

Commission for LGBT People

Meeting Minutes

October 2, 2017

Attendance: Chancellor Beverley Davenport, Vice Chancellor Vince Carilli, Jennifer Jabson, Danielle Burton, Bonnie Benson-Palmgren, Aaron Burnell, Denise Gardner, Luke Garton, Cody Harrison, Shannon Herron, Kevin Kidder, Stephanie Langley, Tatiana Messersmith, Joe Miles, Mitsunori Misawa, Joanne Patterson, Michael Porter, Jennifer Russomano, Jordan Smith, Mary Lucal, Jennifer Richter, Danny Glassmann, Eric Carr, Kelley Kain, Bonnie Johnson, Matthew Theriot, Megan Haselschwerdt, Nancy Thacker

- I. Approval of Minutes
- II. Introductions
- III. Q&A with Chancellor Davenport facilitated by co-chairs Jennifer Jabson and Danielle Burton
 - a. Jennifer Jabson extended gratitude to Chancellor Davenport for all her work and collaboration with University administration on diversity efforts thus far.
 - b. Jennifer Jabson: What is the status of amending current student housing policies and/or creating new policies and procedures that reflect and support an explicitly inclusive transgender student housing program? How will current and prospective students be able to access this information?
 - i. Chancellor Davenport stated she is unsure. She discussed her views on policy, including the timely process it takes to create and/or amend policy. She discussed her experiences from previous institutions and their focus on best practices. A practice at her previous institution was to allow students to select a specific housing preference in their applications. She discussed potential to collaborate with the Commission on a best practice to meet the needs of our students, and then how to best advertise those options.
 1. Vice Chancellor Carilli noted we do not have an existing, explicit policy. He discussed recent conversations with administrators about issues associated with policy language.
 2. Danielle Burton discussed Joel Kramer's role in housing and meeting the needs of transgender students. They noted students have expressed difficulty to find a roommate and the inability to afford a single room.
 3. Chancellor Davenport inquired about the rooming assignments process.
 - a. Vice Chancellor Carilli noted students find roommates at orientation, on social media, and/or by random assignment.
 - b. Chancellor Davenport discussed facilitating an assignment process that can introduce students before they are on campus, and making this best practice known to students so they can prepare beforehand.

4. Bonnie Johnson suggested giving students the ability to select an LGBTQ+ friendly option in their applications.
- c. Danielle Burton: There was a time when we had gender inclusive bathrooms, with maps and placards that reflected inclusion; they were changed to “family restrooms.” This does not protect our transgender and non-binary faculty/staff/students, and we want to see gender inclusivity return to our campus. What can we do as a Commission to support these changes?
 - i. Chancellor Davenport discussed being an advocate for gender inclusivity on this issue, and expressed uncertainty as to why the change occurred before. She inquired about the importance of symbolism on this issue and if the desire for changing placards is a matter of symbolism or safety.
 1. Jennifer Jabson reported on conversations with students who have expressed feelings of literal and symbolic exclusion with the label, “family restroom”
 2. Aaron Burnell noted that the label “family” is not inclusive. He discussed his desire for policy to exist on LGBTQ+ inclusive housing as well, so that the transgender and non-binary community feels safe and included. He noted understanding the hesitancy to change the language due to our legislators, but he believes the risk is worth the need for inclusivity.
 - a. Chancellor Davenport discussed the challenge of policy creation/amendment as a timely process. She stated believing that we can manage ourselves and create best practices that meet our needs and are conducted swiftly.
 3. Megan Haselschwerdt noted “family” carries a female connotation. She noted this language can convey exclusion to male, transgender and non-binary folks.
 - d. Danielle Burton: How can the University best support LGBTQ+ students before they arrive on campus? (e.g. more inclusive genders on the admissions application, components of inclusivity and diversity on the online FYS 100 class) How can we signal that students will be safe, wanted, and included?
 - i. Chancellor Davenport discussed this year’s new student orientation and their conversations about our diverse student body and relevant issues. She was pleased to see student life include this into orientation. She stated she is open to other suggestions from us to how we can be more welcoming.
 1. Bonnie Johnson asked if the Pride Center is still a stop on campus tours. Ensuring students know about the Pride Center could be a means of promoting inclusivity.
 - a. Michael Porter reported the Pride Center is a stop on the campus tour and is in the self-guided tour on the utk.edu website.
 2. Chancellor Davenport noted the most foot traffic on campus is at the entrance of the library on Melrose, where the Pride Center is also housed.
 - e. Jennifer Jabson: Collecting data on harassment and discrimination experienced by LGBTQ faculty/staff/students annually could reveal important aspects of LGBTQ

