

2004-2005 Report of the President's Commission on Diversity and Community

I. A Message from the Chair

II. Report from the Campus Climate subcommittee

III. Report from the Continuing the Conversation subcommittee

I. A message from Beth McCoy, Commission Chair

This message represents the Chair's views and not necessarily those of Commission members

The Commission report for 2004-2005 documents that, through President Dahl's direction, the Commission's focus has narrowed and deepened appropriately. Two subcommittees worked with excellence during the academic year to fulfill their charges. The Campus Climate subcommittee recommended highly visible and easily assessable "Dashboard Indicators" of diversity and community initiatives at Geneseo. The Continuing the Conversation subcommittee planned and hosted three Deliberative Dialogues and carried out substantial evaluation of and reflection upon the process. All Commission members served with distinction, and Joe Van Remmen and Heidi Levine provided smooth, effective leadership.

As this is my last year chairing the Commission, I will leave the Commission members' successes to speak for themselves. Instead, I will reflect a little on the larger, longer processes in which the Commission and the College have been (and will continue to be) involved.

The subcommittee reports and ongoing conversations within the Commission suggest strongly that the Commission and College stand at a crossroads. What kinds of data regarding campus climate can or ought to be gathered? Who should analyze that data, and how should it be interpreted? If interpreted and reported, will the recommendations be believed or acted upon? Commission committees historically have had difficulty in getting some College areas to provide data for reporting and assessment. Commission committees historically also have had difficulty in getting some College areas to take Commission knowledge claims seriously. Part of this seems to be due to the fact (noted in several previous Commission reports) that requests or reports from the Commission can still be interpreted as coming from the "diversity police." Finally, some forms of knowledge that the Commission deals with are those that do not appear (e.g., on-campus sexual assault, chronically under-reported at all institutions; "chilly climate" issues within divisions and departments that may go unreported for fear of retaliation or denial) or may not register with statistical force (e.g., the experiences of students and employees of color on predominantly white campuses) on formal survey instruments.

It is for these reasons that there has been substantial desire within the Commission to begin to transform part of its work to a sort of "troubleshooting" body similar to the model provided by Human Resources' "Listening Post" program. Such a function would not be without precedent at academic institutions, and it would fulfill the College's larger responsibility to prepare students--no matter their academic discipline--to work effectively and with purpose in complex institutions. President Dahl has expressed support for this goal.

Of course, it would take much careful planning to achieve such a goal. As one Commission member pointed out, given issues of trust among various College constituencies, we can't just sit in a room and expect people to show up and talk. Turning desire into reality depends at least in part upon partnering with the office of Affirmative Action and Employment (once that position is filled), and it also depends upon the College's successful development and dissemination of a concrete bias-related protocol. It will also depend upon working closely with community members in order to learn what issues of diversity and community come up repeatedly and determine what are the most effective and appropriate strategies for addressing these issues. The knowledge gained from these processes will help all facets of the College (from University Police to Writing and Learning

Center) to better determine what kinds of education and outreach can be done.

In this way, the Commission will be better positioned to support the development of diversity and community at Geneseo from the grassroots up. As this year's Campus Climate subcommittee report notes, however, action from the top down is crucial. Such action would include visible, active administrative participation in Commission initiatives such as Deliberative Dialogue, but it can also come in other forms.

As merely one example out of many possible ones, both anecdotal evidence and formal academic research affirm the existence of gendered differences when it comes to assertiveness. In short, assertive men are often seen to be wise and effective while assertive women (no matter how cool and calm) are often seen to be irrational and out of line. These gendered inequities in reception are widely known, and they have substantial impact in the everyday workings of all institutions. At academic institutions, these inequities affect divisional and departmental governance and decision-making and create low morale and frustration. Yet, even when leaders understand the problem intellectually, behaviors and attitudes producing the low morale and frustration are generally permitted to continue. Strong administrative acknowledgment of the problem, of research affirming its existence, and of the negative costs of allowing the inequity to continue can go a long way towards opening up areas for conversation and positive change. The conversations that would emerge in the context of a top-down address might then be appropriately given a forum in a Deliberative Dialogue.

As the Continuing the Conversation subcommittee report acknowledges, however, topics for Deliberative Dialogue cannot always be generated from the top. Ideas from the top of the hierarchy may be viewed with suspicion, as "Big Brother" orchestrating a carefully scripted performance disguised as "open conversation." This, as well as the sheer workload created by the Deliberative Dialogue initiative, represents another crossroads at which the Commission and College stand: how to balance grassroots initiatives with administrative directives. With the imminent visit of a team from Franklin Pierce College (the institution widely credited with spearheading the Deliberative Dialogue initiative on college campuses), the Commission hopes to address this dilemma, as well as many others.

II. President's Commission on Diversity & Community Climate Assessment Subcommittee Report

Committee Members: Tabitha Buggie-Hunt, Marie Henry, Heidi Levine (chair), Leigh Miller, Zhiming Zhao

Charge to the Subcommittee

The 2004-05 charge to the Climate Assessment subcommittee of the Commission on Diversity and Community was twofold: conduct data analyses from the 2004 and 2001 climate surveys; develop a list of dashboard indicators related to campus climate, along with recommendations regarding the use of these indicators.

