

# Diversity: Plan calls for faculty cluster hires

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strategic directives are intended to address various aspects of the University's ethnic and cultural diversity situation.

The faculty members who wrote the open letter took issue with "the Orwellian insertion of the 'cultural competency' into every aspect of administration, teaching and performance evaluation."

Developing Cultural Competency is one of the plan's strategic directives. The plan calls for faculty to be evaluated on cultural competency when seeking tenure and for instructional faculty to participate in cultural competency-building training, among other things.

But what "cultural competency" entails is not well-defined in the document, said emeritus math professor Richard Koch, one of the professors who signed the open letter.

"I had not the slightest idea what they were talking about," Koch said. He asked, for instance, whether learning French would be considered cultural competency.

The term was defined on the University's Center on Diversity and Community's Web site as "an active process and ongoing pursuit of self-reflection, learning, skill development and adaptation, practiced at individual and systems levels, in order to effectively engage a culturally diverse population."

"The document has to be exactly precise about what it means," Koch said.

The draft was "all over the place," Koch added, saying that while there are indeed many problems with diversity related issues, the plan must be more specific in laying out how the University should tackle these issues.

Physics professor N.G. Deshpande, who also signed the open letter, said he believes the draft's objectives are good, but he also questions the "cultural competency" component.

"About cultural competency, how does one measure that?" he said, adding that in the sciences he is not sure how one would be required to demonstrate this ability.

Deshpande said if faculty raises and promotions are based on this aspect that has not yet been well-defined, it may have a "destructive effect on hiring."

Jeffrey Hurwit, chair of the University Senate Ad Hoc Committee on Diversity, acknowledged the concerns of faculty members in a May 18 letter to Frohnmayer and Vincent that was circulated to members of the Senate, as well as deans, department heads and program heads.

"Some legitimately see these recommendations as threats to academic freedom," reads the letter, which goes on to urge the formation of a group to review and address feedback.

Vincent said in an interview Tuesday that cultural competency is a long-standing concept.

"This term had been around for 20 years; some very well-established universities have used this," Vincent said, adding that any changes would

be introduced as a bill on the floor of the faculty Senate, which would then vote on the initiative.

"We always recognized ... that anything that had to do with faculty governance would have to go through the faculty governance structure," he said. "It's not the administration, and it's certainly not me, coming and saying that they need to do this."

The diversity work group is seeking feedback, Vincent said. The existing draft would serve as a "blueprint."

Funding is another issue not mentioned in the existing plan but is clearly a concern when initiating hiring processes and scholarships.

Another faculty member who signed the open letter, associate physics professor Stephen Hsu, said while many professors endorse having more diversity on campus, the plan would take away from more pressing priorities such as faculty recruitment and retention.

"This plan would have diverted significant funds (from the budget)," Hsu said. He added that some parts of the plan, such as recruiting 40 new faculty in cluster hires, seem rather optimistic considering the University's fiscal realities because it's hard enough to retain the faculty already here.

"It's just a little odd to think that we'd be able to have cluster hires," Hsu said.

Funding issues should be addressed in the next stage of the process to formalize a diversity plan, Vincent said.

"What we didn't want to happen is to have some good ideas left on the cutting room floor because we're a relatively cash-strapped organization," Vincent said. "We wanted to get it out there. Now we have to get to reality and recognize that there are many competing priorities on campus."

Those who helped to create the draft have reiterated that it is just that: a draft.

Kimi Mojica, director of Diversity Education and Support in the Office of Student Life, was part of the work group that drafted the plan. Mojica said the creation of such a plan is a lengthy process — drafts go out, input is given, and they are revised.

"I didn't expect a final document," she said. "In reality I don't think you can get (everybody's input) just once."

ASUO Women's Center Interim Director Erin O'Brien said the current draft offers some concrete steps for addressing diversity or a lack thereof on campus.

"It puts forward a bold vision, a broad definition of diversity," she said.

She said some of the recommendations such as hiring 40 new faculty in cluster hires and making faculty accountable for cultural competency do not seem like impossible tasks.

"I don't think there's anything shocking (in the plan)," O'Brien said.

O'Brien said campus community members have been given many opportunities in the past to give feedback on the plan. The Office of

Institutional Equity and Diversity hosted several "Community Conversations" to seek input and feedback from campus community members.

"I find it mildly ironic that they are upset now," she said, adding that those calling for the Diversity Work Group's censure are a testament of how unwilling the University is to address diversity issues.

"I think that it's been really frustrating that after all we've put into it, some people are vehemently opposing it," O'Brien said, adding that those charged with drafting the plan did the work on top of their other responsibilities.

But Hsu said faculty were not properly consulted in the planning process.

"There was a problem with the process that produced the document," Hsu said, adding that while there were open sessions, it is unfair to think faculty members, who are already so busy, would be able to participate actively in these sessions. He said the University Senate should have been used earlier as a forum to discuss the plan.

The plan had an advisory council with nearly 50 members, some of whom didn't feel their role was well-defined.

Alison Ball, who sat on the council, said there wasn't time for the council to give input on the draft in between its completion and its release to the public.

She added, however, that she understood it was a working draft.

"We would always have a chance for input, so I didn't view this as a one-time thing," Ball said.

Vincent said most of the input has been positive, but he's surprised at some of the more pointed criticism that diversity issues have elicited recently.

"I think that's where people are really frustrated," Vincent said. "The response was a lot more unprofessional than it should have been."

Some wonder what will happen next with the plan, especially now that Vincent has announced his departure to the University of Texas.

Koch said that he generally supports the plan's principles but that the University must remember its ultimate goal.

"The thing that I support for the University is hiring the absolute best people," Koch said. "You have to keep your eye on that ball above all else."

Mojica said she believes the University administration and the rest of the campus community are still focused on the plan.

"We have been given this reassurance that the ball won't drop," she said.

Deshpande said the University should re-start the process with a committee that is representative of faculty from various fields on campus.

Koch said he feels the plan should be revisited.

"As a first draft, it has many drafts to go," he said.

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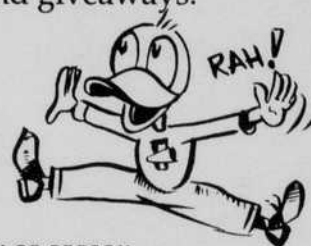
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