

Commission for LGBT People  
February 1, 2016

- I. Introductions: name and pronoun
- II. December minutes approved.
- III. Discussion with Chancellor Cheek and Vice Chancellor Hall
  - a. Introduction from Vice Chancellor Hall:
    - i. Thank you for your service to the Commission for LGBT People.
    - ii. It has been challenging the last several months for all of us, but especially those who care about diversity and inclusion.
    - iii. This is an important annual meeting that is set in August around the Chancellor's schedule.
    - iv. Today is an opportunity for us to have dialogue, ask questions, and provide suggestions on ways we can be better.
  - b. Introduction from Chancellor Cheek:
    - i. Thank you very much and thank you for all coming.
    - ii. This is my seventh year as Chancellor. A few months after I arrived, I gave investiture speech that outlined my vision for UTK, and I included that diversity is a key priority of this administration. For the first on campus, I said, "welcoming to all and hostile to none," and sought to inform the institution with this motto. We have worked very hard to make us a better institution in terms of academics and infrastructure.
  - c. Chancellor Cheek's Update to the Commission:
    - i. Many events in the past seven years that has caused concerns:
      1. Several years ago, a group of black students and parents were visiting campus, and bananas thrown at them. The Bias Protocol group was called together and took action.
      2. Headlines about the incident: "Cheek decries acts of hatred."
      3. As a result, I formed the Civility Task Force with positive implications on campus. This does not mean that we're satisfied on where we are. We still long way to go.
      4. Several years ago, I decided to create the Vice Chancellor for Diversity position on the Cabinet to emphasize the importance of diversity and hired Vice Chancellor Hall.
    - ii. We are facing a difficult time in the state, and many pieces of proposed legislation are concerning.
      1. Bill about the governance of the UT System:
        - a. The bill seeks to overhaul the Board of the Trustees:

- i. Eliminate all current trustees in June or July
    - ii. Appoint new board from the legislature: five trustees by the House, five from the Senate, five from the Governor, and two faculty and two students.
  - 2. Bill to cut diversity spending:
    - a. Cuts diversity spending in the system by at least half.
    - b. Proposal from some of our Knoxville-area lawmakers to have a committee in the House and Senate to look at diversity and the Office of Diversity and Inclusion.
      - i. We embrace the opportunity to stand in front of a committee and explain why diversity is important, not only at UTK, but at every university in the country.
      - ii. Diversity is a key central component of any university.
      - iii. We need diversity; industry and businesses demand that we have a diverse group of students to graduate to go to work in industry and business.
      - iv. Diversity defined in many ways, more than just race or ethnicity: veterans, international students, LGBT students, faculty representative of diverse groups as well.
      - v. Very concerning when students say that they completed a degree at UTK and “was never taught by someone who looked like me.”
- d. Questions from the Commission to Chancellor Cheek and Vice Chancellor Hall:
  - i. *What is your strategy for fighting the status of UTK being used as political bait?*
    - 1. We must work tirelessly to show that their proposals are not good for UT. However, this is happening at other universities around the nation: UNC, Wisconsin, Texas A&M, UT Austin, all cases with board overhauls, chancellors removed and replaced by legislative vote.
    - 2. Turmoil nationwide as to who governs a university – university entities such as boards, or legislators.
    - 3. You need to call, write, send emails, and communicate your views with your legislator, as a voter and taxpayer, not just an individual affiliated with UTK. Legislators respond to pressure from their constituents.
    - 4. From Vice Chancellor Hall:
      - a. We must seek to educate what universities do, why diversity is important to everyone, why industry and business leaders care about a diverse workforce.
  - ii. *Chancellor, have you attended a Safe Zone training? Why or why not?*
    - 1. Has not yet, but will do so if can fit into schedule.

iii. *What can we do as faculty, students, and staff to assist you in helping Vice Chancellor Hall to work with the legislature to show how important diversity is at UTK?*

1. Sign up with UT Advocacy. When contacting legislators, use personal stationary, personal name, not your affiliation with the University. This isn't an issue about losing your job, but about representing yourself as a constituent so your voice will matter to your legislator.
2. A call to students to write and participate should come from the students themselves, less from administrators.

iv. *"Welcoming to all and hostile to none:" what does this mean specifically for the LGBTQ+ community? How do we create a welcoming campus and make sure not individuals are not greeted with hostility?*

1. We need everyone to treat each other like they would want to be treated.
2. When the Pride Center was established, there was legislative concern, but I addressed it. The Center has flourished ever since.
3. Even Butch Jones, UT football coach, sees hostility when the UT Vols are not doing well, and people said hateful things to him about him, his kids, and his wife.
4. Vice Chancellor Hall:
  - a. When I was contacted about working here at UT, I realized that it would be very hard, in a conservative environment. But I was impressed on UT's homepage was a Diversity button and the slogan "welcoming to all and hostile to none."
  - b. We have an aspirational vision, and there will always be some folks who say and do things that are hurtful and harmful. It's more about how to respond and how we can do things to show that we want you here and we welcome you here, like the Pride Center.

v. *Oppressed and marginalized people are different than people who are paid \$1.4 million dollars, like Butch Jones. Yes, the Center has flourished, but the Center has no budget, the Center is in a location that we know will be torn down relatively soon, the Center has no full-time director and no full-time staff, only one half-time Graduate Assistant, thanks to the efforts of Vice Chancellor Hall. But when you look at what other LGBTQ+ Centers are doing at SEC schools, we are doing far more with far less. One way of showing that the campus is "welcoming to all and hostile to none" is to fund the Center, staff it, and give it what it needs. Then add to campus indications that aren't just hollow words: gender-inclusive housing, gender-neutral restrooms, education on gender-neutral pronouns.*

1. Chancellor nods.

vi. *What we're talking about here are the little things throughout the day. On the UT Campus Maps website, "gender-neutral restrooms" have been*

*reabeled to “family style restrooms.” Using “gender-neutral restrooms” instead is one way where we could be taking an opportunity to be welcoming.*

1. These are the naming conventions that we use, and “family style” is currently what we call them. The facilities accommodate a host of people. I don’t know how many we have, over one hundred.

*vii. There are less than 20. Most of them are hard to find, locked, require a key to get in.*

*viii. Why did the change happen, from “gender-neutral restrooms” to “family style restrooms?” When interviewing as a grad student, I was impressed that I could see “gender-neutral restrooms” on the website, and that mattered to me. How do we transmit that information to people on campus, that what are now called “family-style restrooms” are “gender-neutral restrooms?”*

1. I will follow up with that.

*ix. Why are we erasing “gender neutral restrooms” to “family style restrooms?” Gender-neutral restrooms are needed because the safety of the individuals using the restrooms depends on it. There’s no education of administrators about this issue.*

*x. The Facilities Master Plan states that the Pride Center in Melrose Hall is scheduled to be demolished. What the future of the location of the Pride Center?*

1. We have other locations in Melrose that are in the same situation. I don’t know the answer, Chris Cimino probably does. We have a place planned for all locations, even if it’s at a temporary location before a permanent location opens up. We’re in a period of time with so much construction that we’re having to put people where they shouldn’t be.

2. Vice Chancellor Hall:

- a. I have been in contact with Jeff Maples about the Center’s location for over a year. We don’t want to be in a situation where we just have to take what was open, we want space in a highly trafficked area.

IV. Adjourn