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## **YEAR END REPORT OF THE EDUCATIONAL EQUITY TASK FORCE FOR THE 2005-06 ACADEMIC YEAR**

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In Academic Year 2005-2006, President Haynes released a Strategic Planning Initiative (SPI) for California State University, San Marcos (CSUSM). The SPI has five strategic priorities: academic excellence, educational equity, campus climate, community partnerships and student life. The first two priorities, academic excellence and educational equity received special consideration during the academic year in accord with a new philosophy regarding the strategic planning process on campus that sought to tie each strategic priority directly to the budget process.

In fall, 2005 the Educational Equity Task Force was appointed. That Task Force is composed of 8 faculty, administrators, staff and the president of Associated Students Incorporated. In total, there are three faculty members representing the three colleges on campus, the Dean of Extended Studies, Dean of Students, one senior level staff member and two front-line staff members. The Task Force members are diverse and representative of the racial and ethnic groups in the United States and one member is an international scholar. Additionally, the Task Force has an advisory body consisting of diverse faculty and staff.

### **TASK FORCE CHARGE**

The Educational Equity Task Force's mission is to lead the campus effort to achieve educational equity. The Task Force's charge is in line with the philosophy of the CSU's "Cornerstones Report." Although dated, its charge is still relevant with respect to educational equity (and will likely remain relevant as the new "Beyond Cornerstones" report is drafted with an eye toward "Access to Excellence"). The original report focuses on two major goals.

*First, "to aid the campus in developing a committed effort to diversity and multiculturalism in its programs, services, systems, structures, administrative practices, policies, publications, decision making processes, curriculum, recruitment and retention efforts."*

*Second, "to contribute to the development of a campus environment that values and makes central, the contributions of all races, ethnic heritages, physical and mental abilities, genders, sexual orientations, ages, religious backgrounds, and socioeconomic class backgrounds."*

The Task Force's efforts during the spring 2006 semester attempted to remain cognizant of the philosophy of CSU's "Cornerstones Report" and the challenge of implementing its philosophy in CSUSM's service region given the quickly changing demographics of the North County of San Diego, Southwest Riverside County, and Southern Orange County. In its first round of work, the Task Force emphasized data gathering on the broad range of issues and concerns that shape the understanding of

“educational equity” on the campus. In particular, the Task Force attempted to gauge the climate of ethnic and racial diversity on the campus. To accomplish this, the Task Force interviewed key individuals on campus. In part, the Task Force wanted to begin tackling, in accord with the 2000 WASC report, the question of: How far has the campus moved toward achieving its foundational vision of multiculturalism?

## **THE EDUCATIONAL EQUITY CONTEXT AT CSUSM**

Achieving Educational Equity on public universities is a complex and often contested process. This especially may be the case for relatively new and developing public universities. New institutions have to establish their identities, determine their constituents, and formalize their associated practices. This means that their identity is dynamic, and subject to a variety of pressures that require them to develop in a context of often competing interests. More importantly, a new institution develops and changes as it matures and suffers its “growing pangs” as new practices and identities undergo revision and establishment. This makes a new public university a dynamic place where previous decisions are often forgotten, transformed or retained. Without revision to its identity, it is possible for the growing university to lose previous definitions of what its niche is as well as the vision that it has of itself as it continually decides where it is going and how it is to get there. The Task Force finds that the effort to develop and maintain educational equity at California State University San Marcos exemplifies much of this process. The Task Force arrives at this conclusion through the examination of public documents that announce its identity (e.g. General Catalog), and in reviews of the campus practices (e.g. WASC reports). A cursory review of these documents shows transitional points with respect to the vision of educational equity as CSUSM’s changing identity becomes aligned with the practices of a campus moving from a small startup to a comprehensive, medium university. This story is told below.

