

DATE: May 9, 2007

TO: Diversity Disappearing Task Force

FROM: Thomas L. Purce

SUBJECT: Response to The Final Report of the Diversity DTF

Thank you for your comprehensive report. Your charge was challenging. You were asked for a five-year plan to address three pressing challenges in our work on diversity and multiculturalism: a need to sustain our efforts, a need to improve the coordination and planning of these efforts, and a need to gain a broader, deeper view of how these efforts affect the college. You were asked for a plan that would prioritize specific goals and actions, propose a data collection framework, identify needed resources, and might include an implementation team. Your work in preparing this report represents a significant investment in Evergreen's future.

Since receiving your report, I have had an opportunity to read and carefully consider the full report, the community comments, and the Agenda Committee's response to the report. I have also talked with many people on campus, both about the DTF's recommendations and campus climate in general. I am grateful to the members of the DTF and to the many members of the campus community who demonstrated obvious interest in providing input.

The report makes clear the scale of the work that we are undertaking. The DTF calls for transformational change at Evergreen that will bring us closer to our vision of a college consistently engaged with issues of diversity, and with ongoing assessment measures to help keep us on course. Such change requires significant and sustained effort and considerable resources, not the least of which is the time and good will of many members of our community. We all recognize the multi-year time frame involved in such an effort.

I note that the importance of *accountability* is a theme running through many of the DTF's recommendations. The comments that the DTF collected from the community also highlight this theme. Sustaining our efforts is likely to require that we take steps to ensure that we are accountable for our work on diversity—as staff, students, faculty, and as a community. Accountability in organizations is often complex, especially in a community where shared governance and individual autonomy are highly valued. The conditions that produce accountability in our Evergreen community are transparency (so all of us can see, comment on and participate in the work), locatability (so those responsible for making and implementing decisions are known to all), and open communication (so systems of peer accountability can work). As we take steps to implement the DTF's recommendations, it will be important to keep these principles in mind.

Our task now is to take concrete steps so the next biennium will represent a significant step forward, bringing new resources and renewed energy to this work. This will require ongoing planning in anticipation of the following biennium as we carry out our five-year strategic plan.

Standing Committee and Data Collection

The DTF recommends the establishment of a standing committee to sustain our work in addressing diversity issues. It rightfully notes that intermittent, inconsistent engagement with these issues creates a great deal of frustration. I agree that a standing committee is an important component needed to sustain and coordinate our work.

As we form this committee, it is important that we establish a clear charge for the group's work. I will charge a committee before the end of the academic year. As we refine the scope of the committee's work, we will be mindful that the strength of Evergreen's diversity efforts has historically rested on decentralized, grass roots work as well as established programs designed to support our diversity efforts. Members of the committee will include people with expertise in diversity issues as well as those with administrative responsibility for carrying out major pieces of this work.

As noted by the DTF, assessment and research will be an important component of the committee's work. Among the first tasks that I will ask the standing committee to complete is the identification of a data collection framework. The committee will need to assess the extensive data already available – for example, wide-ranging data is already collected about students, but much less is available about faculty and staff. Working with the Institutional Research Office, the committee will develop a plan for data collection and reporting that we can use on an ongoing basis to measure progress and guide future work. We are providing additional resources to the IR Office in the coming academic year to help carry out this work, and I will appoint the Director of Institutional Research to be a member of this committee.

The standing committee will report to the president, and the charge will call on the committee to create an annual report on our progress. That report should include an analysis of the data collected, an assessment of the work we have done, and guidance about areas for focus in the following years. Through this kind of transparent, regular reporting and through the involvement of those with responsibility for acting on the data, we can ensure that we hold ourselves accountable for continued work on these strategic priorities.

The standing committee will also assist in providing information and advice, on Evergreen's behalf, to support the Higher Education Coordinating Board's diversity reporting and initiatives. My budget recommendation for 2007-2009 includes \$5,000 annually to elevate our involvement in diversity activities at the national level, both to disseminate our own successes and to learn from the work of others.

Leadership Accountability

An important part of accountability for this work comes through a process of transparent goal-setting and evaluation. The assessment of Affirmative Action goals has been an ongoing element in the evaluation of senior administrators. I support extending our goal-setting and evaluation process to include all of our strategic priorities, including our diversity goals. I will include these elements in my evaluation process with senior administrators and, through them, infuse this process institution-wide.

Academic Community for Olympia-based Students of Color

It is primarily the role of the faculty to recommend and craft the shape of the curriculum. We have an effective process to support faculty and students wishing to work in a learning community of shared scholarly interests, and I want to encourage the current faculty efforts to develop a proposal for an Olympia program focused on diversity issues. I share the DTF's view that a supportive academic environment is key to student success. At the same time, we know that educational gains are sometimes made when we are pushed out of our comfort zones. I trust that we will be mindful of both aspects of education. I am hopeful that assessment of this initiative will contribute to our understanding of what works.

