

EQUITY, ACCESS & DIVERSITY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Meeting

March 9, 2015

[These notes reflect discussion and debate at a meeting of a committee of the University of Minnesota Senate; none of the comments, conclusions or actions reported in these notes represent the views of, nor are they binding on, the Senate, the Administration or the Board of Regents.]

In these minutes: [*Whose Diversity?* protest and response; faculty diversity on system campuses]

PRESENT: Geoffrey Maruyama, co-chair; Deena Wassenberg, co-chair; Kimberly Hewitt, Rebecca Dean, Irene Duranczyk, Priscilla Flynn, Teddie Potter

REGRETS: Judith Katz, Andra Fjone, Naty Lopez, Richard Graff, Jeremy O'Hara, Susan Seltz, Ellyn Woo

ABSENT: Christopher O'Brien, Yi-Ping Chang, Jeremy O'Hara, Tyler Lande

GUESTS: David Melendez; Rahsaan Mahadeo

OTHER: Shakeer Abdullah, assistant vice president, Office for Equity and Diversity

Chairs Wassenberg and Maruyama welcomed the committee.

1. *Whose Diversity?* protest and response

Professor Duranczyk began the discussion about the recent protest by an activist group called *Whose Diversity?* at Morrill Hall and President Kaler's office. She said she would like the committee to consider what the protest said about the University as an institution, and actions the campus would like to take in response.

Students David Melendez and Rahsaan Mahadeo, representatives of *Whose Diversity?* invited by Duranczyk to attend the meeting, said the group had been formed to question the University's commitment to diversity and to dismantle institutional structures. Melendez noted the grand challenges initiatives, and said the group felt it had to challenge institutional racism, particularly around racialized crime alerts and the closing of colleges that support students of color and historically marginalized communities. Mahadeo and Melendez described the occupation of the President's office, saying the occupiers were peaceful and engaged in conversation with President Kaler, but no substantive changes to their satisfaction were effected. Members of the group were then arrested after the announced deadline for leaving the building, and then jailed for the night. Melendez and Mahadeo said they had been banned from Morrill Hall for one year.

Melendez and Mahadeo said another frustration was being unable to schedule a community meeting with President Kaler off-campus, saying this did not align with the University's commitment to community engagement. Shakeer Abdullah pointed out that since it was about changing the University environment, the decision was made to have such discussions on campus. Abdullah added said he was involved in community outreach in his role with Office for

Equity and Diversity, and that President Kaler charged staff like as himself with furthering the University's goals. However, Abdullah noted, even though *Whose Diversity?* had delivered thirty initial demands to Katrice Albert, vice president, Office for Equity and Diversity, and Abdullah, the group refused to meet with them.

Maruyama added it was misleading to say the president was not engaged just because he did not meet with them on their terms. Abdullah also added that part of the challenge was the rules of engagement are not agreed upon, which leaves space for confusion and miscommunication. Professor Potter wondered how to continue to build relationships to carry the University community forward. She added that it wasn't a matter of decisions being made on faulty rationales, but rather that communication wasn't always transparent. The committee noted that although there is supposed to be student representation on the committee, students do not show up for meetings.

The committee thanked the guests for the discussion.

2. Faculty diversity on system campuses

Professor Dean discussed the difficulty of recruiting faculty of color on system campuses. Maruyama said that although the committee was at a system level, it would like to be more responsive to the issue, hence the conversation. Dean said there were five faculty of color on the Morris campus, and there has been tension and frustration about recruiting and retaining such faculty. Wassenberg noted the student body on the Morris campus was diverse.

Jeremy O'Hara, in an email to the chairs about the issues, reported to the committee that the African American student population at Morris had been declining steadily since 1999, and has the lowest percentage of the campuses. O'Hara wondered why this was the case and what the committee could do to change the trend. The committee discussed the various obstacles to recruiting and retaining faculty of color on the system campuses, noting the rural or outstate locations and Minnesota weather as possible factors.

Abdullah said the Office of Equity and Diversity (OED) had visited other system campuses and planned to go to Morris as well. In these visits, they have been able to talk with students, faculty and the chancellor about the best way to hire faculty of color, and the conversations are ongoing.

Wassenberg and Maruyama thanked Dean for leading the discussion.

Hearing no further business, chairs Maruyama and Wassenberg adjourned the meeting.

Mary Jo Pehl
University Senate