Multiculturalism and diversity were central and integral to the founding mission of California State University, San Marcos. The opening paragraph of the founding mission statement unequivocally stated that the university “offers excellence in undergraduate and graduate education to a diverse citizenry in an increasingly interdependent world.” In a lengthy elicitation, the statement recognized the complexities of the modern world, and the realities of multicultural differences that were quickly being recognized as a part of everyday life for students, staff and faculty. The statement saw the university as providing educational strategies that could teach students how to navigate this world. In short, the statement viewed diversity and multiculturalism as central element in academically preparing future leaders in university’s service region, California, and the world. To drive this point home, the 1994-95 Academic catalog prominently included a section subtitled, “*Achieving Excellence Through Diversity.*” The section began with the following paragraph:

*CSU San Marcos is an academic community committed to excellence in discovery, teaching and learning, and service. Our University community reflects the shared belief that individual and collective excellence can be achieved only in an environment where human diversity is valued. Therefore, the University’s highest obligation is to pursue excellence through diversity (page 17, Academic Catalog, 1994-95).*

In the first review of the campus since its accreditation, the WASC team observed that the university appeared to have veered from its emphasis on diversity and multiculturalism and made, as a recommendation, that the campus “continue to attend to campus climate and to develop additional strategies to move the campus toward becoming the multicultural community envisioned in the (earlier) Mission Statement.” Despite WASC’s recommendation, by 2000, the previously existing Office of Institutional Diversity and Equal Opportunity was dismantled. Nonetheless, the campus vision still sought to “celebrate and capitalize on its diversity to form a learning community.” It is in this spirit that the Task Force began its work of realizing this vision of CSUSM.

## **COMPLETED ACTIVITIES**

The Task Force members were appointed in December 2005 and seated, the work began in January 2006. During the Spring 2006 semester the Task Force met on a biweekly basis. The primary effort centered on gaining an understanding of the broad range of issues that constitutes the backdrop for the current state of campus educational equity. In addition, on a very short timeline, the Task Force responded to request for internal campus support, and developed a mechanism to disseminate its efforts.

### **• *Data Gathering: Invited Guests***

The members of the Educational Equity Task Force modeled inclusiveness not only of people, but of ideas and competing positions as well. Toward that end, the Task Force conducted “open-door” meetings and made standing invitations available to interested people on campus. Moreover, the Task Force invited members of the campus community to give feedback on their experiences equity and diversity issues on campus. As part of this process, the Task Force was fortunate to have Associate Professor Robert Yamashita (Liberal Studies) moved from the Task Force’s advisory group to being a major Task Force member. Professor Yamashita was member of the support team for University of California’s System-wide Task Force of Black Student Eligibility and a member of the research group that wrote the *Diversity Report* for the University of California at Berkeley. As such, the Task Force felt that his presence and counsel were needed on the Task Force proper. We are happy that he was willing to accept the challenge and we welcomed him aboard as an active member. The Task Force also hopes to continue to integrate other members of the advisory group in the future.

Invited guests have included: Ms. Bonnie Biggs, CSUSM Professor Emeritus and Tribal Communities Liaison; Ms. Carol Bonomo, Legislative Affairs analyst for CSUSM; Ms. Deborah Coronado, Associate Director of Human Resources and Equal Opportunity; Dr. Margaret Crowdes, Affiliate Faculty, Department of Sociology; Dr. Sharon Elise, Representative of the Institute for Social Justice and Equity; Ms. Karen Francisco-Butler, Representative of the African American Faculty and Staff Association; Dr. Carmen Nava, Director of the Faculty Center; Ms. Mary Jo Poole, Affiliate Faculty,

Department of Sociology; Ms. Tracey Richardson, President of the African American Faculty and Staff Association; and, Dr. Mary Elizabeth Stivers, Associate Vice President for Academic Resources. The Task Force Task Force benefited from the perspectives of each of our guests.

**Ms. Biggs** brought the “Tukwut” issue to the Task Force. She provided a history replete with supporting documents and an institutional perspective on the issue from the points of view of the Native people affected by what appears to have been a university snub of an important gift. The Task Force thought it shortsighted to see this issue as a “mascot issue” deciding instead that it was a gift of a spiritual nature and the university might ask again if Native people would wish to give it again in their manner not that of the university. The Educational Equity Task Force recommends that Ms. Biggs further discuss this idea with the Native American community and bring back concrete ideas on how this campus might do this.

