

Office of Diversity and Equity (ODE)

When I took the position of CDO at CCSU, I knew our community was hurting. After the incidents with the student newspaper, the defacing of posters actually calling for diversity and tolerance with racial epithets, and the divisive issues regarding tenure decisions and no confidence votes, our campus was in deep need of healing. Since taking the position, I have met with dozens of students and faculty concerned about diversity and equity. I have met with students from the Black Student Union who feel teachers are, at best, condescending, at worst, hostile to them. I have met with students from our gay and lesbian community, who feel marginalized and rejected by many of their peers and underserved by our institution. I have met with many women on campus who feel they are not valued and respected for their work, and I have met with many students with disabilities, that sometimes were just looking for some empathy and support. And yet, I am hopeful. I am hopeful because I have seen faculty and staff who are willing, eager, to volunteer to work on programs and curricular issues to make central a better place. Because I have seen that many in our administration deeply care, and are willing to push to make a difference. And I am hopeful because I see the difference we make every time in the life of our students, kids who are rarely from a

privileged background, and for whom a degree from CCSU will actually mean a much better and brighter future. We have also seen many positive changes: the enrollment and retention of minority students is up. There is greater awareness of diversity and multicultural issues on campus, and the administration has been fully supportive of the efforts of the ODE.

The position of the Chief Diversity Officer (CDO) at CCSU is a new position that significantly expands the role of the former director of Multicultural Affairs. In addition to the old responsibilities of AA/EEO monitoring and compliance, the CDO is in charge of supporting initiatives that not only advance diversity at CCSU, but that promote multicultural competence & further the outcome of diversity education.

In order to achieve these outcomes, the ODE focuses on three areas:

1. To foster a campus climate of tolerance and diversity that will be welcoming of all people regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, national origin, gender, sexual orientation or disability status.
2. To ensure equal rights and representation, that reflects the rich diversity of our state, of all these various groups as part of the student body, the faculty, the staff and the administration.

3. To educate our students, as integral part of the mission of these university, towards appreciation for diversity and “multicultural competence”—the skills and understanding necessary for students to succeed and, indeed, thrive in a culturally diverse nation and an increasingly interconnected, multicultural world.

The first order of business after I took this position, was to coordinate and consolidate the multitude of diversity related programs and effort to create a systemic, comprehensive Strategic Diversity Plan. However, in order to be successful, the development of a Strategic Diversity Plan must be based on a comprehensive needs assessment, and as a process, it has to involve all the different stakeholders in the campus community. While I expect to continue conducting this process over the Fall semester, there are a number of short-term goals and initiatives that are already under way that will have a significant impact on the diversity of the campus:

- As part of the needs assessment project:
 - Started a Gender and Diversity Study, conducted by Dr. Carolyn Fallahi and the Center for Public Policy and Social research, which should be completed in the Spring.
 - Incorporated to the assessment the conclusions of the President’s Blue Ribbon Commission on Diversity, and the conclusions of the

“conversations on diversity” that were carried out by the FSDC during the Spring 2008 semester

- Conducted a series of conversations with constituency groups, including BSU, LASO, LAA, PRIDE, CCW, Africana Center, Wombli Tokoda, Hillel-Jewish Student Club, the FSDC, and others.

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- Created a Critical Incident Response Procedure for incidents of racism and discrimination
- Implemented mandatory Diversity and Sexual Harassment training for new faculty and faculty not in compliance with state regulations as of the Fall 08 semester.
- Started a pilot program with a core group of faculty, directed by Dr. Beth Merenstein, to implement a diversity general education requirement.
- Made changes to the AA/EEO procedure to be more effective in achieving our goals and reduce liability, including:
 - Requiring that AA demographic information be completed by applicants as a first step to the application process, a change that improved data gathering from a former 25% of applicants, to over 90% of applicants today.

- Match AA goals to specific departments to increase diversity at the departmental level.
- As mandated by law, extended AA monitoring to promotion and other internal appointments, not just new hires.
- With the support from Interim VP for student affairs, Dr. Laura Tordenti, I am pleased to announce today that we will inaugurate a GLBT center in the Spring of 2009.
- Implemented a new process to distribute grant money for diversity projects, which now are decided by a committee comprised of a student, a faculty member and the CDO. This replaces the old practice of the director of the office distributing money capriciously.
- Took the lead to create a CSU diversity council with the other Diversity Officers of our sister institutions.

I am proud of the work that the ODE has done in the few short months since I started in this position. Yet that is merely a fraction of what we need to accomplish. Ultimately, my goal is that, with your support, CCSU will not merely be “in compliance,” or above average when compared to our peer institutions. My goal is that CCSU becomes a place in which we prepare our students with the skills to be successful in an increasingly diverse and global society, that we become the

college of choice for young, and not so young women and underrepresented minorities in the state of Connecticut, that we have a campus that not only tolerates each of its members regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, or disability, but that actually embraces the differences to make us stronger. In short, that CCSU becomes a regional and national role model institution, leading the way into a more diverse, better future for our state and our nation.