

Project Final Report

Project Title: Forum; *Focus on Civility: Sexual Orientation and Gender Equity*

Team Members: Lyn Buchheit, English Department
Bianca Cummings, Office of Institutional Advancement
Josie DiGregorio, Office of the President

Overview of Project Proposal/Goals

The Leadership Institute's project theme for 2006-2007 was "Building on the Strengths of a Diverse Institution" and the focus of the College professional development activities throughout the year has been the topic of diversity. To meet that objective, our team agreed to continue this theme and focus on diversity.

We agreed that discussions of diversity on campus generally focus on race, and that there was a gap in discussions of other aspects of diversity. Based on that, our group decided that our project would focus on gender equity and sexual orientation. Our plan was to organize a College wide event/forum/discussion which would engage faculty, students and staff in an open dialogue on this diversity issue.

Our project idea was further solidified with a discussion held by a Student Panel on Diversity in the Classroom during Professional Development Week. The panel voiced the need to have more discussions and education on sexual orientation issues on campus.

Research Undertaken in the Completion of the Project

Our group was fortunate to have Simon Brown, director of the Office of Diversity and Equity, assigned as our mentor. We met with Simon to discuss our project idea. We talked about the ongoing discussions of diversity issues on campus and whether there were complaints received relating to gender equity and sexual orientation. Simon indicated that while such complaints were unusual, he felt that the College had not held an open forum/dialogue that specifically focused on the issue of gender equity and sexual orientation. Simon agreed that our project was viable and recommended that we collaborate with a subcommittee of the President's Diversity Council who was planning to hold a Civility Week in March. Our group met with Dr. Claudia Curry, chair of the Civility Week Committee, and we agreed that our project/forum would fit very well into the plans for other activities planned for Civility Week. Since Civility Week was planned for the week of March 12, 2007, our group was assigned Wednesday, March 14 as the date for our event.

Outline of the Steps Taken to Complete the Project

Our team met several times to discuss the planning of the event, possible speakers, panel participation, to determine the focus of the forum and other logistics. We wanted our forum participants to be diverse. In addition, we proposed that the forum engage the academic community in an open dialogue about differences and dissimilarities, to serve as another vehicle of encouraging greater understanding of diversity by the College community.

After several meetings and deliberations, we identified a keynote speaker, Dr. Mary Conway, English Department. Our team also secured a diverse panel consisting of Dr. George Thornton, Sociology Department; Mr. Jimmy Calnan, Dignity Philadelphia, a non-profit organization of LGBT (Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender) Catholics, and Norah Wells, William Way Community Center, the LGBT Community Center in Center City Philadelphia (who was unable to participate on the rescheduled date).

Our group was pleased with the assembled participants. The group envisioned the forum to begin with Dr. Mary Conway as the keynote speaker, followed by comments from the panel members on the issue from their perspectives. We felt confident with the group and optimistic that the College community would embrace the discussion. Our group strongly believed that the focus of the forum should be on student discourse and the classroom experience. We continually discussed ways to encourage faculty members to bring their classes to the forum since the student panel during Professional Development Week had expressed the need for this type of discussion.

A few weeks prior to the rescheduled forum (which was subsequently changed due to the faculty and staff strike) Dr. Mary Conway informed us that she would be unable to serve as the keynote speaker. She recommended Dr. Richard Frei, faculty, Behavioral Sciences Department as the keynote speaker, and noted that she would open the session with a few comments accompanied by visuals.

For long-term projects, an outline of next steps and long-term goals

Our forum was held on Wednesday, April 25, 2007. A session evaluation form was distributed to the audience and a total of 36 responses; the average grading of 4 with 5 as strongly agree. The overall comments received were very positive and encouraged the need for additional College-wide discussions of this nature as well as other issues. Our group shared the assessment of the session with Simon Brown. The session was videotaped for use by the Office of Diversity and Equity as well as for classroom use by faculty. Our group will follow up with Simon Brown about continuing this type of discussion on an ongoing basis at the College

An overview of how the project has been or may be institutionalized within the College for continuity

Our group feels that these types of discussions should be ongoing at the College. We envision the project to be continued under the aegis of the Office of Diversity and Equity with the assistance of our group. In addition, we believe that this type of forum/discussion may also be integrated in connecting with other activities around the college.

Assessment Results or Plans for Assessment

As noted above, the team circulated an assessment form at the forum. We received 36 very positive responses about the need for the College to hold additional discussions of a similar nature. The cumulative average grade was 4 with 5 indicating strongly agree.

An Explanation of how the project relates to this year's theme of "Building on the Strengths of a Diverse Institution"

Our team feels that our project very strongly relates to the Leadership Institute's theme. As the College's *Diversity Plan* states "Diversity encompasses an infinite range of an individual's unique characteristics and experiences." Diversity discussions on campus have generally focused on race. Since diversity encompasses many different characteristics, our discussion of gender equity and sexual orientation was timely and fit extremely well with this year's theme. Our discussion topic is certainly part of diversity, and we as a College community must embrace the strengths that all different groups bring to our academic enterprise.

Bianca

As a result of implementing this project, I have come to appreciate the various perspectives that each individual brings. We come from different backgrounds and cultures, but together we work toward a common goal, which is the mission of the College. This project has impacted me as a leader because it allowed me to have an open-mind, and to explore areas I would not have explored if working alone.

I am grateful for this opportunity and thankful to the Leadership Institute for designing a program such as this that will develop leadership skills in the lives of many that make a difference in the College community.

Josie

Working on this project with Bianca Cummings and Lyn Buchheit was a pleasure for me. We always worked as a team, met frequently and communicated via e-mail during the various stages of project planning. Working with a group on this project, I learned to appreciate the good ideas and creative thinking that Bianca and Lyn brought to

the team. Participation in the Leadership Institute and working with a team solidified for me that a competent and cohesive team is critical to being successful in leadership positions.

Lyn:

This project made me realize that all of the women on this team were leaders. Everyone had good ideas, listened to each other, gave good feedback, was supportive of the others, and finally, came to a decision that worked well for each team member and the project, as a whole. No one took single ownership for ideas or plans, but instead, each person on the team worked very hard to ensure the ultimate success of the project. It was an excellent collaboration, and I have enjoyed so much working across the College to make a contribution through the Leadership Institute Class of 2006-07. Thank you, Bianca and Josie!