Diversity Council Minutes
Monday, October 23, 2006

Committee Members
Present: Lee Barrentine, Jeffrey Faust, Allen Gainer, Kathleen Hall, David Jones, Sherry Martin, Susan McBride, Latitia McCane, Cornelia Miller, Maurice Moore, Marilyn Nicholson
Absent: Corine January

The committee’s charge was reviewed as the first item on the agenda:

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. This will include coordinating awareness and training activities. In all our initiatives we must emphasize the development of good character and must model the values of inclusion, mutual respect, and cooperation.

We also reviewed the ground rules for dialogue as mentioned in the minutes from the June 23rd meeting:

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.

The minutes from the previous meeting were approved as submitted.

Final plans were discussed for the On-campus Diversity Conference which will take place December 13, 2006 from 9:00-11:30 a.m. The guest speaker will be Mr. Brad McClain, associate pastor as Dauphin Way United Methodist Church in Mobile.

Chapter 5 in Loden’s book was the next topic of conversation. Loden emphasizes the importance of applying the principles of change management when attempting to implement a diversity program in an organization. Implementation Principle #4 reads as follows: Change management principles can be the single most important tool in diversity implementation when artfully applied. Loden also says that implementing diversity requires not only training, but a systemic culture change.

There are very predictable patterns in terms of how a population will view any diversity initiative. Individuals typically respond with enthusiasm, skepticism, or hostility and they usually fall into one of five distinct groups: innovator, change agent, pragmatist, skeptic, or traditionalist. The response pattern varies depending on the amount of perceived risk felt by the
individual. Personality traits, ignorance of other cultures, and social conditioning play a significant part in determining a person’s level of perceived risk.

“In developing an implementation plan for valuing diversity, one must begin with a solid change management framework. The Diversity Adoption Curve is a sound framework for understanding how people react to and resist change.” In this model the five distinct subgroups—innovators, change agents, pragmatists, skeptics, and traditionalists—allow us to “tailor communications, education, and systems changes to better meet their needs…thus, increase the probability that valuing diversity will ultimately be adopted by every segment.” (p 45)

People tend to have a set number of variables they want answered when considering whether or not to embrace diversity in the workplace. They want to know:

a) how it will affect them personally
b) that it will not harm them
c) that it will lead to favorable results
d) how it will impact their work group
e) is there bottom-line evidence that it makes good financial sense
f) that the boss really supports the change

The next portion of the meeting focused on challenges, successes, and strategies both locally and internationally. One person mentioned a recent diversity issue involving two Nursing students whose religious observances require them to wear head coverings. A brief discussion included the fact that clinical institutions serve patients whose comfort is their priority; whereas our ultimate focus, as a community college, is the students we serve. It was pointed out that the clinical institutions which cooperatively provide training for our students have the right to implement dress codes.

Another person brought up an extremely important international issue about which we know very little: the differences between Shia and Sunni Muslims. This difference is an issue affecting approximately 1.3 billion individuals across the globe. In brief, the Shia consider Ali, the cousin of Muhammad, and his descendants as Muhammad’s only true successors; while the Sunni accept Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman and Ali as the four rightly guided caliph’s of Islam and Muhammad’s rightful successors. There are other important differences, but the divide itself began as a result of political strife rather than doctrinal issues. (Sources: Encarta, Wikipedia, and Adherents.com)

Along these lines, according to Loden, although valuing diversity is a simple concept to understand, it is not easily put into practice — lack of knowledge about other cultures and unconscious biases often interfere with implementation of this philosophy. (pp 44-45)

For our next meeting, the reading assignment is to read the remainder of chapter 5 (beginning with page 41) and all of chapter 6. The chair pointed out that chapter 6 gives a more detailed discussion of the five distinct groups that typify how people respond to any promising new idea… and the predictable pattern of adoption that will occur among employees. (pp 42-43) It is vital for the committee members to know not only their own placement within each of the five groups, but also the place of all individual employees of the college.
The small group project for the next meeting is as follows: each group member should review the criteria for the five distinct groups; decide which group he/she fits into; reach a consensus with his/her group; and be prepared to discuss the findings.

At our next meeting, the group will look at monthly activities for the first part of next year. The goal is to ensure that we choose activities that will raise awareness and thus promote valuing diversity keeping in mind the people we serve or have the potential to serve.

The next meeting is scheduled for Monday, November 27, 2006 at 1:30 p.m. in the library’s Multimedia Resource Center.
Our Commitment to Diversity

Our goal for diversity at JDCC is to provide an inclusive community of mutual trust, acceptance, and respect that reflects the individuals—employees, students, and visitors—who bring varied human characteristics, interests, and points of view. We commit to creating an environment where all people, regardless of differences can achieve their highest potential, whether through a quality educational experience, work experience, or other interaction, thus contributing to the overall success of the College. We strive to move beyond simple tolerance to embracing and celebrating the rich dimensions of diversity contained within each individual. We acknowledge that core differences—such as age, body size, color, ethnicity, gender, language, marital status, mental and physical abilities, political views or other ideologies, race, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, socio-economic status—can create hierarchies of privilege which we must avoid. We recognize that learning is enhanced by interaction with diverse individuals who bring multiple perspectives and a variety of approaches to the learning process.

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