Faculty Institutes

It is essential to Evergreen's educational success that faculty be well-prepared to facilitate seminars when difficult topics emerge, including around diversity issues. When we fail in this, we risk the health of the seminar for all students and the painful disengagement of students of color. The DTF has recommended that all faculty engage in regular reflection on their work in this area. The Evergreen culture of portfolio reviews argues against imposing an administrative mandate on the process. However, Academics will continue to sponsor summer institutes on the scholarship of teaching and learning, including institutes specifically designed to help faculty prepare for difficult topics in seminar. In addition, I am asking the Provost and Dean for Faculty Hiring and Development to plan an annual institute for new faculty on working with cultural diversity in academic programs and to articulate a clear expectation that new faculty participate in the workshop as part of their orientation before their first year of teaching. My budget recommendation includes \$8,000 annually to support this work.

Capacity Building and Community Engagement

The DTF rightfully noted the importance of continuing to cultivate intercultural knowledge and skills to help develop an inclusive community at Evergreen, and I support the DTF's recommendation for a series of regular lectures and dialogues. Because of the decentralized nature of our efforts, the community rarely feels the full impact of what we do. While a great many activities supporting diversity occur on our campus, I recognize the need for an institutionally supported, coordinated and well publicized program for the greatest impact on the college as a whole.

It should include a variety of offerings to help members of the learning community develop their awareness, skills, and intercultural competencies, to create culturally hospitable, equitable and competent learning and working environments across the

college. These offerings should be varied in focus, addressing issues of race, class, gender, religion, sexuality, disability, etc. And they should be varied in depth and duration, from brief orientation or awareness building sessions to deep, sustained competency development work.

Other entities have been consistent contributors to this effort over the years, and will continue to be vital participants. I am going to ask the director of S&A Productions, Evergreen Expressions, my Special Assistant for Diversity Affairs, a representative of the Longhouse, coordinator of Day of Absence/Day of Presence, a faculty member from Expressive Arts, a member of the Tacoma Program, and the Executive Director of Marketing, Communications and College Relations to come together to develop a strategy for coordinating our numerous activities, to encourage early planning, and to develop an annual calendar and an effective tool for communicating about these events. I propose \$5,000 annually for the Executive Director of Marketing, Communications and College Relations to assist this group in promoting these events.

Additionally, I support the recommendation of the President's Diversity Fund Review Committee and the Faculty Agenda Committee to provide continuing funding to sustain the Day of Absence/Day of Presence, and propose to allocate \$10,000 for this purpose.

I have implemented their recommendation to establish a new President's Diversity Fund advisory board, and I support their recommendation to double the fund's annual allocation of \$20,000 to \$40,000. Of that amount, \$10,000 would be provided for mini-grants to students and staff for specific diversity-related projects. This fund also supports our very successful Diversity Series. The spending priorities for the fund will rest with diversity fund advisory board.

Center for Community Matters

The recommendation regarding the establishment of a center affords us an opportunity to improve our capacity to address conflict. I accept the recommendation and see the following roles for the program:

To enhance the conflict resolution skills of the entire campus by providing ongoing skill development opportunities for faculty members, staff and students. A priority for training should be students and staff members who are likely to come in contact with conflict situations as first responders.

To serve as a visible referral source for individuals experiencing conflict, especially for those who are uncertain about where to proceed in addressing the conflicts they are experiencing. The office should be able to provide assistance by coaching/advising individuals so they can better address conflicts, referring individuals to appropriate offices responsible for addressing conflicts, or offering conflict management processes (mediation, facilitated conversations) as an option.

I am asking the Vice President for Student Affairs to oversee the establishment of this new initiative, to which I propose to allocate \$10,000 annually to support this effort. The

Vice President will convene the individuals who forwarded these recommendations and other interested parties to finalize the plans for this program.

I want to thank the Diversity DTF, The President's Diversity Fund Review Committee, and all of the members of the community – faculty, students, and staff – who have shown their earnest commitment to this effort. I have appreciated the public conversations on Red Square, the private conversations in my office, and e-mails too numerous to mention. Emily Lardner, of our Washington Center, wrote, “The deep purpose of education, in its best sense, is to support people in developing the capacity to live well together in the world. The ultimate measure of any educational reform effort will be the material changes we see in our communities. Such a transformation may not happen in our lifetimes, but the value of remembering the larger purpose for any reform effort is that like a constellation, also beyond reach, it helps us navigate a true course.”* I believe that the fine work of this DTF has charted a stronger, more committed course for our diversity efforts here at The Evergreen State College.

*Lardner, E., with others. 2005. *Diversity, Educational Equity, and Learning Communities*. Learning Communities and Educational Reform, Summer. Olympia WA.