Dashboard Indicators

The committee focused on identifying areas that are easily assessed and reflect a range of issues related to campus diversity for use as dashboard indicators. Following are the committee's recommendations for dashboard indicators and their utilization:

1. *Inclusion of topics related to a range of diversity issues in courses across the curriculum*
– Periodic review of course descriptions and syllabi should be conducted to assess progress in this area.

2. *Guest speakers addressing diversity-related topics* – An annual review of guest speakers brought to campus would provide data regarding the prominence of diversity issues on campus.
3. *Participation by students, faculty and staff in diversity-related activities* – Participation should be assessed encompassing a variety of activities and dimensions:
 - a. Participation in on-campus diversity-related events and activities;
 - b. Comparisons of group representation at campus events and activities.
 - c. Attendance and presentations at professional conferences and meetings addressing diversity-related issues;
4. *Applications and “yields” of individuals of color* – Annual assessments should be made of the number of students, faculty and staff applying for admissions/positions at Geneseo. Assessments should include percentages of those offered admissions/positions who accept offers. In addition, applications and yields by individuals with self-reported disabilities could also be periodically assessed.
5. *Reports of bias-related incidents* – The College needs to determine the best means for encouraging students and others to report bias-related incidents, as well as the means for gathering those data (e.g., web-based report form). Once the processes for collecting and maintaining these data are resolved annual review of reports should be conducted.
6. *Administrative support for diversity-related initiatives* – Administrative support for diversity-related initiatives is reflected in:
 - a. Provision of fiscal and other resources to support activities (e.g., Vice President’s grants, funding to support Commission activities);
 - b. Administrative presence at and participation in diversity-related campus events (e.g., Deliberative Dialogues);
 - c. Upper level administrators taking on visible roles leading diversity efforts on campus.

Responsibility for conducting these assessments could be distributed among College divisions and departments with functions related to the related indices.

Climate Assessment

The committee has been working with Catherine Renner, Director of Institutional Research, on the survey data analysis. Analyses include a factor analysis of the instrument, comparisons between student groups, comparisons across groups (students, faculty, staff), and comparisons between survey administrations.

We expect to complete this task early in the 2005-06 academic year and will submit a report summarizing our findings at that time.

III. CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT: Fall 2004-Spring 2005

Committee Members: Irene Belyakov, Kelly Clark, Ralph Carrasquillo (Volunteer Facilitator) Sarah Donaldson, Cindy Durand, Amanda Gitomer, Becky Glass (representing the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning), Cristina Geiger, Dave Geiger (Volunteer Facilitator), Viet Ha Do, Savi Iyer (Volunteer Facilitator), Dave Levy, Beth McCoy, Bob Owens, Monica Schneider, Kate Steinnagel, Kathy Trainor, Joe Van Remmen (Chair).

Special Mention

The Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning has been critical to our success at both

planning and holding the events mentioned throughout this report. Becky Glass has provided crucial support. Her work and guidance throughout the many tasks has been critical and much appreciated by our entire committee.

President's Charge

“... Building on the strong base already established and working closely with the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, I ask that the Commission continue to implement discussions across campus based on deliberative dialogue. I hope you will be able to foster an ongoing conversation and move from deliberative dialogue to sustained discussions that lead to positive change. Diversity in the classroom is an excellent topic on which to begin, but I encourage you to explore other issues....”

What is Deliberative Dialogue?

“Deliberative Dialogue” frames an issue to provide 3-4 “choices” or viewpoints that the trained facilitator provides to the group in the course of a 1 1/2- to 2- hour session. The group discusses each choice using a process that moves from a “statement of the approach” through “what should be done” to “drawbacks, dangers, trade-offs” so that each viewpoint is processed using the same framework. We learned that a goal of deliberative dialogue is to find common ground on which people who hold different viewpoints can agree with others in the group. This goal is different than compromise, which implies that people move from their original positions.

Franklin Pierce College distinguishes between deliberative dialogue, a one-time discussion, and sustained dialogue, an on-going discussion that develops from a deliberative dialogue. Participants in a sustained dialogue progress “from personal experience through examining all points of view to consideration of strategies for action and change” (Topsfield Foundation, 2003).

• The Subcommittee's Work

During the 2004-2005 academic year, the subcommittee planned and put into operation “Deliberative Dialogue” at SUNY Geneseo. Three dialogues were held during the school year, with two different themes. “Engaging Diversity in the Classroom” occurred in September 2004 and again in February of 2005. In March 2005, people met for a dialogue “Bias and Hate on Campus: What's a Community to Do?”.

• The Subcommittee's findings: To put it mildly, Deliberative Dialogues take a lot of work. That this work is done by people who are already oversubscribed with duties and responsibilities cannot be overemphasized.

