

Report from the Special Committee for Diversity and Cultural Competence (SCDCC)

Prepared by Phillip Ortiz, 28 April 2009

Since our February report the entire committee has met via conference call twice (19 March 2009 and 15 April 2009), a sub group had a conference call on 31 March 2009, and there has also been quite a bit of e-communication and discussion. We are in the process of setting our next call for late May 2009. In my role of chairperson of SCDCC, on 12 and 13 March I attended and participated in the “Diversity Officers Conference” hosted at Central Administration by Vice Provost Caban. That conference brought together the diversity officers from all, but one, of the SUNY campuses – it should be noted that such a meeting has never before been convened within SUNY. In addition, I have been serving as co-chair for a conference that will address recruitment and retention of minority students in the STEM disciplines (i.e., science, technology, engineering, and mathematics). This latter conference will be held in October of this year – information and a call for papers will be released within the next two weeks.

On our calls, SCDCC has been discussing the various ways cultural competence is addressed in curricula across SUNY. It has become apparent that there are many approaches being employed, each to various degrees of success. Thus, we decided to construct a brief questionnaire, composed of ~20 questions that should be answerable in less than 30 minutes. In the next week I will be contacting the UFS Senator from each campus to ask that they identify the person (e.g., director of curriculum development, chair of curriculum committee, office of academic affairs, etc.) on their campus who they believe should be asked to provide this information. To facilitate the selection, included with the letter to each senator will be a draft version of the questionnaire. The campus contact person will then be asked to complete the instrument online (Carol has already been at work on this step, her product is available at http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=DsClj6qbk60eQ_2bCBg4IgtQ_3d_3d).

The committee will examine the data with the intent of identifying a set of effective practices for bringing cultural competence into the curriculum. Our report will then be presented to UFS with the hope that the senators will use it to promote conversation and, if necessary, curricular improvements on their campuses.

Lastly, as an attendee at the conference celebrating the 60th anniversary of SUNY held at the University at Albany in early April, I was able to have a brief discussion with Chancellor-select Zimpher. During that conversation it became clear that she is well aware of the activities and concerns of UFS in regard to cultural competence and the importance we place in the success of Vice Provost Caban and the Office of Diversity and Educational Equity (ODEE). Since that time the state legislature has been advancing bills that will elevate that office from one that reports through the provost's office, to one that reports directly to the chancellor. At this point it is unclear what the outcome of the legislative process will be, but I am convinced that the new chancellor recognizes how important it is that ODEE succeeds, and will take steps to ensure that it is appropriately empowered and funded.

Respectfully submitted,
Phillip Ortiz
28 April 2009