

Commission for LGBT People

Meeting Minutes

November 4, 2017

Attendance: Dixie Thompson, RJ Hinde, Matthew Theriot, John Zomchick, Jennifer Jabson, Denise Gardner, Diane Goble, Cody Harrison, Shannon Herron, Kevin Kidder, Stephanie Langley, Joe Miles, Mitsunori Misawa, Joanne Patterson, Michael Porter, Jennifer Russomano, Phyliss Shey, Jordan Smith, Jenny Richter, Danny Glassmann, Eric Carr, Beauvais Lyons, Bonnie Johnson, Joel Kramer, Fabrizi D'Alosio, Nate Taylor, Nancy Thacker

- I. Introductions
- II. Approval of Minutes
- III. Report from LGBTQ Open Forums from Jennifer Jabson
 - a) Two forums were held on November 1st. There were 11 attendees total (seven commissioners, three non-commissioners comprised of eight staff and two faculty during the 1st forum; one attendee identified as an ally during the 2nd forum).
 - b) Jennifer shared six main initial findings:
 - i) Need/desire for greater visibility of LGBTQ role models in higher administration
 - ii) Suggestions: mentoring and leadership programs for faculty/staff that intentionally include LGBTQ people with the goal to advance and increase visibility of LGBTQ people at UTK
 - iii) No awareness of pay or benefits inequity, no awareness of unfair treatment by supervisors
 - iv) Some concern about the possibility of faculty in some academic units being asked to reduce LGBTQ related service
 - v) Concern for untenured faculty serving in leadership positions related to LGBTQ issues
 - vi) Need for spaces/events/activities where allies receive training and work together to contribute to promote inclusive climate for LGBTQ people
- IV. Discussion about results from the LGBTQ forums
 - a) Joel Kramer mentioned attendees also discussed demographic data is not collected for LGBTQ people on campus.
 - b) Michael Porter asked: will the LGBT mentoring program currently being developed be for faculty only, not staff?
 - i) Jennifer Jabson responded, yes that is correct.
 - c) Bonnie Johnson noted attendees discussed the increased offerings of UT services to LGBTQ folks, but much of the time, the activities are stealthy advertised and/or facilitated. She noted this creates a lack of visibility of available services.
- V. Provost John Zomchick response to LGBTQ Open Forum findings
 - a) Provost Zomchick noted in regards to finding #2, they are trying to find ways throughout the University to more widely offer leadership opportunities to all members of community. There is currently a leadership program through the Haslam College of

Business that seeks nominations for participants each year; he suggested the leadership program could include the Commissions and Council in their advertisements to nominate individuals to expand the diversity of applicants. He also noted administration is aware of the need to do more for leadership in general. In regards to finding #4, Provost Zomchick noted his team met with the CFB, and they discussed invisible labor—where members of underrepresented populations are called upon to do extra work, such as mentoring with other alike underrepresented folks. He noted a discussion with council of deans will be helpful in addressing the service burden for these individuals. Dean Rider in the College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences has discussed this particular issue within his unit, so Provost Zomchick will be reaching out to him to address this issue across academic units.

- VI. Jennifer Jabson opened the floor for commissioners to address questions/concerns to Provost Zomchick and team
- a) Jennifer Jabson discussed the issue of visibility in higher administration. She asked, what do we do about increasing visibility of LGBTQ folks in a safer climate?
 - i) Provost Zomchick responded that this is a difficult question. He noted if it is a climate issue, we need to work harder to shift the climate. The student climate survey provided some insight into climate, but it is student only. There also was the COACHE faculty survey that provided some insight a few years ago, but it is faculty only. So, he stated uncertainty in how to accurately assess campus climate for all community members. He asked the group for their thoughts.
 - (1) Commissioner asked if sexual orientation can be accounted for in upcoming faculty surveys.
 - (a) Vice Provost Matthew Theriot responded that he can address the issue in an upcoming meeting with administration.
 - b) Eric Carr discussed students viewing the world differently, particularly in their expectations for inclusivity, in that it differs from the older generations that makeup our campus leadership. He inquired about measuring the differences between expectations so that it better informs how we can close the gap and make progress with policy changes, advocacy efforts, climate, etc.
 - i) Provost Zomchick responded that the climate survey may be a start. He noted the student survey did ask about sexual orientation and gender identity. But, he is unsure how much the survey will tell us since for generalization purposes because there was only an 18% response rate. Provost Zomchick discussed differences in political identity are significant here as well. He noted one of the responses from the survey was that conservative students reported our campus is a hostile climate for them. Provost Zomchick stated he believes what they mean is that the mainstream press identifies University faculty and staff as liberal; so, conservative individuals feel their voices cannot be heard. He stated being ultimately unsure how to close the gap. He asked group members for their thoughts.
 - ii) Vice Provost RJ Hinde discussed past surveys have given the option to self-identify as a veteran. He suggested all surveys could include an option to self-identify as LGBTQ. He noted potential political ramifications should be considered, both the benefits and downsides.