**Ms. Richardson**, on behalf of the African American Faculty and Staff Association, brought the concerns of Affiliate Black faculty to the attention of the Task Force. The Task Force felt that Affiliate faculty could often feel isolated and need some pipeline to express their frustrations and gain the knowledge needed for successful navigation of the CSUSM environment.

**Ms. Francisco-Butler**, on behalf of the African American Faculty and Staff Association, shared concerns with the perceptions of fairness of front-line managerial staff in the treatment of people of color in getting promotions and recognition. She expressed that the process should be more transparent and that reasons given for personnel actions especially when they involve people of varying seniority and overall experience.

**Ms. Coronado** has been to a few of our meetings and has been invaluable as a resource with respect to staff diversity. She has shared with the Task Force some of the challenges to diversity efforts that Human Resources faces and directed us to resources that can help the Task Force understand the Affirmative Action plans that the campus has developed.

**Dr. Elise** later brought forth the initiatives of the beginning Institute for Social Justice and Equity that helped the Educational Equity Task Force to begin to think critically with respect to its proposed equity activities. Dr. Nava furthered this discussion by urging a careful consideration of pedagogy and classroom delivery while reminding the Task Force of the resources in the Faculty Center.

**Dr. Crowdes** shared the way in which she is able to employ pedagogical strategies that promote multicultural sharing and learning in an engaged, rigorous academic environment. She volunteered to share her techniques with interested faculty and staff as well as her time and effort to help others accomplish her classroom success.

**Dr. Elise and Anthony Blackshear**, a sociology graduate student, gave the Task Force a first-hand understanding of “spoken word” and its transformative powers in animating discourses of diversity. Moreover, Dr. Elise also spoke of her experiences with the use of ethno-autobiography as a teaching tool for sensitive issues around diversity and identity.

Fringe Benefits, Theatre for Social Justice Institutes, are a performance group that brings its message of diversity to campuses without charge as long as time permits and they can be convinced of the sincerity of the community has contacted **Ms. Poole**. Additionally, she expressed her commitment to take the lead on this project and serve as point for it. The Task Force wishes to support her in that effort.

**Ms. Bonomo** shared with the Task Force the legislative process and the ins and outs of lobbying on the behalf of the university. She also mentioned that we may be able to lobby on-line in the short-term and stressed the importance of coordination with her office and others on campus.

The above are just synopses of our invited guests and as such do not fully reflect the fullness and scope of their thought-provoking contributions to the Educational Equity Task Force’s ongoing involvement with the issues that they raised. We, however, count ourselves fortunate to have had such passionate advocates come to our meetings and freely share their talents and expertise with us.

- ***Funding Requests***

In March of 2006, the Educational Equity Task Force submitted two funding proposals through the university’s budgetary process:

**Proposal One** asked for funds to establish an administrative position for an Equity and Diversity Officer who would report directly to the President of the University with respect to salient issues of diversity and equity as they arose on campus. The Task Force felt that this position would benefit the campus by having a recognizable voice for equity issues on campus that faculty, staff and students could identify. The Task Force further felt that this was especially timely given the changing demographics and a growing demand for a culturally aware and sophisticated workforce equipped with both technical and social skills to increase productivity and, in keeping with the vision of the California State University System’s as expressed through its “Cornerstones” report, maintain the state at the forefront of innovation.

**Proposal Two** centered on a group of activities. The Educational Equity Task Force chose them because of its belief that they represented ready opportunities for ready implementation that would gain public attention and establish early momentum for other equity and diversity activities on campus. There were four general sets of activities identified at a one time budgetary cost of \$39,500. Those activities were: 1)

delivery of diversity and equity training workshops; 2) development of an educational equity educational community film and performance series; 3) collaboration with the College of Education's Hansen symposium; and, 4) training of multicultural and academic peer tutors. With respect to these equity efforts the Educational Equity Task Force's role was to provide initial impetus by making such activities immediately visible and encouraging others to build on them, with the hope that other segments of the campus community would become involved in their continuance.

