distribute a handbook of policies and procedures in response to incidents of racial discrimination.
2. Design a website dedicated to diversity activities and initiatives that would include:
 - * Policies and procedures
 - * Offices and programs (Center for Diversity, Affirmative Action Office, EOP, CSTEP, Campus Civility Center, International Education, BearWitness Step Team, SAGE, etc.)
 - * Activities that promote diversity: campus wide curricular and co-curricular
 - * Calendar of events
 - * Student Organizations (BSA, PANA, CLASS, LGBTA, PIO, ASO, etc.)
 - * Academic Programs (Africana Studies, Native American Studies, Women's Studies, International Studies, Global Studies)
 - * Statistical information related to diversity: Student Fact Book Data, Faculty/Staff Fact Book Data
 - * Listing of classes that involve concepts of diversity and social justice
3. Insure that all publications reflect the College's diversity.
4. Create an advisory board for the Center for Diversity that includes representation from broad campus constituencies.
5. Enhance relationships with Akwesasne.
6. Re-establish, with a clear mission and goals and with representation from broad campus constituency groups, the Equity and Diversity Council and associated sub-groups such as the Affirmative Action Advisory Committee and the Bias Response Team.
7. Identify sustainable resources for faculty, staff and students engaged in programs and activities that promote diversity and social justice.
8. Address transportation issues.

Goal 2. PROMOTE KNOWLEDGE, AWARENESS AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Note: It is our recommendation that, in the first year of these initiatives, race be the primary topic for professional development, training and activities programming. This recommendation is based on a review of the frequency of reported inappropriate acts on our campus. It is clearly understood that any discussion of race will naturally involve discussions of gender, sexual orientation and other attributes.

Objectives:

1. Implement a professional development series that invites and engages faculty and staff from all departments of the College in explorations of multicultural competencies and issues of social justice.
2. Promote opportunities for local governments, businesses, and schools to participate in our learning.
3. Encourage Festival programs that advance themes of diversity and social justice.
4. Develop and implement activities such as speaker's series, book discussions, film series, teach-ins, etc.
5. Support the World in Potsdam. Explore the possibility of returning it to a community venue rather than a campus in an effort to involve residents and business people from the Village.

Goal 3. DIVERSIFY THE CURRICULUM RELATED TO MULTICULTURALISM AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Objectives:

1. Create opportunities for faculty to learn how to integrate themes of American diversity into class curricula.
2. Develop incentives for faculty who commit to revising class materials.
3. Identify ways to acknowledge faculty who engage in scholarship and service related to multiculturalism and social justice.
4. Insure the inclusion of themes related to diversity and social justice in First Year Success Seminar curricula.
5. Investigate, develop and implement a visiting scholars/faculty exchange program, bringing scholars with diverse backgrounds and areas of scholarship to the campus.
6. Communicate opportunities that allow faculty and students to engage in activities related to diversity and social justice, i.e., UNESCO Forum of Cultures, Fall 2007.
7. Consider the development of a Center for the Enhancement of Scholarship and Teaching related to Social Justice.

Goal 4. INCREASE THE NUMBER OF FACULTY AND STAFF FROM UNDERREPRESENTED GROUPS RECRUITED TO AND RETAINED AT SUNY POTSDAM

Objectives:

1. Assess the transitional needs for underrepresented faculty and staff.
2. Establish pre- and post-doctoral fellowships for candidates who will introduce concepts of diversity and social justice to the curriculum.
3. Implement an Employee Recruitment and Retention Task Force to:
 - * work with departments and search committees to clarify diversity considerations in the search process
 - * create a mentoring program, perhaps with MANNY, that pairs new staff from underrepresented groups with current staff from underrepresented groups
 - * identify resources to aid in the recruitment of diverse faculty and staff, i.e., Southern Region Education Board
4. Establish relationships with institutions graduating high numbers of PhDs from underrepresented groups.
5. Achieve more diversity at upper levels of administration. Consider Chief Diversity Officer role.

Goal 5. INCREASE THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS FROM UNDERREPRESENTED GROUPS RECRUITED AND RETAINED AT SUNY POTSDAM

Objectives:

1. Assess the transitional needs of minority students.
2. Establish scholarships, based on merit and need, for students from underrepresented groups.
3. Study the feasibility of offering incentives (room, board, books, etc.) for graduate and undergraduate students from underrepresented groups.
4. Develop and implement a mentoring program, pairing new students from underrepresented groups with successful returning students from underrepresented groups.
5. Build relationships with alumni from underrepresented groups in support of mentoring, fundraising, internship and employment.
6. Establish graduate assistantships for students from underrepresented groups.

Progress toward and achievement of the goals and objectives described in this document will have a cumulative effect on the campus climate. In addition, the following principles are essential to our success as a campus.

- * Commitment and support from the President and top-level are critical in the desired campus ethos.
- * Members of the campus community understand, on a personal and professional level, the need for multicultural competency in today's global society.
- * Ongoing assessment and subsequent adaptation of diversity initiatives in all departments and divisions is essential.
- * Accessible and comprehensive communication of plans, initiatives and activities are necessary to keep diversity themes in the every day experience of the campus.
- * Documentation and dissemination of information about effective programs and practices currently in place will underscore the positive foundation upon which we can build. Similarly, regular public acknowledgement of new and innovative ventures will stimulate creativity and participation.