

**Commission on Multicultural Understanding  
Executive Council Meeting Summary  
February 20, 2009 – Distinguished Alumni Room, IMU – 1:30-3:00pm**

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**Attendance:**

Chair: Pamela Freeman

Deputy Chair: Bill Shipton

Graduate Assistant: Jodi Benenson

General, At-Large, & Ex-Officio Members: Doug Bauder, Melanie Castillo-Cullather, David Hummons, Tom Lee (IUPD), Roberta Radovich

Committee Co-Conveners and Representatives:

Orientation and Welcome: Melanie Payne

Retreats and Recognition: Lillian Casillas and Barry Magee

Teachable Moments: Sharlene Toney and Rebecca Riall

Student Coalition: Not present

Faculty and Staff Policy Issues: Hilary Kahn

Training: Ashleigh Klingman

Student Policy Issues: Rachel Peterson and Jennifer Yu

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**I. Welcome**

- Pam welcomed everyone to the meeting, and all attendees went around and introduced themselves.

**II. Update on Co-Sponsored Events and Sponsorship Request**

**A. Campus PRIDE Film Festival**

- Barry discussed the two films COMU sponsored, which included: It's Still Elementary and XXY. The first film presented a story about the power to ignite positive social change through documentary film and grassroots organizing. The second film gave us an opportunity to talk about a topic we do not always talk about – intersex individuals in America – and brought in Bloomington community member Cindy Stone, who is a volunteer for ISNA (Intersex Society of North America.)
- Barry mentioned that everyone appreciates what PRIDE does on campus with the films, especially with the campus events. At these events, people are able to have a particular type of dialogue that does not occur during the actual film festival. This component of the festival speaks to very special needs that we have on campus.
- Barry mentioned that with COMU's sponsorship, PRIDE was also able to give out free passes to the festival to IU students in the audience.

**B. FOSTERing Action in Times of Challenge and Controversy**

- Because the format of the program changed, this event no longer needed COMU's sponsorship.
- The new format of the program was an open mic night, and students were invited to share poems, songs, and thoughts about Dr. King's work and how it influences their lives.

**C. MLK Civil Rights Immersion Trip to Haskell Indian Nations University**

- Barry and Lillian described the trip to Haskell Indian Nations University in Lawrence, Kansas. Barry noted that in the past, the trip focused on civil rights as being related to the African American struggle in the country. This trip was able to focus on a new cultural group.
- Barry mentioned that the trip had about 15 people who had gone on previous MLK Civil Rights Immersion trips, but there were about 25 people who had never been outside the state of Indiana. Clearly, this was a great opportunity for these students, as for \$25 they could do something very meaningful.

- Barry also mentioned that this trip requires everyone to go to all of the events, and then spend an hour or an hour-and-a-half reflecting on their experiences. He mentioned that before they went on the trip, many participants had a very stereotypical view of what Native Americans look like. However, when they arrived to the university the students were floored by the diversity of the students at Haskell.
- During the trip, the group also got to tour the Brown v. Board of Education National Historic site in Topeka, Kansas. The group also stopped at the Ritchie House, which was part of the Underground Railroad. Students were able to learn about the conflict surrounding segregation and the African American struggle for civil rights, because there was no mention of Native Americans at either of these locations. The students talked about how history is very compartmentalized; this concept was recognized by the students, and one particular student spoke up and admitted how much she really did not understand about oppression.
- Lillian mentioned how this trip was one of her favorites because she saw the students acknowledge how much they did not know about all forms of oppression, and they could all converse and learn together.
- Melanie C. noted that orientation may be able to take a part of this annual trip and advertise it at their events. There may also be people at the Alumni Association who could use this trip to promote new diversity initiatives.
- Pam said that it may be nice to follow-up with the participants and see how this trip has impacted them.

#### **D. MBLGTACC 2009**

- Doug spoke of the 1,500 students who were guests to Indiana University-Bloomington for the 17<sup>th</sup> annual MBLGTACC conference. The conference had over 100 volunteers and three keynote speakers: a transgendered professor from Indiana State University, an African American man from ESPN an out-gay man, and an out lesbian filmmaker from New York.
- Doug mentioned that students, including COMU representatives Jodi and Thea, took the role of playing host for other students very seriously.
- A noteworthy point of the weekend occurred when keynote speaker LZ Granderson was speaking extemporaneously. For instance, at one point he used the word "retarded." The students in the audience responded with "no" and he immediately apologized for using the word. At this moment, LZ acknowledged that he is not perfect and he appreciated the respectful response of the audience. Doug said this was a great teachable moment for students.