- ***Dissemination: Website***

One activity that the Educational Equity Task Force was able to complete was a web page that detailed its charge, preliminary recommendations and a beginning database for diversity and equity related resources. Cathy Nguyen, a health educator on campus and a representative from Asian and Pacific Islander Faculty and Staff Association, deserves much of the credit for the web design and resource placement for the site. The Educational Equity Task Force is especially proud of its ease of use and her hard work in constructing it. Garrett Collins from Academic Technology Services also made extraordinary contribution to the Educational Equity Task Force by making such space available for its use.

The web page has links both to national and campus resources that the Task Force hopes will facilitate discussions of educational equity on campus and beyond. Additionally, it has the expansive charge of the Task Force as it received feedback from the campus community and helped it to think critically about its proposed activities. Moreover, it is a blueprint of where the Educational Equity Task Force will be moving in the future with regard to its activities.

- ***Change in Task Force Structure: Appointment of Co-chairs***

The Educational Equity Task Force, per a request from the chairperson, has changed its structure to include two co-chairs. Lourdes Shahamiri now shares the chair position with Garry Rolison. Ms. Shahamiri has an incredible knowledge of past diversity efforts on campus as well as a strong understanding of the administrative structure of the campus as high-ranking staff. Chair Rolison and the Task Force found her contributions invaluable, insightful and well grounded and are pleased that she has agreed to serve as co-chairperson.

## **UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGE OF EDUCATIONAL EQUITY**

There are three kinds of reporting captured by the data collection efforts: reports on the "current state" of equity on the campus, ideas to support the goal of educational equity, and institutional avenues to develop equity initiatives. The first two sets of interviews were self-generating, where the requests to reports came out of "hall

conversations” and inquiries into the work of the Education Equity Task Force. The Task Force drove the final set of interviews in the effort to begin to map out pathways for implementing education equity initiatives on the campus.

The presentations from long-time members of the campus community universally made one clear point to the Task Force: in both explicit and implicit terms, they acknowledged a clear shift in their campus climate and they saw the Task Force as an opportunity to recover what was lost. The Task Force takes the message to heart because it is easy to forget that the ideas of multiculturalism, diversity, and equity are neither static nor neutral. Importantly, the Task Force recognizes that the contest over the meaning and significance of these terms becomes contentious when the problem is seen as occurring in a zero-sum environment.

The old maxim “when something is everybody’s responsibility, it is nobody’s responsibility” became reality. The authors of *White Washing Race: The Myth of a Color-Blind Society* (Berkeley, 2003) highlight what happens when, as a society, we no longer need to concern ourselves with racism, racial discrimination (and the like) because “those” issues were solved by the Civil Rights Movement. This claim asserts that the achievement of “equity” means those who need to point to racial inequality really reflect a cultural defect of people who are unwilling or not capable of taking advantage of the opportunities offered them. Playing the “Race Card” simply blames others, ignores personal shortcomings, and avoids taking personal responsibility. This construction creates a forced silence that prevents real discussion about perceived problems because those who raise the flag become subject to the accusation that they raised it because they lack specific ability, not because there is a real problem.

This silencing of diversity and discussion of equity issues creates real problems. Silence means that critical questions go unasked, and the community as a whole, can never engage or think of new ideas and alternatives opportunities. Imposed silence forces dissent and critical thinking into hidden recesses, and creates a level of distrust. The university is not immune to political trends, fads and ideology among its faculty, staff and students. In the absence of informed debate, active support for diverse opinions, and promulgation of alternative perspectives, it is “business as usual.” In the case of diversity, when this attitude becomes prominent on a university campus, three consequences can occur that transform the university from a site of open inquiry to an arena of closed political opinion and can quickly eviscerate a vision of “academic excellence through diversity.” First, silence at a public university works to prevent it from serving the interests of all communities. Second, silence works to prevent students from receiving the best education in citizenry and academics that they will need to prepare them to function in an increasingly diverse, multicultural society where difference is increasingly the norm. Third, silence works to prevent the university from reaping the benefits that the best active learning community founded on ideals of inquiry and democracy can give.

