

CAL Diversity Council Minutes February 18, 2019

Appointed Members:

Chair: Heather L. Scheuerman scheuehl@jmu.edu Justice Studies

Members:

Jessica B. Davidson	davidsjb@jmu.edu	History
Bill Knorpp	knorppwm@jmu.edu	Phil/Rel
Diana Galarreta	galarrdf@jmu.edu	Foreign Languages
Adrienne M. Hooker	hookeram@jmu.edu	SMAD
Elizabeth Pass	passer@jmu.edu	WRTC
Lisa Porter	porte2ll@jmu.edu	Soc/Anth (SP19)
Mark Richardson	richardm@jmu.edu	Political Science (SP19)
Mary Thompson	thompsmx@jmu.edu	English
Isaac Woo	woocw@jmu.edu	SCOM

Sitting Members:

Robert Aguirre aguirrrd@jmu.edu Dean of CAL

In attendance: Heather L. Scheuerman, Jessica B. Davidson, Bill Knorpp, Diana Galarreta, Adrienne M. Hooker, Elizabeth Pass, Lisa Porter, Mark Richardson, Mary Thompson, Isaac Woo, Robert Aguirre, and Rob Alexander (invited).

- 1) Professor Scheuerman reminded the council that it is soliciting nominations for its chair for next year.
- 2) Rob Alexander (Political Science) addressed the committee on the topic of his department's experience with an internal "diversity advocate" on a search committee. Professor Alexander said that the advocate was thought of as promoting diversity "at every point" in the hiring process, and that the advocate had initiated discussions of "diversity as a value," also prompting introspection about implicit bias and "white fragility." There was, however, no training, support, or job description for the position, and this caused a certain amount of uncertainty about the advocate's role. This uncertainty also related to the search committee questioning whether there were any relevant legal concerns associated with such a position. In addition, the diversity advocate started serving on the committee after the solicitation went out and the committee already had an applicant pool.

Furthermore, the person functioning as the diversity advocate came to be considered as *the* person responsible for promoting attention to diversity, which took the onus away from the committee to ensure that it was prioritizing diversity. Finally, the additional workload associated with performing the advocate role was judged to be excessive, as this diversity advocate found herself on multiple searches during that year. Although the diversity advocate role was well-intentioned, focus on this position did not lead to a deeper discussion at the

department level of considering members' own possible biases, which could perpetuate the homogeneity of faculty. Professor Alexander reported that due to these unforeseen problems, the role of the diversity advocate had to be shelved by the department.

- 3) A general discussion followed Professor Alexander's presentation, focusing largely on the development of "best practices" guidelines. Dean Aguirre asked Professor Alexander for his input regarding his evaluation of the experience and asserted that although JMU is good on inclusivity, a significant shortcoming of CAL is its lack of diversity in its faculty, as conveyed to him many times since his initial visit to campus in January, 2018. He said that in order for things to change, concrete steps must be taken. The Dean reminded the Council that the faculty handbook makes clear that hiring decisions are at the dean's discretion. And although the Dean has the ability to implement various changes to the process, he would prefer not to exercise that authority by fiat but rather enlist the Council to assist him in thinking of meaningful changes that could be implemented to increase the diversity of applicant pools in faculty searches. He stated that JMU faces additional challenges by virtue of being remote, provincial, and rural. He suggested that departments should consider broadening the areas of specialization in their job descriptions to increase the pool of candidates from underrepresented groups. Another suggestion would be to extend the length of searches and to hire adjuncts for classes if a search pools are weak. As examples of successful searches with deep pools, the Dean highlighted the recent SCOM and Soc/Anth searches. The Soc/Anth representative also indicated that she thought that requiring "diversity statements" of their candidates had been a good thing.

Other suggestions included:

- a) Sharing job descriptions among various departments
- b) Aiding recruiting efforts by giving departments the ability to negotiate more nimbly
- c) Having diversity advocates lobby hiring committees to seek candidates that would support broader needs in CAL (e.g., the women's studies and queer studies programs)
- d) Limits on how often people can serve on search committees
- e) Mandatory training for members of search committees
- f) Mandatory inclusion of the department's CAL diversity representative on search committees
- g) If a diversity advocate is to be implemented, have the position rotate across department members. Also, the diversity advocate should not be an extra person on the committee and should remind the committee of best practices, even though everyone on the committee should still be aware of such practices.

The Dean also suggested that diversity advocates might come from outside the department, which raised the concern among some council members that this might produce legitimacy problems for the advocate. The Dean suggested that this might only be the case until people got used to the idea of an advocate external to the department. The Dean also said that, although the diversity advocate proposal could not be implemented this year, he is thinking about it for next year.

Although the Council was encouraged by the discussion of how to increase faculty diversity, Professor Scheuerman highlighted that part of the Council's mission is to "advise the dean of the College of Arts and Letters on issues related to diversity, access, and inclusion" which includes supporting "inclusive faculty and staff searches by circulating information on best search practices." As such, Professor Scheuerman advocated that these issues be discussed with our departments first, and some others agreed. The Council acquiesced to this request and members were instructed to seek faculty feedback on the "best practices" that were discussed.

To facilitate discussion among departments, the Dean indicated that he would tell the AUHs to put the issue of hiring best practices on the agenda for up-coming department meetings so that recommendations can be solicited for the 2019-2020 academic year.

- 4) Due to time constraints, Professor Alexander was not able to present on the Provost Diversity Council's Report. The Council will also discuss the proposal for cross-disciplinary studies and the policy concerning public expression on campus at a later date.
- 5) Due to inclement weather, the Diversity Chairs Council did not meet on Wednesday, February 20th.

Respectfully submitted,

William Knorpp &

Heather L. Scheuerman