

## Senate Committee on Diversity Annual Report AY 2011-2012

Dear Senators and Colleagues,

I write on behalf of the University Senate Committee on Diversity to share some of our activities this year. We are a body of sixteen members, comprised of faculty, staff, and students, and we are charged under University Senate rules to a unique set of duties and responsibilities. I would like to briefly share those with you now. As per subsection (B) of Senate Rule 3335-5-4816, the Committee on Diversity:

...shall study issues that relate to the implementation of the University nondiscriminatory policy. It shall recommend policies that foster an environment of civility, tolerance, and mutual respect. It shall perform the following functions with appropriate administrative support from the Office of Academic Affairs and the Office of Human Resources.

The Senate Rules name several other functions of the Committee on Diversity:

- (1) To study and evaluate issues affecting diversity from an overall University perspective.
- (2) To be informed on external requirements on the University affecting diversity
- (3) To advise the President, the Executive Vice President and Provost, the Associate Vice President for Human Resources, and The Vice President for Student Affairs about the institutional climate, policies, and priorities for ensuring justice, fairness, and equitable treatment to all members of the University.
- (4) To educate and inform the University community on issues of diversity, including the letter and spirit of all Ohio and federal rules regarding members of protected classes.
- (5) To oversee administration of University affirmative action grants and awards.
- (6) To report annually to the University Senate.

I would also like to share the University's Nondiscrimination Policy. It reads, simply:

Discrimination against any individual based upon protected status, which is defined as age, ancestry, color, disability, gender identity or expression, genetic information, military status, national origin, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, or veteran status, is prohibited.

In part because violations of the University's nondiscrimination policy are few, clear, and easily adjudicated, the Senate Committee on Diversity spends most of its time each year evaluating Diversity Reports submitted by units from across the University, selecting a recipient for the yearly Distinguished Diversity Enhancement

Award, and discussing emergent issues related to Diversity. This is important work and the Committee manages it well and did so again this year. In fact, the Senate Committee on Diversity has begun to work closely with the office of Vice Provost Mike Boehm in the process of revising the University's Strategic Plan Template with particular concern to how issues pertaining to diversity are reflected. This is truly important work as it goes directly to questions of faculty governance, and the role faculty and staff can play as *proactive participants* in the development of policy, rather than reactive recipients of University policy. This is particularly important as it relates to diversity issues, because the Senate Committee on Diversity and the Diversity Officer's Working Group (an important campus partner to the work done by the Committee) are peopled by individuals with expertise that can help guide the University in achieving its diversity-related goals.

In addition to this work, the DC this year decided to focus on two things: 1) the potential emergence of conflicts between University policy and University *de facto* practice, and 2) development of connections between the University Senate Committee on Diversity and other University community members invested in these issues. Because as a committee, we recognize our own diversity of perspective, committee members were invited to contribute short 'reflection pieces' that were both the foundation on which we built our conversations, and documentation of general interests and concerns. I offer them below, disconnected from the particular committee members who brought them to our awareness.

### **Potential Contradiction in the Treatment of Potentially-Neurodiverse Students**

*22% of students with disabilities in college reported having "mental illness or depression" and 11% reported Attention Deficit Disorder... Results published in the Archives Of General Psychiatry put the numbers even higher: according to analysis of data from the 2001-2 National Epidemiological Study On Alcohol And Related Conditions, nearly half 46% of college students reported having experienced some psychiatric disorder in the year the survey was conducted.*

*From Mad At School (2011), Margaret Price 7*

In light of these numbers, and in the continuing effort to point out instances in which the operating procedures of the University may violate the rights of protected groups, I would like to point out a seeming contradiction in the rhetoric surrounding potentially-neurodiverse students. The University has disseminated the "Ohio State Guide to Assist Disruptive Or Distressed Students" (with the asterisked addendum: stating that "Ohio State Student Life acknowledges University of Central Florida and University of Florida for folder concept and format"). The "Guide to Assist Disruptive or Distressed Students" identifies the possible signs of "distress" with such descriptors (among others) as:

- marked change in performance or behavior
- excessive absence or tardiness
- undue aggressiveness
- exaggerated emotional response inappropriate to the situation

- excessive confusion
- dependency—persistent and unreasonable demands for time and attention
- words or actions that intimidate or harass another

Definitions of such signs and symptoms come out of a highly-subjective evaluative frame-work, and that fact (in and of itself) presents a problem for an objective assessment of “distress and disruption.”

But perhaps even more problematic are the series of guidelines instructors are given for dealing with “disruptive students.” Here, we find the direct recommendations that: a) the instructor express concern about the student’s welfare to the student and b) that the instructor offer an unsolicited referral of the student to the “the appropriate campus department.” Both of these rhetorical gestures may simultaneously serve to infringe upon the student’s privacy and increase the frustration the student is already feeling. Both rhetorical acts create a landscape in which the student may feel packaged, patronized, and “unheard” in the way that Margaret Price addresses in her 2011 text *Mad At School*: “...consider the depth and reach of rhetoric in our lives. To lack rhetoricity is to lack all basic freedoms and rights, including the freedom to express ourselves and the right to be listened to” (26). Obviously, truncating a person’s attempts at self-expression may lead to further expressions of frustration and emotion.

This is not to say that rhetorical limits are never necessary in the context of the college classroom, but to point out that an overzealous application of the “Guide To Assist Disruptive Or Distressed Students” might actually create the very scenario an instructor is attempting to prevent. Alternately, such treatment may discourage a student’s attempts to communicate entirely. Instead of encouraging instructors to integrate and use rhetorical styles unfamiliar to them, the guide provides excuses and encouragement for ridding the classroom of diverse communication styles. In doing so, the guide itself becomes an act of rhetorical aggression.

