

Inclusion/Diversity Advisory Committee
Minutes
March 28, 2019

Present – Filipe De Oliveira Fiuza, Ann Eargle, Adrianna Guram, Keith Johnson, Mary Jordan, Antonio Rusinol, Laura Terry, and Phyllis Thompson.

Not Present – Joe Sherlin.

Overview – Dr. Johnson explained that in addition to his current role as Chair of the Department of Engineering, Engineering Technology and Surveying, he is serving as Special Assistant to the President for Diversity and Inclusion. In this new role, he will be serving to help advance the university toward meeting diversity and inclusion goals. Members of the advisory committee, representing various units across campus, will serve as the first diversity champions. Members are encouraged to provide support and advise Dr. Johnson in all aspects of diversity and inclusion. Dr. Johnson shared that the committee members were chosen because of their present passion and commitment to diversity and inclusion and he expects that they will serve as participatory members of the committee. Dr. Johnson welcomed the advisory committee members and thanked them for their willingness to serve as members of the Diversity/Inclusion Advisory Committee.

Dr. Johnson shared that some time ago the university put into place a task force on diversity with the purpose of brainstorming and offering recommendations for a diversity pathway for the institution. There were many exceptional outcomes and ideas birthed from the prior task force. It is Dr. Johnson's hope, with the assistance of the committee, that the ideas, processes and procedures, previously discussed, will usher the university toward becoming a more diverse and inclusive institution. An important goal of the university is to become a HEED Institution. HEED status is quite comprehensive and measures an institution's level of achievement and intensity of commitment in regard to broadening diversity and inclusion on campus through initiatives, programs, and outreach; student recruitment, retention, and completion; and hiring practices for faculty and staff. The committee agreed that, at this time, we appear to be far from reaching the HEED status in the very near future. Dr. Johnson shared that in order to successfully reach HEED status, equity and diversity needs to be woven into the fabric of our university. ETSU is uniquely different in terms of diversity challenges. However, despite our location and the challenges that lie ahead, Dr. Johnson is certain that we can obtain HEED recognition. Only with buy-in from key individuals at the institution can successful achievement of that status occur and at one-step at a time. Dr. Johnson shared that instead of relying on our own community experiences, he believes it would be advantageous to reach out to a consultant for guidance and counsel. The committee agreed.

Dr. Johnson also shared that his expectation of his new role will not include acting as an ombudsman. The work of an ombudsman should be carried out within individual colleges/departments/units and, when required, perhaps the assistance of the Office of Human Resources.

Dr. Johnson has already begun working and taking the necessary steps moving forward toward becoming a more diverse and inclusive university. The following are some areas where work has already actively begun and areas where the committee will have an opportunity for collaboration:

- I. **Updated Position Description** – An updated position description for the administration role in the Office of Equity and Diversity is crucial in order to usher in the expansion of the diversity and inclusion efforts at our institution. One of the outcomes of the prior task force was the preference to change the title of the position to Vice President. A VP title is a higher-level management position, which is assigned responsibility for specific functional areas. The designation of a VP status will personify the necessary weight of the position and illustrate the earnest intention of moving the university forward. Dr. Johnson has already written a position description. However, he has challenged the committee to submit their ideas and recommendations for the position description in an effort to create the description as a collaborative effort. He requested that ideas and recommendations be forwarded to him with a copy to Ms. Ann Eargle.
- II. **Department Name Change** – Dr. Johnson shared that in many studies “Equity & Diversity” seems to be cause for guarding or implying defense. Dr. Johnson shared that inclusion is a sense of belonging, which allows a person to engage and contribute within an environment.

Diversity is the goal and by incorporating inclusion, diversity tends to become a natural progression. A departmental name change is one of the initiatives Dr. Johnson would like the committee to begin considering.

