

## **2015-2016 Report of the University Council Committee on Diversity and Equity**

### **General Committee Charge**

*The Committee on Diversity and Equity aids Penn in fostering and taking full advantage of its diversity as well as in strengthening ties across all boundaries to enrich and enliven the campus community. The Committee shall advise the offices of the president, provost, and the executive vice presidents on ways to develop and maintain a supportive atmosphere on campus for the inclusion and appreciation of diversity among all members of the University community. The Committee will review and provide advice regarding the University's equal opportunity and affirmative action programs and policies. The areas in which the Committee shall report to the Council include diversity within the educational and work settings, integration of staff and faculty into the larger campus community, and ways to foster a campus environment that is inclusive and supportive of difference. The Committee also will advise the administration on specific diversity issues that may arise on campus.*

### **2015-2016 Specific Charges**

1. Obtain data relating to the diversity of Penn staff and discuss of the University's efforts to recruit and retain diverse staff.
2. Continue discussion of the University's efforts to attract diverse graduate students.
3. Examine the environment and resources available to low income undergraduate students.
4. Consider gender diversity in STEM fields for undergraduate and graduate students.
5. Review and discuss this Committee's general charge and identify two or three issues that should be given the highest priority for the committee's work in academic year 2016-17.

### **Priorities**

The committee agreed that the four main charges for the year would be a lot to cover and do any real justice on. Thus, the committee began working immediately on the second and third charges and it was officially agreed upon at the December 16, 2016 meeting that we will focus our work on these two charges. We also agreed to revise the second charge to focus specifically on the resources for and experiences of diverse graduate students and the third charge to examine the environment and resources available to low-income and first-generation undergraduate students.

### **Number of Meetings**

The Committee met six times.

### **Major Points Addressed by the Committee**

1. During our first meeting on October 7, 2015, the committee had Will Gipson, Leslie Kruhly, and Anita Mastroieni as invited guest. Anita Mastroieni indicated that the Enrollment Students Survey does not include responses from professional or master's students. The challenge that her office is faced with is how to include more students on existing surveys and noted that she would like to have permission from the master degree deans to include master degree students in the survey. Will Gipson encouraged cultural centers to support graduate student leadership, which is the best way to support affinity groups.
2. During our November 4, 2015 meeting, the committee invited Hannah Sweeney and Juana Granados, undergraduate students from the new organization PennFirst. The students spoke highly of PennCAP (Penn College Achievement Program) but that not every student has the opportunity to participate. Not everyone is invited and some students have to work during the

summer months in order to meet their financial need to attend the university. While Juana has expressed that as a junior she is just beginning to feel acclimated to the university community, Hannah (a freshman) said she does not feel like she belongs at Penn because of the negative comments received from some wealthy students. She stated this is not her reality and that she does not feel accepted or “like” a traditional Penn student. It was noted that Penn has been a school for the elite and has not done a successful job with providing an environment for low-income students. It was also mentioned that the Penn community is not good at welcoming first-generation students. Students do not feel comfortable approaching faculty, staff or other students for assistance. Finally, it was noted that there is a cultural bias at the institution that is shared by people on campus, particularly faculty, that all students who attend Penn come from privileged backgrounds.

3. During our December 16, 2015 meeting, the committee invited William Schilling, Interim Director, Student Financial Services, to discuss financial aid concerns pertaining to low-income and first-generation students. To begin, the committee discussed that graduate students need a representative of accountability, who students would go to for assistance. It was mentioned that there is not a designated person to address their grievances and the onus is being placed on the students. Bill Schilling provided a thorough explanation of financial aid and the process of student awards. The committee agreed that the institution is providing substantial resources for low-income students and that there is likely more an issue of institutional culture and issues of student awareness of resources.
4. On January 27, 2016, the committee convened its third meeting. Anita Mastroieni, Director of the Graduate Student Center, was the invited guest to discuss resources for diverse graduate students. The committee began with a brief summing of what has been learned thus far regarding first-generation and low-income students then discussing the subcommittee report on diverse graduate students from academic year 2014-2015. The committee wanted to recap the committee’s findings in relation to the university’s response to the recommendations. The committee acknowledges the university’s response that resources are available to students via the Graduate Student Center and the cultural centers but the information is not easily accessible. It was also importantly noted that there is not a centralized location on dealing with graduate student diversity. Anita Mastroieni discussed the various programs and resources of the Graduate Student Center. She emphasized the value of a number of programs including Fontaine for both providing resources and a community network for PhD students from underrepresented backgrounds.
5. The committee convened for its fifth meeting on February 18, 2016. Sam Starks opened the meeting with a discussion of Penn’s revised *Sexual Violence, Relationship Violence and Stalking Policy* with the committee. The committee then discussed the Undergraduate Assembly’s Social Justice Committee Project Survey. In light of the survey results, it was stated that the Financial Aid Package to low income students should be reviewed. More information is needed on how aid is calculated and how a student’s family finances are considered into the formula. It was also explained that once tuition, room and board has been deducted from a student’s aid package, it does not provide the necessary resources for students to purchase basic needs. It was also mentioned that some students send their work study money home to help their families and noted that work study loans appear on the students’ tax bill that have resulted in student loans. The committee agreed that Penn would need to become more diligent in providing information to students about the resources accessible to them.
6. The committee had its final meeting on March 23, 2016. The committee summed up the work of the committee as well as considered future work and how to approach that work as a committee in the future. The chair summarized a separate meeting he had with Vice Provost of