#### **E. Wesley Thomas Sponsorship Request**

- Rebecca spoke of the Wesley Thomas event taking place on March 30, which is being sponsored by the Native American Graduate Student Association and other offices.
- She mentioned that Wesley would speak about two topics in particular: the institutional discrimination of Native Americans, and indigenous ideas of gender. Everything for this event is open to the campus, and the overall cost of the program will be \$1,000. Rebecca noted that any amount would be appreciated.
- Melanie P. motioned to sponsor \$75. All were in favor. For this reason, \$75 will go towards the Wesley Thomas event on March 30. Rebecca will fill out the new sponsorship form online and get it to Jodi this week.

### **III. Committee Updates**

#### **A. Retreats and Recognition**

- Lillian spoke about the COMU retreat on February 6, and said that she wished there would have been more attendees, but based on the comments after the event she found that people really enjoyed Dr. Warner's speech.
- Lillian noted that hopefully this event coupled with the immersion trip will establish an ongoing relationship between Indiana University and Haskell. This event is only one part of an ongoing conversation in many different ways.

- Lillian also mentioned that the COMU Awards will be on April 6<sup>th</sup> in the Federal Room at the Indiana Memorial Union from 4:30-6:00pm. Nominations for the COMU Awards are due on March 12. Jodi and Barry worked together to make an online form for submissions.
- Bill will convene the selection committee on either the Monday or Tuesday during Spring Break (March 16 or 17).
- Lillian mentioned that we need to order a new plaque for the "Outstanding Program" award recipient, and figure out where to put the filled plaque.
- Melanie P. said that the original intent was to put it in a place where students pass, and we should consider putting the plaque somewhere in the IMU.
- Lillian said that we also need to talk about which gift to get Dean McKaig at the COMU Awards. Pam mentioned that we may be able to find a photo of him from the COMU retreat in 1984. Jodi will look through the old COMU files and try to find a photo.

## **B. Teachable Moments**

- Sharlene explained that the committee met a few weeks ago to talk about the op-ed anti-Zionist article in the IDS (Indiana Daily Student) from November 2008.
- A student involved in IUSA (Jesse Gross) envisioned a COMU-sponsored event involving a mediation session between different campus groups, but the committee was unsure whether this would be the best response.
- Sharlene sent an email to the two editors of the op-ed section of the IDS, and let them know the Teachable Moments committee is interested in writing a guest column related to diversity issues.
- Sharlene would like to have a program and send email invitations to several diverse student groups on campus to facilitate a conversation about labels that have affected them regarding race, ethnic, sexual orientation, and religion. Ideally, this event will get students talking about how the various labels impact them. Through this exchange, people will hopefully be able to better understand why labels are hurtful to others, and also let people think about the things they hear about themselves.
- Sharlene also mentioned the Honoring Diversity poster campaign, because the Order of the Arrow will be arriving at the end of July. Sharlene would like to hang up the posters we have left from the 2007 campaign.
- Melanie C. mentioned that Diversity Day on March 25<sup>th</sup> may be a good date for the "labels" program to occur. Sharlene will check in with the Diversity Day committee.

## **C. Student Policy Issues**

- Jen will be meeting with Professor Padriac Kenney of the Bloomington Faculty Council (BFC) Educational Policies Committee to discuss the policy concerning accommodations of students whose religious observations conflict with academic requirements.
- Pam mentioned that COMU and the incident teams were instrumental in getting the policy into the books based on expressed need and students not knowing how to go about it. She would personally like to see the policy strengthened, not weakened.
- Pam also noted that it is not the policy that needs to be looked at, but the enforcement of the policy.
- Pam would like the BFC to come up with a template/text so students understand this policy and then ask faculty to put the template/text into a syllabus.
- Bill noted that there are two problems with the current policy: first, if students do not get the form in after the first two weeks, they are out of luck, and second: many faculty members change their syllabi throughout the course of the semester.
- Bill also mentioned that there is nothing in policy whether or not the form can be submitted late, and it would be nice to have a clause about late submissions.
- Melanie P. said that we may need a new way of looking at the policy and making people aware. She mentioned that they do discuss this policy during orientation, but students usually are overwhelmed by the amount of information received during this time and then do not remember how to utilize the form. She suggested a link through the registrars office to get to the form, which is currently under the Academic Affairs section on the website.