The Task Force recognizes that a university needs to be a rich complex environment where differing perspectives, experiences, and insight can be offered and discussed. Such an environment remains unrealized at California State University San Marcos. We further take as our charge to serve as an active catalyst for the realization

of the vibrant and socially responsible university that can serve to incorporate difference in the building of a stellar academic and social environment that will come to characterize the CSUSM experience. We feel that the following recommendations reflect our commitment to realizing this ideal.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Through general discussions, presentations, and confidential discussions, the Task Force has **one consensus** recommendation: **the campus needs a senior administrative position on diversity and equity**. This recommendation clearly stands in front of all others. The Task force believes that this one recommendation is foundational to facilitating all other issues of campus equity and diversity. The Task force also suggests a number of recommendations to realize educational equity on campus. Many of these recommendations overlap and are connected to other campus strategic initiatives.

- ***Create a senior administrative position on diversity and equity.***

This position needs to be:

- a direct reporting line to the President;
- an active part of the President's decision-making process; and
- a clear permanent institutional commitment with an office, funding, and staff.

For many people of color on campus, creating a campus leadership position will show that we value diversity. However, the Task Force sees greater advantages to the position – especially if there is more to the office than simply being an equity compliance officer. An administrative position on diversity and equity centralizes responsibility for educational equity. Currently, the effort is diffuse, with uneven results – we have some clear success in some units, and obvious failures in others. There are enough anecdotal reports that, sometimes, the different interests and functions of units create situations where equity is actively (while unintentionally) undermined. Centralization, at this stage of campus development, also suggests that the campus can become more systematic efficient in distributing resources to achieve educational equity. Finally, the office can also be a mechanism that to illustrate the university's commitment to recruit and retain diverse faculty, staff, and students. This can facilitate the work of developing and implementing new campus niches, such as becoming a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI).

- ***Activities in Support of Educational Equity***

The task force received a group of recommendation designed to alter the visibility and discussion of education equity on the campus. The recommendations are really directed at the public space on the campus, and emphasize the idea of reviving a campus conversation on diversity and equity. For the most part, most of the

recommendations constitute “low-hanging” fruit, easily achievable through modest support:

- Develop an advocacy process for equity issues
- Develop funding for campus initiatives supporting “forums of difference”
- Develop a “critical mass” recruitment strategy for students, faculty and staff and location of substantial recruitment monies to Human Resources, Faculty Affairs and student outreach and admissions
- Staff and Faculty Recruitment through a Target of Opportunity strategy
- Develop safe places and cultural programming
- Use the resident expertise in the College of Education to develop practicable strategies of academic enhancement for all incoming undergraduate students
- ***Academic Excellence through Diversity***

The Task Force recognized the early campus call for achieving academic excellence through diversity and its strong link to diversity. Therefore, we identified a number of proposals that focused on building centers of excellence in various diversity domains.

- The establishment of a Seminar and/or Summer Resident Program for faculty and staff that focuses on developing a multicultural curriculum
- Explore alternative methods to attract and build “learning communities” for similarly situated students
- Develop formal academic majors, programs, and departments such as those in Ethnic Studies
- ***Campus Climate***

The Task Force recommends:

- A campus climate survey to gather baseline data on equity efforts
- Return to mandatory cultural diversity courses as a graduation requirement
- University recognition and revisiting of the “Tukwut” as a core campus value

- Tukwut Unity Week—Develop an International Day, Week or Month of activities
- Make sure that the campus is physically accessible for all, from the parking lots to the buildings
- Follow new American with Disability Act’s guidelines with respect to web sites
- Explore the feasibility of “voice recognition software” and Braille tutors.

As co-chairs of the Education Equity Task Force, we want to give our heartfelt appreciation to the individual members of the Task Force. Anne René Elsbree note-taker and scribe. We also thank Cathy Nguyen for taking the lead on the web design and Jan Jackson for finding space in Extended Studies for us to meet and for supplying bottled water during the meetings. We are appreciative to all members for their extraordinary commitment and time to our biweekly meetings.

We end with the dual recommendations that two current attempts to bring immediate attention to diversity and equity issues, the Institute for Social Justice and Equity and an Ethnic Studies major, receive full campus support.