Education Beth Winkelstein, Karen Lawrence, and Anita Mastroieni on institutional resources for diverse graduate students. It was learned that one of our recommendations from last year (ie, to implement a regular survey of graduate student experiences, with a focus on diverse graduate students) has been in the making this year and will be piloted in April 2016. There are at least two sampling challenges that were mentioned. One of the challenges is that not every school or program has opted to participate. The other sampling challenge is that if a department or program has less than 20 students from a particular group of students then they will not be able to provide reporting on those students due to confidentiality concerns. The rest of the meeting was devoted to discussing findings and recommendations.

7. Additional information learned by the committee:
  - i) We reviewed the Undergraduate Assembly's Social Justice Committee Project Survey lead by undergraduate students Hannah Sweeney and Justin Hopkins and administered to students involved in PennFIRST, Questbridge Scholars, Mayor Scholars and PennCAP. Of the 99 respondents, the survey indicated that 70% identified as first-generation college student and only 29% of the students participated in PennCAP. Majority of which appear to be aware of various resources on campus such as Weingarten, CURF, and CAPS. However, the use of these resources appears to be underwhelming with some estimates as low as 19% for CURF, 32% for CAPS, and 42% for the Tutoring Center.
  - ii) Some of the survey results included:
    - (1) "I don't think that my experiences with CAPS have helped. CAPS is temporary help and not a replacement for actual therapy."
    - (2) "Generally the experience of people I know with advising at Penn is not very good. I know someone, who was already struggling with mental health issues, that was told she was "exaggerating her home situation." I don't think there is enough support for first-generation and low-income students, particularly mental and emotional needs. All the resources are scattered and I think we need a Center for First-Generation and Low-Income Resources. I center would be something that really shows students Penn welcomes them with a greater sense of understanding."
    - (3) "I also feel that the culture of Penn is difficult to navigate as a first-generation student, and like more resources should be given to first-gen students as soon as they arrive on campus to prepare them for the difficulties that may face them. I feel that, in particular, academic and pre-professional advising need to be improved upon."
    - (4) When asked about what workshops they would've been interested in attending time management, understanding financial aid, career/pre-professional advice, and internship/fellowship help received the highest frequencies.
    - (5) "Also, TBH [to be honest], someone just needs to sit low income and first gen college students down and explain the different people at Penn (in Marketing, we would call these segments of the population). We're getting exposed to people that dress differently than us, that have a lot more money than us, and have dealt with totally different problems through life than we have. Understanding how the other half lives is the first step in being able to effectively interact and cope with these people that we're forced to interact with on a daily basis. But no one ever tells you that these are the kind of people that go to Penn, and that's why you may not have much in common with them. Why your values may be different, etc. ... Lay it out for us all that "these are how rich people think and act and where they come from and what their values are.""
  - iii) In the inquiry conducted last year on the resources and experiences of diverse graduate students, data collection included semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and document

analysis. In the focus group with 30 graduate students from eight of the twelve of Penn's graduate and professional schools, the students expressed the following:

- (1) Feelings of isolation
- (2) Feeling marginalized
- (3) Having experienced microaggressions from faculty
- (4) Interest in more diverse faculty
- (5) Need for more support for graduate students as parents
- (6) Need designated place for dissertation work
- (7) Need for diverse community space
- (8) Need more conversations about diversity
- (9) Need for more people of color in programs
- (10) Need for more networking training
- (11) Need to destigmatize mental health diversity
- (12) That real important connections have been made at affinity groups
- (13) Schools not caring about diversity issues

### **Recommendations to University Council**

#### *For Charge on the Environment and Resources Available to Low-Income and First-Generation College Students (LIFG Students)*

1. We learned that the university does have a host of resources in place for LIFG Students, but either those resources focus on a specific subset of students or students are not aware of the resources. It was expressed in the Undergraduate Assembly's Social Justice Committee Project Survey on first-generation and low-income students that resources are not easily accessible; there are gaps in financial aid awareness; there is lack of clarity on the terms and process of work study. Given these resource related concerns, the committee recommends that resources be better consolidated via an office (see recommendation 2) that puts together resources and contacts students about these resources prior to their attending the institution. This possibly might be easily addressed by expanding the reach of the University of Pennsylvania College Achievement Program (PennCAP) such that all low-income and first-generation students are invited to participate in PennCAP. LIFG students who were able to participate in the past reported that both the summer event and continued programming during the academic year were crucial to their adaptation to Penn, and thus PENNCAP should be expanded to include more LIFG students.