- III. **Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) Doctoral Scholars Program** – Dr. Johnson shared with the board that TBR has withdrawn their support from the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) Doctoral Scholars Program. The program, nationally recognized and founded in 1993, has supported more than 1,550 scholars who have attended 109 institutions in 31 states. The goal of the program is to increase the number of minority students earning doctorates and choose to become faculty at colleges and universities. For many years, the Office of Equity and Diversity has supported two scholars through graduation. The SREB program provides financial and research funding as well as career counseling. Dr. Ansley Abraham, Director, SREB-State Doctoral Scholars Program, Dr. Noland, and Dr. Johnson are scheduled to meet in the very near future to discuss what would be required of the institution to continue the program in an effort to support diversity in our future faculty.
- IV. **Inclusion/Diversity Conference** – Dr. Johnson shared that he has assembled a group of folks to serve on an Inclusion/Diversity Conference Planning Committee. The conference is planned for fall 2019. Dr. Johnson shared that he has received an incredible amount of support from the members of the planning committee and the committee has yet to convene. Members have rendered information regarding speakers, topics, etc. Dr. Johnson believes that if our institution is going to expect inclusion from faculty, staff, and students, folks are going to need to know exactly what inclusion looks like, embrace it and in turn change the culture of our institution. He noted that buy-in from administration, deans, and chairs is crucial. There is the possibility of a minimal charge to attend the conference and the committee agreed that buy-in equals return.
- V. **Building of Diversity Champions** – Dr. Johnson shared that he has begun to meet with colleges and units to discuss their current diversity plans. He has met productively with some of the Arts & Sciences units to discuss realistic plans to include measurable outcomes. Dr. Johnson has also met with a few Associate Deans from the College of Education and discussed the importance of obtaining buy-in from faculty members. In addition, Dr. Johnson is also actively working with the College of Medicine and currently awaiting their diversity plan. Next week, he has plans to meet with the folks at the College of Business and Technology. Dr. Johnson shared that he would like to see diversity champions throughout the university who truly want to become part of the initiative and perhaps not chosen but to be voluntarily willing to become a part of the initiative.
- VI. **Office of Human Resources** – Diversity should be a part of all we do – in faculty, leadership, staff, departments, colleges, and units, etc. In particular, the Office of Human Resources touches every component of our institution. Human Resources is at the very core of everything we do at the university and serves as the welcoming center of our institution. Dr. Johnson has met with Ms. Lori Erickson, Executive Director, Human Resources, regarding a statement relating to inclusion and diversity, which Dr. Johnson has requested to be included on all faculty and staff ads. Dr. Johnson and Ms. Erickson discussed the importance for potential employees to know, at the start, that there is an expectation of embracing diversity and inclusion and not have the idea become an afterthought once someone is hired. During the interview process, diversity and inclusion should be part of the conversation.
- VII. **Diversity and Inclusion Conference/Accountability** – Dr. Johnson shared that in order to require buy-in from administrators, faculty, and staff members, it will be important for all constituents to understand the dynamics of diversity and inclusion. If accountability is to be an expected outcome, clear understanding is essential. Dr. Johnson has assembled a committee charged with creating a Diversity/Inclusion Conference. The charge includes identifying potential speaker(s), gaining skills in including diversity and inclusion in the syllabi and campus projects, and delving deeper into understanding identity as well as other components. Dr. Johnson suggested possible spin-offs from the main conference in the form of workshops. The committee discussed the importance of diversity becoming a component of annual evaluations for all levels: VPs, Provost, Deans, Chairs, faculty, staff, etc. Dr. Johnson plans to meet with Dr. Wilsie Bishop in the near future to discuss the initiative.

- VIII. Incentivize** - The committee discussed the possibility of incentivizing folks who go over and beyond in their diversity and inclusion efforts. Also discussed was the possibility of rekindling the Pat Robertson Diversity Award, and possibly initiating other awards to show appreciation to those habitually engaging in the initiative and those who exceed expected goals.
- IX. University Advancement/Partnerships** – Dr. Johnson met with Ms. Pam Ritter to discuss the possibility of enlisting her assistance with student scholarships through the private support structure. The idea of collaborating with industries was also suggested.

Conclusion – Dr. Johnson requested the committee to provide any helpful resources, thoughts, and ideas. The significance of enlightening and teaching current administrators, faculty and staff as well future employees should be effective because the diversity and inclusion piece which is expected to become a component of the evaluation process. The committee was supportive of the idea. The committee voiced some concerns such as not being aware of what our onboarding process looks like; the fact that there seems to be no diversity in the Office of Human Resources; and there appears to be very little assistance for new employees from the beginning to the end of the hire process. All committee members agreed that empathy is directly related to inclusion. The committee suggested a possible buddy system for departments, colleges and units as a means for inclusivity and it became apparent that some departments are currently utilizing the buddy-system methodology and believes it to be a working component. The c suggested that empathy appears to be desired among many, but unfortunately is missing from many areas as well.

Next Meeting Date – April 18, 2019, 3-4:30pm, Burgin Dossett, Room 309.

Respectfully submitted by: J. Ann Eargle