

Diversity and Inclusion Committee Minutes
Thursday, 12/06/2017

Committee members attending:

Gladys Alexandre (BCMB), Brian Ambroziak (Architecture), Misty Anderson (English), Michelle Kwon (Law), Niki Labbé (Forestry), Mary McAlpin (MFL), Marcy Souza (Biomedical & Diagnostic Sciences), Chair: Monica Black (History).

During the main portion of the Diversity & Inclusion committee's Dec. 6 meeting, committee members heard a research presentation by two Psychology PhD students who are researching campus climate among faculty and students. The student-researchers use a research method called Critical Participatory Action Research, which aims to bring social scientists and community members together, to formulate research plans and questions in concert. The intention of Critical Participatory Action Research is to make research more inclusive, democratic, and useful to communities.

The students' research into campus climate relates in part to the shuttering of the university's Office of Diversity in 2015, and what the closing of that office has meant to various student constituencies and faculty. The student-researchers hope to learn more about how members of marginalized groups at UTK perceive issues of safety, discrimination, and the university's commitment to a diverse and inclusive campus. They also want to know how students and faculty generally perceive the situation on campus for marginalized and minority groups. The study has been going on for 1.5 years. The work has involved teams of undergraduate students, most from the Psychology Department, but also from such academic units as Public Health, MFL, and Business, among others. To date, the study has involved a survey, which has been taken by around 460 students and some 100 faculty. The next step in the graduate students' research plan involves organizing focus groups.

The D&I Committee plans to invite the student-researchers to present their findings at an upcoming meeting of the Senate, perhaps in March. The committee would also like to help them recruit more faculty to participate in their survey by reporting on it at the Senate's February meeting, after which we would like to distribute instructions about how to participate in the survey via the faculty listserv. During the second half of our Dec. 6 meeting, committee member Misty Anderson offered updates on two initiatives of significance to our committee and to the campus community:

1) Wade Davis, former NFL player and advocate for open, non-homophobic sports opportunities, will visit UTK March 3-6, 2018. Mr. Davis' visit will coincide with *The Strangers*, a world-premiere play written by Chris Peña (*Insecure*, *Jane the Virgin*). Davis and Peña will lead a joint talk-back session after the Sunday matinee of the play. On Monday, Mr. Davis will meet with the PRIDE Center Ambassadors, give a public talk in the afternoon with Q&A, and participate in an evening session with our current student athletes at the Thornton Center. Mr. Davis was moved by the plight of our PRIDE Center last year and hopes to help generate productive dialogue on campus across constituencies. An example of his message is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=umKKrbmdHFM>

2) Misty Anderson and Beauvais Lyons are working with Theatre, the College, and other parties to launch a project called "Play It Out," modeled on the University of Michigan Players project. The initiative would use theatrical improv, short scene work, and student actors from ACT to model civil exchanges around issues of diversity and inclusion. The principle behind the project is that if students and others are able to watch the contrast between uncivil and civil

interactions, which support the dignity of all parties involved, the message will be more effective and less likely to “shut down” parties who might benefit from it. Misty and Beauvais will keep the D&I Committee updated and hope to solicit the committee’s help in moving the project forward.
<https://senate.utk.edu/playitout/>