#### **D. Faculty & Staff Policy Issues**

- Hilary mentioned that Roberta Radavich is working with her on the team of individuals working on the Benton Mural project.
- Hilary recently communicated with various faculty and chairs who teach in Woodburn Hall and are concerned with what we are doing. Yet, there are a lot of empty panels in the room so we may consider using these as an alternative plan. This project is on the agenda for the campus' space committee meeting, so we may be able to find out more about how to use these panels.
- Hilary and Natalie met with IU Creative Services, who are willing to help with a creation of a website or a video/PR piece that might be needed for the project.
- Roberta works with the Social Justice league, and the committee is trying to get them involved as a focus group.
- Hilary's students in the Human Rights in the Arts class have been assigned to write about freedom of speech, freedom of expression, political art at IU and the community, controversial art at U.S. and Foreign universities, and research meaning and symbolism of the Benton Murals and history at IU for the website.
- David and Hilary discussed that the purpose of this project is both reactionary and proactive – the primary purpose is to educate people about the mural.
- Roberta mentioned that Hilary is trying to resituate the idea that “art as art,” which brings this project back to the mission of the university as an educational space. No matter what, the art gets resituated as an art piece. You can talk about it from all forms of angles like the students are doing, and that's what's missing from the approaches that have been offered so far. The murals don't stand as artistic pieces of conversation, they are just trying to be explained away or the university is trying to explain itself. She noted that the art does not take center stage, and this is what we are trying to do with the Benton Mural project.
- Hilary added that we cannot displace the meaning of the murals, and this must all be done in an educational way.
- Hilary also noted that the idea of an ongoing PowerPoint in the display case or a website or a flat screen is still up for discussion.

#### **E. Training Committee**

- Ashleigh mentioned that she, Eric, and Rob would like to have an event that is modeled after the Unity Summit to work with student leaders from CASTL, but do not know if this event will happen this year. The purpose of this program would be to teach leaders how to teach about diversity.
- Ashleigh added that in the summer, Rob would like to have an event focusing around biracial themes.

#### **F. Orientation & Welcome**

- Melanie P. talked about using the COMU blog as place for students, staff, or any of us in COMU to talk about events that we put on. We want to provide a place for people to present their own perspectives, an impression, or a report about a COMU activity or event.
- Hilary said that it is not easy to get people to write on the blogs, because you need people to respond and moderate the discussion. However, this mechanism could be attractive to incoming students.
- Jennifer Yu will be writing about the PRIDE film festival and a friend of hers will be writing about the MLK Jr. Cultural Immersion trip to Haskell.

### **IV. Announcements and Discussion Items**

#### **A. Bloomington Multicultural Festival**

- Lillian mentioned that there have been mixed thoughts about the festival because the festival competes with other festivals in the fall. However, this event continues to be a phenomenal

partnership between the campus and community. So, if we do not have this event, what can we do to continue the partnership?

- Lillian will send out an email to the old BMF committee to schedule a time to convene and discuss what will happen to the BMF in the future.

#### **B. Campus Community Partnership Meeting, March 12**

- Pam mentioned that Provost Hanson and Mayor Kruzan will be speaking at this event, which will be taking place at Bloomington City Hall on March 12 from 3-5pm. The entire COMU Executive Council and group of Co-conveners will be invited to the event, and you should be receiving your E-vites next week.
- Melanie C. would like to bring a snapshot of the Cultural Lens program and show it during the event.
- David added that he was working with a group who continued meeting about helping local high school kids prepare for college.

#### **V. Reports from Cultural Centers and Offices**

- Hilary said that tomorrow, February 21, a program called “Expressions of Islam” will be happening from 2-5pm. This program has been well received by the community, as it won the Human Rights Award.
- David said that there is going to be a forum on the economy next Tuesday, February 24, at 7pm at City Hall. Three individuals with campus affiliations will be speaking at this event.
- Rebecca added that on March 8<sup>th</sup> there will be a Native American Film Festival at the Buskirk Chumley.
- Melanie C. added that next Wednesday, February 25, there will be a third showing of Cultural Lens. This will happen at 8pm. This episode's themes are activism, hope, and civic engagement. There are four segments, which include: an interview with Rob Stone who is an activist on health issues, a demonstration on a band called “The Ladyquakes” who make music for a cause, an interfaith service, a feature on local knitters who knit on MLK Jr. Day and donate, and a “cultural oops” in partnership with the Bloomington Playrights Project.

Meeting adjourned at 3:05pm.