

## College of Arts and Letters Diversity Council

### DRAFT Meeting Minutes from February 5, 2016 (to be approved at the March 18 meeting)

Present: Christine Robinson (scribe, Justice Studies), Erica Cavanagh (English), Stephen Chappell (History), Jenny Davis (Sociology & Anthropology), Mike Davis (School of Communication Studies), David Jeffrey (College of Arts & Letters), Yenisei Montes de Oca (Foreign Languages & Literatures), Alexandra Vilela (School of Media Arts & Design)

**1. Dr. Chappell brought a heavenly tart creation to share.**

**2. Diversity Events: Announcements**

- a. February 29: Stepping Towards a Trans-Inclusive Campus Professional Development for Faculty and Staff, Madison Union 405 (requires sign-up)
- b. February 29: Ryan Sallans: Eating Disorders, Body Image and My Trans Identity, Grafton-Stovall Theatre, 7-8:30
- c. March 1, 7:8:30, Duke Hall gallery, Jen Bervin lecture
- d. March 4, 6:30-8:30pm, First Friday potluck sponsored by the Shenandoah Valley Gay and Lesbian Association (Christine Robinson is hosting this event at the Harrisonburg Unitarian Universalist Fellowship Hall – LGBTQ people and Allies are welcome. Contact Christine at [robin2cm@jmu.edu](mailto:robin2cm@jmu.edu) if you want more information)
- e. March 16: JMU Diversity Conference

**3. Faculty/Staff Diversity Networking Resources:** At the December 2015 meeting, there seemed to be a general sense among Council members that the first step in improving networking opportunities should be to identify existing networks and publicizing these more clearly. Christine has volunteered to gather this information from Council members and add it to the list she has created that includes (so far): The LGBT Faculty-Staff Group, the Madison Caucus for Gender Equality, and the three Employee Resource Groups that are being created by Human Resources (Tapestry, Veterans, and WeCare). At the December Council meeting, Frances Flannery and Yenisei Montes agreed to explore what networking activities may be available through ALANA. Please send information about any relevant organizations (name of organization, mission, contact information) to Christine at [robin2cm@jmu.edu](mailto:robin2cm@jmu.edu) and ask your colleagues in your departments to send any information about any relevant organizations to Christine directly.

**4. Speaker for Next CAL Diversity Council Meeting on Supporting First Generation Students:** Dean Jeffrey communicated with Dr. Lee Ward about our discussions of the needs of first generation JMU students and reported that Lee offered to help assist CAL Diversity Council. David asked the Council if we would be interested in having Lee visit the Council at a future meeting, which was enthusiastically received. David will ask Lee

to join us at our next meeting, which members present agreed should be on Friday, March 18 at 11:00 am, due to schedule conflicts that would prevent an earlier meeting.

5. **IDEA Grant Submitted by Council Member Francis Flannery:** Related to #3 above, Dr. Frances Flannery (member of the CAL Diversity Council) has submitted an IDEA Grant Proposal to fund an initiative to support first-generation students at JMU. The Council expressed its support for the initiative in the December 2015 meeting. Dr. Yenisei Montes de Oca and some other members of the Diversity Council present at the meeting will assist Dr. Flannery with this initiative.
  
6. **Campus Climate Study and Follow Up on 2013 Diversity Task Force Report:** Christine Robinson raised the issue of the recommendations of the 2013 JMU Task Force Report and expressed interest in the CAL Diversity Council inquiring further about what has been (or is being) done to implement the Task Force recommendations (listed below, verbatim from the Report), and, in particular, the recommendation that, “as a first step, an external group conduct a climate study at JMU. Christine noted that President Alger invited and appointed members of the JMU community, representing a wide cross-section of the university, to serve on this committee, and that the hard work of their efforts and recommendations should not go to waste. Christine noted her concern that when faculty, staff, and students devote their time and labors on diversity initiatives of this magnitude, and when their recommendations are not acted upon, that it contributes to the very problem – disengagement from diversity efforts – that the Task Force noted in the first recommendation (see below).

[From the 2013 JMU Diversity Task Force Report]

- a. If Diversity and Inclusion efforts and programs are to be successful, faculty and staff members beyond the VP for Access and Enrollment, the Office of Diversity, Admissions, the Center for Multicultural Student Services must become and continue to be engaged, implementing and becoming accountable for making JMU a diverse and inclusive community.
- b. To gain a clearer perspective of what JMU faculty, staff, and students experience and where there are opportunities to make transformative change, **we recommend that a first step be that an external group conduct a climate study [emphasis added]**. The DTF recognizes that barriers to access, information and the challenge of being a minority (of any type) can create challenges and stress amongst some members of the JMU community.

Additionally, Christine noted that while the University has carried out some internal assessments with respect to diversity issues, it has not undertaken an independent, comprehensive climate study since she has been at JMU. Christine (and others on campus) has been advocating for the need for such a study for many years. Christine argued

- that without a comprehensive climate study, we have no way to identify (based on the evidence) all of the needs and issues at and no way to identify the most urgent needs or prioritize the agenda based on the evidence (rather than other institutional priorities);
- that participants in such a study (faculty, staff, and students) need to be able to trust the integrity of the study, which is more likely to occur if the study is undertaken by an independent consultant with expertise on comprehensive diversity assessment (like Sue Rankin, for example) and who is allowed to carry out the assessment without JMU impeding what questions are asked; and
- that an independent/external consultant doing the assessment is more likely to yield greater participation and honesty in the responses from members of the JMU community and that study participants are more likely to have confidence in the confidentiality of their responses.
- Finally, Christine expressed an interest in ensuring that if or when such a study is carried out at JMU, it would be important for there to be transparency in reporting the results to the university community and then ensure that the needs and issues that emerge from the study are prioritized (based on the seriousness of the issues more than, for example, the preferences or priorities of any particular entity on campus), and addressed.

Dean Jeffrey asked Christine to remind him of this issue by email and that he would communicate this information to the JMU administration.

7. Christine asked for other items of new business. There were none and the meeting adjourned before noon.

**NEXT MEETING: March 18, 11:00am-noon, 1131 Harrison Hall**