students/staff/faculty and how we could create a more inclusive campus climate. What are the current plans for this type of data collection in the future?

- i. Chancellor Davenport discussed the challenge of reporting. She noted we already gather data, but she expects incidents are underreported. She expressed a need more active research that will shed light onto specific incidents and lead to targeted services.
 1. Jennifer Richter discussed changes in data collection. Discussions for organizing data on those that are reported followed.
 2. Chancellor Davenport noted it would be useful to know percentage and categories of reports/incidents.
- f. Danielle Burton: The word “diversity,” like “social justice” or “sustainability,” has been framed as liberal causes, and thus negative in Tennessee politics. In reality, these are basic human causes that are about access, opportunity and our survival. How do we navigate these perceptions while also working for these goals?
 - i. Chancellor Davenport discussed the importance of language, not just words, but in interactions as well. She discussed “diversity” has been coopted, and questioned does the word do anything constructive for us? She discussed searching for language that can work for us constructively to reach our goals to be inclusive, safe, and welcome. She also discussed not being as concerned about getting a “diversity office” by that name, but some type of strategic engagement office. She noted the political nature of language, and expressed belief that we can redefine who we are without using the word diversity per se. She discussed efforts towards our goals already, and inquired about a video she recently saw about our success thus far.
 1. Review of ‘It Get’s Better Project’ video. Chancellor Davenport discussed her pride of this recognition. She noted our University is due for such recognition and continued efforts towards social justice.
- g. Aaron Burnell inquired about the source of funding for the Pride Center.
 - i. Chancellor Davenport responded the funding is technically private, as it comes from her discretionary funds. She discussed receiving monies that she has complete discretion over, where no “tax payer” money is being spent. She noted looking into the opt-in funding source, and the wait to approve that funding was too long. She reported deciding to use her discretionary funds to move forward quickly. She also discussed her recent conversations with donors; she intends to ask for \$3.5 million in funding for Pride Center; and, she would love to have the center named if possible.
- h. Stephanie Langely asked if there is anything the Commission can do for the Chancellor and her efforts with other administrators.
 - i. Chancellor Davenport discussed the continual need to bring forward issues and our needs to her and her team so they can address them as they arise. She noted a need for the Commission to support Bonnie Johnson to make the Pride Center as successful as it can be. She also noted a need to refine

our message and consolidate our goals so that we can accurately measure current success, which will uncover areas for improvement.

- i. Chancellor Davenport inquired about our method introductions with inclusion of pronouns. She asked, is it a part of your culture or a response to recent events on campus?
 - i. Danielle Burton discussed how sharing pronouns can signal others that this is an inclusive space for all gendered folks to share pronouns. They noted it promotes inclusivity and safety.
 - ii. Jennifer Jabson discussed research in public health has shown sharing pronouns promotes health and safety. She noted it is a best practice that is common for inclusive LGBTQ+ spaces, not just within our group.
 - iii. Megan Haselschwerdt noted sharing pronouns is a generational shift that is emerging with younger populations.
- j. Chancellor inquired about what she can do to help the Commission and LGBTQ+ people on campus.
 - i. Jennifer Jabson reported this open dialogue is helpful. She also noted desire to collaborate on bathroom and housing issues moving forward.
 - ii. Chancellor Davenport responded that she wants to continue working with us, and thanked commissioners for their efforts.

IV. Adjourn