2. The committee recommends that the university establish a First-Generation Office that is responsible for monitoring and being responsive to the needs and concerns of first-generation students, offers ongoing programming that helps to bridge the knowledge gap regarding assumed institutional processes (e.g., What is research? And, how can undergraduates become involved?), and conduct ongoing work that will enable both the student's transition into the Penn community as well as shift the institutional culture. The office could be made up of a staffed university official, graduate student staff that coordinate programming such as mentoring programs between graduate students and LIFG students or events on relevant topics, and undergraduate leadership from PennFirst that can develop programming while also provide an ongoing voice and input to community needs and concerns. This office would be able to facilitate the building of community while also organize and implement programming that would

help address issues and concerns pertaining to institutional culture. Peer institutions such as [Brown University](#) have already established a First-Generation College Student Office.

3. All advisers should be trained to increase awareness of and sensitivity to LIFG students, but the administration should also explicitly identify and recruit advisers who themselves were LIFG college students to work with current cohorts. Special care should also be taken to ensure that all advisers assigned to LIFG students will be in-residence (i.e., not on sabbatical) during the entire advisory period.

4. Finally, while each of these recommendations provide an institutional mechanism to be responsive to the various concerns, needs, and experiences of first-generation students what was also very clearly expressed both through interviews and the Undergraduate Assembly's Social Justice Committee Project Survey are issues pertaining to the institutional culture. These concerns included everything from socially and culturally elite student conversations to elite assumptions made by faculty in classroom discourse. LIFG students expressed how the elite culture of the institution has been socially and culturally marginalizing and has made for a difficult existence, specifically during the first two years. While the committee does acknowledge that the normative context of the institution is not an easy ship to move we do think there are mechanisms and procedures that can be implemented in order to enable an incremental institutional cultural transformation. Thus, we recommend

- 1) Ongoing faculty training on unconscious bias, microaggressions, and how to teach with diverse students.
- 2) Added programming during new student orientation that raises awareness to diversity by incorporating topics such as cultural sensitivity, race, gender, class, sexuality, dis/ability, and unconscious bias to its daily line up. The students indicated that a reception during NSO would facilitate the dissemination of information, allow LIFG students to establish networks of support, and provide an opportunity for a representative of the university to explicitly welcome and express support for LIFG students.

#### *For Charge on Resources for and Experiences of Diverse Graduate Students*

1. The committee applauds and encourages the university's efforts to create and implement a graduate student survey. It will likely provide information that will identify strengths and weaknesses and may help direct future efforts. That said, our current view is that more needs to be done as outlined below. The committee would like to request access to the survey and data for review next year. The committee also thinks the university needs to develop mechanisms on enabling appropriate and affirmative use of the data.

2. Fontaine Society has been a tremendous resource for PhD students from underrepresented backgrounds, both in funding and as a network. While Fontaine Society is not currently limited to PhD students that are funded via Fontaine Society, there continue to be procedural gaps in identifying and inviting underrepresented PhD students that are not funded by Fontaine. The committee does think that addressing these procedural issues and inviting all underrepresented PhD students will go a long way in addressing their needs and concerns.

3. The committee acknowledges that there are currently several cultural centers on campus that are designated as both undergraduate and graduate student resources. However, the committee's inquiry between last year and this year has discovered that the primary programming focus of the cultural centers tends to be on the undergraduate student population. Even though this is not uniform for all cultural centers, it does seem to be overwhelmingly the case. Thus, in order to incentivize the cultural centers graduate student programming and resources, the committee recommends (1) the university allocate a specified proportion of the cultural centers funding toward graduate student programming and resources; (2) encourage and prioritize the cultural centers pursuit of the recent Provost \$20,000 allocation for race and gender bias programming for both undergraduate and graduate students; and (3) have an allocated set of funds for diverse graduate student programming and resources that is available by proposal only and eligible to the cultural centers and schools.

#### **Recommendation of New Topics or Continuing Topics to be addressed the Following Year**

1. Obtain data relating to the diversity of Penn staff and discuss University's efforts to recruit and retain diverse staff.
2. Consider gender diversity in STEM fields for undergraduate and graduate students.
3. Examine the campus climate and experiences of LGBTQ students, staff, and faculty.
4. Examine and discuss the pilot survey and data on graduate students, with a particular focus on diverse graduate students.
5. Continue to monitor efforts related to the campus climate for undergraduate students for low-income and first-generation undergraduate students.

NOTE: The Committee considers "diversity" comprehensively, to include components of identity including but not limited to race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, immigration and legal status, disability, mental health, veteran and family status, faith traditions, and socio-economic background. The Committee recommends including these varied identity components when examining faculty, staff and graduate student recruitment and retention.

#### **Committee Members**

Ezekiel Dixon-Román, Chair (SP2 faculty); Administrative Liaison : Sam Starks, staff; Herman Beavers, SAS/English (faculty); Shaina Adams-El Guabli, PPSA; Kuan R. Evans, staff; Kristin Field, PPSA; Chenoa Flippen, Sociology (faculty); Nancy Hirschmann, SAS/Political Science , GSWS (faculty); Lauren Kemp, WPPSA; Jonni Moore, PSOM (faculty); Cheyenne Rogers, Undergraduate Students; Lloyd Talley, Graduate Students; Justine Sefcik, Graduate Students; Joe Libonati, Nursing (Faculty); Sharrona Pearl, Annenberg (Faculty); Iren Tan, WPPSA.