Cultural Diversity Committee Minutes
April 13, 2005
10 am – 11:35 am

Present: Julie Ancis, Perry Binder, Doris Derby, Paul Ferraro, Sally Fowler, Christine Gallant, Marcia Pearl, John Peterson, Cora Presley, and Hazel Scott.

Absent: Peggy Albers, Brenda Blackwell, Kyle Bruner, Elisabeth Burgess, Vijay Deshpande, Valerie Fennell, Mary Finn, Elizabeth Firestone, Josue Heredia, Marissa Johnson, LaLoria Konata, Charles Marvin, Linda Nelson, Ronald Patterson, Doug Podoll, and Alan Raines

Guests: Aprille Blair and Bryce Farbstein

The Minutes from the March 16th meeting were approved without corrections.

Cora Presley urged committee members to attend next week’s Senate meeting at which the phasing out of the Kinesiology and Physical Therapy programs were going to be discussed. These programs have a relatively high enrollment of minorities and thus could affect student diversity in the School of Health. John Peterson indicated that he had spoken to the Provost and to Dean Kelley about the issue. He believed that the decision to phase out these programs was based on objective criteria (course credits, enrollments, etc.) and thus their demise was unfortunate but not necessarily something the Diversity Committee should oppose. He also mentioned urging Dean Kelley to consider making more resources available to other programs with high minority enrollments under the assumption that students from Kinesiology and Physical Therapy would substitute existing program majors for the phased out program majors. Marcia Pearl questioned whether existing programs with high minority enrollment would be substitutes for the phased out programs.

Cora Presley asked for a show of hands of members who had read the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered (LGBT) survey results (many members only received it the night before the meeting). Only four people had read it and thus discussion was tabled until the next meeting.

Christine Gallant gave an update on the Racial Climate Survey. There had been no progress since the last meeting. The Provost continues to support the September implementation of the survey by OIR (see March 16 minutes). Christine informed the committee that the Provost has indicated that state funds could not be used for incentives to boost the survey response rate. Hazel Scott agreed and said that her office used Foundation money, not State funds, to provide incentives for their recent survey. John Peterson suggested contacting the President, who has access to non-state monies, to finance the incentives. He also emphasized that OIR should be doing repeated follow-ups with non-respondents to help boost the survey response rate. He also repeated his point from an earlier meeting that the survey be kept short.

Members then engaged in a lengthy debate about whether the survey should be piloted to test reliability, estimate likely response rates, etc. The sub-committee indicated that the full committee had already agreed that there would be no pilot. OIR probably would not do it, sub-committee members did not have time or incentives to do it, and other schools that have done climate surveys did not pilot their surveys. This debate was later revisited in the meeting, but the final conclusion was unchanged. No pilot will be initiated.

John Peterson asked for clarification on why the survey had to be completed in September. This provoked a lengthy discussion of how the deadline arose (a combination of OIR decisions and peoples’ interpretations of the connection between the survey and the Regents’ 2004-05 deadline for action to be taken with regard to racial relations on campus), whether it was a hard and fast deadline (not exactly, but there were pressures from several sources, including the Diversity committee itself, to implement the survey as soon as possible and complete analysis by December), and what analysis had to be undertaken by December to satisfy the Provost and Regents (whether just the quantitative data needed to be analyzed and presented in simple means and frequencies, or whether more
sophisticated analysis was required as well as analysis of the qualitative data). Hazel Scott noted that GSU was the only school to be conducting a racial climate survey as part of a response to the Regents’ directive. Julie Ancis and Cora Presley reminded committee members that Julie and Elizabeth Burgess were allocated a GRA and a course release in the fall semester to assist in completing the survey analysis, but there was no further support to do any analysis in the spring. Christine Gallant indicated that it might be possible to free up $2000 from the existing $12,000 survey budget to fund a GRA in the spring ($1000 from the budgeted incentives, which are not allowed, and $1000 from staff assistance for Christine, which she was willing to forgo if the money would help the survey). John Peterson stated that they didn’t think the committee had a good idea of the objectives of each stakeholder involved in this process (Provost, Regents, student groups, Diversity committee). He believed the time allocation would depend on what was required to meet each stakeholder’s needs. He believed that the survey instrument and proposed analysis exceeded what the Provost and Regents required, but not what the Committee desires.

Cora Presley requested that the Climate Survey sub-committee: (1) revisit the timeline for the survey implementation and analysis and (2) revisit the budget. In particular, she requested that the subcommittee obtain a good idea of (a) exactly what OIR was promising to do for the survey and (b) the time commitment that Julie and Elizabeth were willing to give beyond December.

Cora’s request was followed by more debate and discussion about the timing and purpose of the survey, but no new issues were raised.

Perry Binder gave an update on two initiatives. The Sexual Violence Committee activities are moving more slowly than anticipated but progress is being made since the committee’s inception last fall. The main short-term objective of the committee is to make it easy for victims of sexual violence to know how to seek assistance and what services are available to them. A one-page information sheet that all relevant units at GSU would hand to victims is in the works. A video (no description provided) is also in development. Perry also presented an update on the Campus Environmental ad hoc committee. This committee is new (convened by Hazel Scott and chaired by Perry Binder) and arose in response to the “biased incidents” of the recent past (e.g., swastikas, black face). The committee has three main objectives: (1) establish a centralized repository that allows documentation of the history of “biased incidents” at GSU (the reporting process is proposed to take place through Linda Nelson’s office); (2) establish a centralized and “harmonious” way for community members to report a biased incident (Cornell University has a good model for such a system); and (3) establish a program of short-term and long-term education on diversity issues at GSU.

Hazel Scott gave an update on the AAMI. Dr. Neil (?) in the College of Education will be conducting an evaluation of Tighter Grip activities to examine the organization’s effectiveness in improving GPAs and retention rates among African-American males. Cora Presley inquired about progress on the AAMI recommendation for a summer “bridge” program. Hazel responded that the Regents insist that GSU coordinate on this project with Atlanta Metro College. Hazel will be meeting with representatives of Atlanta Metro next week. There will be no summer bridge program in 2005.

Perry Binder introduced two student guests, Aprille Blair (undergraduate) and Bryce Farbstein (graduate). Both argued for a mandatory diversity course at GSU, with an emphasis on providing an opportunity for face-to-face, sustained discussion among different cultural, racial and ethnic elements of the campus. They argued that voluntary engagement, as currently practiced on campus, is inadequate to achieving a tolerant and understanding community. Self-segregation is coming among student groups. Both students noted that GSU claims diversity as an important attribute of the university, but does not foster an environment in which we get to know and understand diversity. Aprille indicated that there should be some mechanism to “force” students to learn something about different cultures in a more sustained and structured way. Bryce echoed these sentiments. The students and committee members engaged in a discussion about the issue of a required course in “diversity,” including its motivation, its objective, its implications for staffing and the functioning of the current course system, what such a course would look like, and whether it would have any effect at all on tolerance in the community.
Cora Presley, who chairs the subcommittee on the diversity requirement, has a GRA examining the use of the Perspectives program as a vehicle for introducing a required diversity class. They are looking at peer institutions, as well as considering staff issues, potential course structures and other potential avenues for introducing such a requirement into the GSU curriculum. The subcommittee is also investigating GSU courses currently approved as “diversity” courses, but which have little to do with cultural diversity. She will provide a report when the subcommittee’s initial research is completed. She also encouraged Cultural Diversity Committee members to join the subcommittee (which needs members) if they had ideas about how it should proceed. Bryce Farbstein offered student assistance as a way to facilitate the completion of this report. John Peterson volunteered to join the subcommittee.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:34 AM.