

Diversity 'conversations' encourage action plan

Administrators presented the five-year diversity plan to members of the campus community on Tuesday

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NEWS EDITOR

The University is actively taking steps to create and implement an extensive diversity action plan in upcoming years.

Administrators in charge of mapping out the plan held the first of several "conversations" on Tuesday in the EMU Gumwood Room to outline elements of the plan and get feedback and perspectives on diversity from faculty, staff and students.

Gregory Vincent, the vice provost for institutional equity and diversity, said diversity is an integral part of the University's mission and there is a need to align available resources to focus on the issue.

"We have a lot of effort and goodwill around diversity," Vincent said. "Yet I think we could do a better job and use our resources more efficiently."

Two groups have been formed to develop the multi-faceted, five-year plan — a core Diversity Work Group and a Diversity Advisory Council, a larger group that will provide advice and consultation. The University hired Vincent earlier this year specifically to address issues of diversity and equity on campus.

One of the University's goals, Vincent said, is to build a "critical mass" of people from diverse backgrounds through active recruitment and retention of students and faculty.

"You only get the benefits of diversity if you have enough numbers to break down isolation and stereotypes," he said.

Vincent noted it is difficult to put a measure on exactly what critical mass means, but people will be able to notice the difference in their classes and in the campus.

"You'll know it when you see it," he said.

The University is also placing emphasis on creating cultural competence among all its members. Part of this process is examining policies and practices within the University and addressing the discriminatory impact they might have had on certain groups. The University community will also be encouraged to explore how factors such as ethnicity, class and sexual orientation affect the lives of those on campus.

PLAN GOALS

The University's Diversity Action Plan, which is in the process of being developed, has identified the following goals:

- Developing cultural competence
- Building critical mass
- Filling the pipeline
- Strengthening and increasing community linkages
- Developing diversity infrastructure

Suggestions and ideas can be sent to vpdivers@uoregon.edu

"We really need to go beyond the surface and look at the cultural roots of the University," Vincent said.

John Shuford, the associate director of the University's Center on Diversity and Community, and Robin Holmes, director of the Counseling and Testing Center, are developing a three-year pilot cultural competency program, Vincent said.

"(Cultural competence) is a skill, and it's a skill that needs to be developed and honed, and it can atrophy if you don't use it," Vincent said.

Carla Gary, assistant vice president and provost for institutional equity and diversity, said faculty members must be equipped with these cultural

competency skills and set examples for their students.

"If the climate on this campus were such that people were welcomed and encouraged and affirmed ... that would make a profound difference," Gary said.

Vincent said it's also vital to create policies that hold University leaders accountable. Administrators would have to demonstrate "a strong commitment to diversity," and how they handle these issues might also become an important part of their evaluation as leaders.

"To be an effective leader you have to understand and appreciate diversity," Vincent said.

Other elements of the diversity plan include increasing internal and external community linkages, strengthening and developing diversity infrastructure, and "filling the pipeline" through outreach to grade school and high school students of different backgrounds with programs that introduce them to college and its potential at an early age.

About 30 people attended the meeting, but students were clearly not well represented. Vincent acknowledged that the timing of the meeting during Dead Week may not have been conducive for students, but added that students would contribute to the plan.

"Students need to be involved in the development of this plan," he said.

He said there are student representatives on the diversity work group. Also, he said he has been working closely with ASUO President Adam Petkun to get representatives for the Diversity Advisory Council, and Petkun will also serve on the council.

Senior Julia Carr said it's important to have such a plan in the works. She said she has had only one professor in her two years at the University who has directly

addressed issues of diversity; therefore, having an institution-wide plan will allow for greater dialogue.

"I think that the fact that they're addressing it, I think that at least things should open up," Carr said.

Faculty and staff also welcome the process.

"I am optimistic," ASUO Women's Center Director Erin O'Brien said. "I have some faith that we can change the climate."

O'Brien said at the University, "you look around and you don't see much diversity." She added that institutional mechanisms, such as the University's potential plan, are a step forward.

"If the University doesn't take it up, the individual might not take it up," she said.

The campus community can learn

more about the plan and give feedback at the second diversity "conversation" on Friday from noon to 5 p.m. in the EMU Walnut Room. A third session is scheduled for early winter term.

Both Gary and Vincent acknowledged that defining diversity and adequately addressing all its dimensions is no easy task. Vincent said it is "harder than rocket science."

But despite the various challenges it presents, questions of diversity must be tackled head on, Gary said.

"We have to be very candid and very clear that we have to get over this fear that it's going to hurt," Gary said. "Change is always painful. But it will be much more painful to stay where we are."

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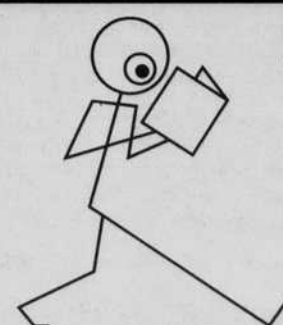
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