- (1) Bonnie Johnson asked why the option to identify as LGBTQ could be a political downside?
 - (a) RJ Hinde noted there may be political downsides if percentages of identified LGBTQ people is low.
 - (2) Joel Kramer noted that resources are often allocated to populations of people that are the majority, but he noted the services are still necessary regardless of the number of people.
 - (3) Eric Carr suggested a question in the climate survey may inquire if the individual knows anyone who is LGBTQ; the question may also inquire about what position the known LGBTQ is in without identifying them by name.
 - (a) Jennifer Jabson responded that this was a good suggestion. She also noted a self-identifier is still needed as it is significant in creating a climate that feels inclusive and safe.
 - (4) Danny Glassmann discussed the importance of visibility and voice. He quoted Harvey Milk, "silence kills." He noted asking about sexual orientation and gender identity, whether the data is flawed or not, is important; and, the information can still be helpful and informative.
 - (5) Beauvais Lyons noted multiple identifiers for data collection would be helpful, including socio-economic status, first-generation status, family background, etc.
 - (6) Jennifer Jabson stated it would be a great start if we can include sexual orientation and gender identity demographics in faculty and staff survey.
- iii) Provost Zomchick noted multiple demographics are included in the student survey, including some that Beauvais Lyons suggested. He asked Jenny Richter if a Modern Think survey is coming out soon.
- (1) Jenny Richter deferred to Denise Gardner. Denise Gardner noted the Modern Think survey is on the table, but it is not a climate survey. She discussed the amount of information we know about students from their application materials, and we are able to publish demographics that are collected from applications.
- iv) Bonnie Johnson noted the need to collect demographics beyond applications, because identities evolve.
- (1) Denise Gardner responded that this is a good point, and a periodic survey will be helpful. She stated, it is difficult to generalize to the population with low response rates, but statistical tests can still be done.
- c) Joel Kramer inquired about a staff climate survey.
- i) Denise Gardner noted a staff climate survey was supposed to roll out in the spring, but she has heard it has been delayed. She stated being unsure if this is true.
 - ii) Provost Zomchick discussed the history of survey distributions, and decisions about the timing of distribution are based on probability of high response rates.
- d) Joanne Patterson asked about our role as a commission in encouraging faculty and staff to complete these surveys with feelings of safety. There are concerns of power in position, with confidentiality, and more.
- i) Vice Provost Dixie Thompson inquired about where SafeZone is in the process of rebooting.
 - (1) Bonnie Johnson noted they are in the process of getting it back on its feet. Planning will continue into the spring, and they aim to offer it in Fall 2018.

- (a) Dixie Thompson responded that is great, because having visibility of safe spaces has proved important in the past.
- ii) Dixie Thompson asked about how individuals should out themselves as LGBTQ without risk.
 - (1) Jennifer Jabson asked the group for their thoughts.
 - (2) Phyliss Shey noted using pronouns in email signatures is one way of outing gender identity.
 - (3) Joel Kramer discussed having grounding data that speaks to LGBTQ visibility is a start. He noted having data of how many LGBTQ people are on our campus sets a baseline that sexual orientation and gender identity is important enough to be collected and stated.
 - (a) Joanne Patterson stated recognizing the things we are doing is as important as counting. She noted stating that we have various resources available (e.g. the Pride Center, the Commission, SafeZone trainings) increases visibility and safety as well.
 - (4) Bonnie Johnson noted being an out LGBTQ individual serves as an important example for other LGBTQ individuals. She discussed the risk that goes into being out and serving as an example, but she spoke from her experiences on the benefits outweighing the risks. She noted upper administration, faculty, and staff who are out can serve a great purpose.
- e) Michael Porter discussed how to communicate the value of diversity to those who do not intrinsically value diversity. He asked, how can the institution communicate the value of diversity, and how can the Commission help?
 - i) Provost Zomchick noted the STRIDE training as one way to spread the value of diversity; he stated the training is internally focused, however. He noted there are some people whose minds are simply closed. He stated it may not be possible to change some people's minds. He is at a loss for how to best communicate with external audiences. He believes he and other administrators are trying, but he is unsure how successful they are in reaching external audiences. He stated the responsibility to internally communicate the value of diversity within our campus community is the responsibility of all of us. He discussed STRIDE further as a faculty committee rather than administrative, because it was believed that faculty could best disseminate the message of value in diversity. He encouraged the group to continue these conversations with the Chancellor, because her office does more PR than the Provost's office.
 - (1) Jenny Richter discussed her experiences early in her tenure where groups would meet to support each other in diversity related matters. She noted there are some people who will not change and some who are willing to conform behavior. She stated our efforts are best made towards those who are willing to conform behavior and expand their thinking. She noted this is where we can find support and have meaningful dialogue.
- f) Cody Harrison inquired about the COACHE survey. He asked, why can it not be sent to staff as well?
 - i) Provost Zomchick noted it is administered by a particular group that controls the instrument. It is designed to only be for faculty. He discussed the results of every University who administers the COACHE can be shared with each other in a

confidential manner. He stated the comparative benchmarking can be useful in comparing our climate to our peer institutions.

- g) Provost Zomchick discussed the importance of the Commissions and Council to continue telling administration what they should be doing and are not doing in order to be more inclusive and spread the message of value in diversity. He stated that he believes so much creativity lies within our group and the other Commissions and Council. He thanked the group for sharing insight about what is needed in the surveys, and how to spread our message stronger, particularly within our institution. He noted the institution's position in advocacy must be carefully considered, because we are a state institution. He stated believing the institution should not be a political advocate; rather, he believes the institution should focus on educating. He noted others in the group might disagree, but there are groups, like the faculty senate, that can attend to advocacy issues with greater strength.
 - i) Beauvais Lyons noted the Provost's office recent advocacy about the new proposed tax law. He commended the Provost for their message, but he inquired as to why that advocacy issue was sent out when others may not be.
 - (1) Provost Zomchick responded that it was not so much advocacy, but instead a note for the campus community to educate themselves on the issues at hand.
- h) Commissioners thanked the Provost and his team for their time and shared communication.

VII. Other updates

- a) A monthly update will be sent with committee updates in the coming weeks.
- b) Shannon Herron noted upcoming faculty/staff Social on Dec. 5th at the Fieldhouse Social.
- c) Trans and non-binary committee report from Bonnie Johnson. Bonnie Benson-Palmgren has created a map for restrooms across campus. The committee will be working more through the winter break and into the spring to complete the map.

VIII. Adjourn