As Margaret Price helpfully suggests: “People with mental disabilities do move in an aura of constant violence within institutions, but as several scholars have observed, most of the violence comes not from these individuals but is instead directed at them” (1-2). She goes on to cite trends on many campuses at large where: “Faculty and staff are encouraged to be alert for signs of imminent violence in student writing, in an atmosphere that Benjamin Reiss has called ‘quasi-psychiatric surveillance’” (3). But it’s not just student writing that is under such surveillance, it is the ways in which we communicate at large.

What is interpreted as “disruptive” behavior by me, as an instructor, may actually be just a natural feature of a given individual’s rhetorical style. The judgmental and dire tone of the “Guide to Assist Disruptive or Distressed Individuals” fuels the fire of just the sort of bigotry against disability that Price is concerned with. The violence done by such circulating rhetoric is severe--given the dropout rates for students with

disabilities, feelings of exclusion from an academic setting, and the loss of the contributions of a significant portion of the University community. At best, this easy separation of the “distressed” from the “non-distressed” is reductive. (At what point does a passionate discussion become a display of disruptive rhetorical tendencies?) At worst, this “sick versus well” subtext frightens people into silence, excludes people from conversations, and expels the neurodiversity the University is committed to protect.

## **Regional Campuses and the Experience of Students of Color**

The February 29, 2012, *Columbus Dispatch* article titled, OSU Diversity Gains Not at Main Campus, noted the following ...

“The Ohio State University has 8 percent fewer black students on its Columbus campus than it had in 2001. But regional campuses gained black students, resulting in a slight increase university wide ... Ohio State officials recently called the African-American numbers and lower-than-expected growth among Latino students “patterns that command attention.” The Latino population has nearly doubled on all campuses since 2001, but these students still represent only about 3 percent of all Ohio State undergraduates. Black students make up 6.7 percent. About 12 percent of Ohioans are black, according to the 2010 census, and 3 percent are Latino. Ohio State spokesman Jim Lynch noted that there are more black students across all campuses, despite the trend in Columbus. “We’ve always said we don’t care where someone starts. What matters is that they get in and graduate,” Lynch said. While the Columbus campus lost 227 black students since 2001, the regional campuses gained 462. That adds up to an 8 percent increase for the entire Ohio State system, to 3,339.”

### **Fact**

Ethnic minority students, economically disadvantaged students, and/or students with disabilities, that had competitive academic profiles which were once strong enough to be admitted to the main campus (where they matriculated and graduated-many with honors), are now being deferred for admissions and enrollment on our regional campuses.

### **Perceived Concerns**

This disturbing trend of deferring students, who may “need” to be on our main campus, to our regional campuses has increased over the last ten years and does not seem to be changing.

The official statement that “we don’t care where students start but that they get in and graduate” is very disheartening and appears to conflict with the notion of equal opportunity and access for all.

There is less ethnic diversity amongst faculty and staff and on average a significant reduction in merit and need base scholarship funding opportunities, advising personnel, campus owned housing accommodations, counseling, programming activities, advising, affinity support groups and organizations, and/or campus and community mentorship support on the regional campuses.

It has been noted that several communities surrounding the regional campuses are far less supportive of embracing ethnic, gender, sexual orientation, and/or differentially-abled dimensions of diversity than our main campus's surrounding communities.

### **Issue**

Why are students perceived as less competitive and needing more support, nurturing, and/or special accommodations being deferred to our regional campuses where there are perceived to be less support structures in place?

### **Reflecting on the place that issues pertinent to Asian Americans have at OSU**

Asian American's are typically categorized as "non-underrepresented" in a variety of University policies. It is not uncommon to see scholarships specifically list all the minorities eligible...with the exception of Asian Americans. I'm not sure if this is still the policy, but in the past Asian Americans were included in the overall minority #'s gathered by OSU (students, faculty, staff). This is just one of the ways in which Asian Americans "count" for certain things, and don't for others.

If you take the total number of Asian American students/faculty on our campus, then one can see how this # is higher than the population in the state ( a traditional way of determining who is underrepresented on campus). However, what if you are the only one, or one of only a few, in a specific department? Is it time to look at more stratified data re. where Asian Americans are represented (or not) among department faculty? I wonder how those faculty are thriving in their departments when they may be one of only a few. We certainly need more Asian Americans in education and counseling fields if we look at trends around bullying and mental health concerns. How can we better include those who are publishing/doing research in these high need areas in conversations like the upcoming DISCO event?

In general, I see that Asian Americans don't have the similar issues to getting in the pipeline for higher ed as other minorities. Of course, when you overlay family income, LEP issues in the home, etc...then there may be more similarities to access issues encountered by other minorities. My sense is that climate, and succeeding within specific career/academic areas, is a focus for further conversation. Two perceptions about Asian Americans that continue to swirl around us are: 1) Perpetual Foreigner and 2) Model Minority. How do these perceptions play out for faculty?

The Senate Committee on Diversity looks forward to continuing to pay attention to instances wherein University policy around diversity and University practice might potentially come into conflict and therefore expose the University to ethical and/or moral vulnerabilities.

The committee also invested time and energy this year in developing connections for communication and action between itself and other diversity-invested units/entities at the University. In addition to beginning to plan for an action oriented diversity summit next year, we also updated our presence on the University web site, and have begun to use the Senate Diversity Committee web page as an organ of substantive communication.

On behalf of the Senate Committee on Diversity,

Maurice Stevens, Chair