Diversity Council Minutes  
June 23, 2006

Council Members present: Lee Barrentine, Jeffrey Faust, Allen Gainer, Kathleen Hall, Corine January, Sherry Martin, Dr. McBride, Latitia McCane, Cornelia Miller, Maurice Moore, Marilyn Nicholson.

As a prelude to the meeting, committee members participated in an interesting ice-breaker activity. By identifying and discussing personal characteristics from the primary and secondary dimensions of diversity, committee members were able to know each other a little better.

Dr. McBride was asked to open the meeting with a short overview of the organizational meeting. She gave a general introduction to diversity in which she stressed the importance of awareness and valuing diversity. Goals emphasized were creating a broad, inclusive definition of diversity where real issues are addressed in an effort to cultivate a campus climate with a diversity mindset which values all people. She reminded the committee of its charge to create and assist in the implementation of a plan to foster a campus climate in which there is a proactive commitment to diversity as a basic value of the College. She also expressed her appreciation to Marilyn for helping us to find ways to approach the sometimes difficult task of discussing diversity.

The minutes from the previous meeting were read and approved as submitted. The name “Diversity Council: was reviewed and unanimously reaffirmed.

Although diversity is not always easy to discuss, the goal of the committee is to create an environment which promotes real change through awareness raising initiatives, not just as a formal, task-oriented process.

As a ground rule, the chair reminded committee members that, before speaking, they should ask themselves: “Will my response sound defensive? Will my comments hinder or encourage another’s participation?” The meetings should be open and non-threatening forums in which committee members feel comfortable to express their ideas freely. In this type of setting, we can learn quite a bit from each other’s collective wisdom. Further, in an attempt to avoid leaving a meeting with unresolved issues, we will try to have a 10-minute wrap-up period before the end of each meeting with each person taking about a minute to make final comments.

Defining diversity for Jefferson Davis Community College will be a process resulting in a document that will emerge from this committee to be forwarded to the Executive Council for approval. In an attempt to better understand the issues at hand, Dr. McBride has agreed to purchase copies of a diversity resource for committee members: Implementing Diversity by Marilyn Loden.

City, county, and student body statistics were discussed as to how well the College’s faculty and staff represented the diverse population it serves. Sherry will update the statistics to delineate the prison population. Dr. McBride will verify the overall demographic information for the local population. Latitia shared a personal experience from early in her career at JDCC in which some students were faced with having an African-American instructor for the very first time. This surprising event highlights the fact that cultural diversity issues are just as real and important here in Brewton or Atmore as in more culturally diverse areas of the country.

Sometimes diversity awareness is simply that, increased awareness. When confronted with certain diversity issues, people will often say: “I never thought about that before.” The task of the committee is to get the members of the College community thinking about these issues. While encouraging a “diversity mindset,” the committee must at the same time move toward proactive involvement by developing a plan and implementing activities.

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The committee’s first task will be the formulation of an operating definition of what diversity means for Jefferson Davis Community College in order that we, as a College community, might become aware of and celebrate the differences that are represented on our campuses. Committee members are to work on their respective definitions in the small groups established during the first ice-breaker activity.

The next meeting of the Diversity Council will be held on Thursday, July 13th at 2:00 p.m. in the President’s Conference Room.