What we have learned:

- 1. Space counts:** Spatial planning for the event is important. Generally, we need a large room for 100 or so people (initial Dialogue instruction) and 4 or 5 smaller rooms for groups of 15 or so (the actual deliberative sessions). Scheduling dialogues for the campus is often dependent on whether or not we can get the needed space.
- 2. Being inclusive takes work:** Crafting approaches that bring in a variety of viewpoints has been a somewhat frustrating, time-consuming but eventually gratifying task.
- 3. Assessment takes work:** The paper documents needed for assessment have been more cumbersome than at first one might have expected. From Post-Dialogue questionnaires to process evaluations, each Deliberative Dialogue generates about 10 pages of paperwork per participant.
- 4. “Common Ground” remains elusive and something on which we do not necessarily agree:** The finding-common-ground component of the process has been somewhat problematic. Our National Issues Forum Institute training seemed to show a coming

together by the group on issues after they have been discussed. In our Geneseo dialogues, a few facilitators report that their group has gotten to this point, but most have not. The facilitators have had much discussion as to the importance of this aspect of the dialogues. Is achieving “Common Ground” possible, or even desirable? Does “Common Ground” mean agreement on action to be taken? Commitment to the process of Deliberative Dialogue? Recognition that there *is* an issue or problem at hand? Additionally, facilitators reported that some Dialogue participants were suspicious of the very idea of “Common Ground” as a goal.

Community Response To The Dialogues

Generally, participant response to both Deliberative Dialogues has been positive. For instance, after the first dialogue, 80% of questionnaire respondents answered “Yes” that they recognized options that they had not seen before the dialogue. And in process evaluations for the last two dialogues, respondents overwhelmingly (i.e., 37 out of 38 and 41 out of 43, respectively) “agreed” or “strongly agreed” with a statement asking if they liked the Deliberative Dialogue process.

Of course, within such favorable feedback, there is a wide range of individual responses. Some positive comments taken from evaluations completed after the dialogues: “*Wonderful and Challenging,*” “*Would like to see more,*” “*This type of engagement is important,*” “*Dazzling! Much more than I expected,*” “*Great opportunity for students & faculty to get together-wish more would attend.*”

Some negatives: “*Requires too much discussion,*” “*Felt like people were too cautious, trying to be politically correct,*” “*some people dominated,*” “*Some people used as a stage for off-the-wall suggestions.*”

Other Outcomes

After the dialogue “Engaging Diversity in the Classroom,” the subcommittee held brainstorming/de-briefing sessions. From these sessions emerged a number of ideas for a brochure that can be distributed to both new and established faculty who are interested in the above topic.

Facilitator training occurred on February 15, 2005. Three students and three faculty completed the training necessary to facilitate future dialogues. These new facilitators participated in the March 1, 2005 dialogue. After the March dialogue, four more people sought and received facilitator training.

We also began to reach beyond Geneseo’s campus. On February 25, 2005, subcommittee members led by Robert Owens and including students Kate Steinnagel and Cindy Durand traveled to SUNY Brockport’s “Building Community Through Diversity” conference. At this conference, subcommittee members gave a presentation on the Geneseo Deliberative Dialogue initiative.

Right now, we are planning to bring in facilitators from Franklin Pierce College in October 2005. During this visit, the Franklin Pierce facilitators will provide more training for our facilitators, give us an opportunity to discuss how things went with our dialogues, and find out how and if our experiences at Geneseo are similar and/or different from those at Franklin Pierce. We also hope to learn how Deliberative Dialogue might be used more widely at Geneseo (e.g., in such areas as curriculum reform). Further, we also hope to learn how to implement sustained dialogues at Geneseo.

Issues for the Future

1. We would like Speakers or Trainers to come to the college to give us further insights into the development of our own Dialogue.
2. We would like to explore possible expansion of the Dialogues into other areas. Orientation was mentioned as a potential area for expansion. We recognize that it is important that we maintain

a high level of quality for all Dialogues that occur.

3. We need to explore potential correspondence with NIFI and other organizations about what we have been doing at Geneseo.

4. We need to continue facilitator training so that our facilitator base remains strong, especially as students graduate from the College.

5. We need to determine subjects for future dialogue. We have received a number of suggestions for potential future dialogues, and we have spent a lot of time talking about exactly how to choose subjects that fit the needs of the College. Some subcommittee members have asserted that we need a more grassroots approach to choosing Dialogue subjects; if topics continue to seem as if they are issued from the top down, it may look like College community members are being asked to play roles in a process whose outcome is already determined. We have done some initial brainstorming about generating Dialogue topics, including advertising in The Lamron, etc.

6. Ending each Dialogue continues to be a point of conversation. The three Dialogues have ended in different ways. The first dialogue was heavily facilitated through dinner, the second was generally finished in the small groups prior to dinner, and the third gave participants a short opportunity to talk after dinner. A consensus as to how to end them in the future has not as yet been reached.

7. We need to further explore how to balance and address varying ideas about what Deliberative Dialogues should produce. For instance, should they lead immediately to institutional action? Action may satisfy those who feel that Dialogues are just more meaningless talk; at the same time, action may also be seen as circumventing the usual processes of the College.