

Commission for Blacks
Wednesday, December 3, 2014
12:00 pm – 1:00 pm

Minutes

Call Meeting to Order

[Lilia Neville calls the meeting to order at 12:05]

Attendees

(1) Lilia Neville, (2) Syed Kamal, (3) Marshall Steward, (4) Kaylyn Harris, (5) Joanne Hall (6) Tara Davis, (7) Alecia Davis, (8) Susan Benner, (9) Mary Lee Stewart, (10) Jennifer Dobbins (representing LGBT & CFW), (11) Marcia Johnson Lane, (12) Robert Nobles (13) Eric Stokes, (14) Margaret Davis, (15) Yolanda Kirkpatrick, (16) Latasia Woods, (17) Cynthia Manning

Approval of Minutes

[Susan Benner makes a motion to approve the minutes of November-2014 meeting. Cynthia Manning seconds the motion. The commission unanimously approves the minutes.]

Update from Committees

a. *Faculty/Staff/Student committee*

Lilia Neville: This committee is tasked with creating the survey for the status of African Americans on campus. We are working with VC Hall's office to setup a meeting about the survey. Hopefully we will meet sometimes 2nd or 3rd week in December.

b. *Bylaws committee*

Robert Nobles: We have circulated the bylaws to the committee members and we will have a committee meeting next week. One of the committee members is from out of town. So we will get him involved in the meeting via teleconference. We will formulate a plan of action for the committee in that meeting and will provide update to the commission in next commission meeting.

c. *Outreach/PR committee*

Lilia Neville: Tara Davis is not here yet to provide update on the Outreach/PR Committee. I am expecting that her update will go over the feedback from the past events. Overall, past events that the commission organized or co-sponsored are the Trailblazer series speaking event, the retention workshop and the Ferguson report back event. So the committee was fairly active organizing and attending several events during the past month. Does any member from the Outreach/PR committee want to provide any anecdotal update?

Alecia Davis: The retention event was very well attended. We received a lot of feedback. But I guess you did not get time to reconcile the feedback yet.

Lilia Neville: I was able to digitize some of the feedback surveys from the retention event during the Thanksgiving break. I have brought the evaluation summary of responses to distribute in the meeting today. It was a one page evaluation and the first question was about the overall feedback on the small group facilitation and report back sessions. The attendants were asked to provide rating on a 5-point scale and there was also room for written feedback. A brief on the written responses are included on the summary document handout. The quantitative responses were generally good and I am quite pleased with it. Except for two, all other responses were on mid-point to positive side of the scale. The other two ratings were mildly good. Those two persons who

gave mildly good rating, they thought it was too long. However these two responses were different from general sentiments. When we are dealing with responses from a large group of people, it is expected to have some exceptions and we will focus on the general feedback that we received. I heard from lot of people and they were thankful to have an event with many like-minded people together. Generally attendants wanted a longer event. One person even wanted one Saturday for each topic instead of half-day for the whole event. I thought we maintained a good balance on the length of the event and it is always good to end with people wanting a little more. This helps with engaging people for future events.

Eric Stokes: I was there at the retention workshop. Some of the discussion was sort of repetitive. I was not able to attend the whole event as I had to leave for another engagement. My question is what will be done with the feedback received. I am asking this because a lot of the proposed solution involved partners outside the university such as the city officials, Mayor's office etc.

Lilia Neville: We will digitize the responses. We will then formalize the report in spring. The way I imagine the next thing to happen is that the formalized feedback will go to specific partners of the solution. Mayor Madeline Rogero was out of town and thus was not able to attend the workshop. However, she was aware of the event and our initiative. She was very interested to know the output/feedback that comes out of the workshop. She also verbally expressed that she is interested in taking action based on the solution proposed in the workshop.

Eric Stokes: Staff members from the Mayor's office was present the event.

Lilia Neville: Yes, also the Leadership Knoxville Facilitator and the lead facilitator of our event Avice Reid reports directly to the Mayor. So she communicated updates to the Mayor throughout the planning process. As for other civic partners such as churches, there were some social engagement suggestions for those partners. I had some talks with some of those groups. But I have less than firm believe that they will take definitive action based on the proposed solutions. VC Chancellor Hall is completely committed to review the proposed solution and take action. We will not only distribute the reports to the people who attended the event, we will also send it to other corporate and community leaders that we think as target partners for the solution.

One critique about the event was that the report back session was sort of stiff and redundant. A suggestion that I heard a lot is that the report back session would have been much more engaging if the participants were asked to report on a particular session immediately after the session. Facilitators were little disappointed that the report back session was not as engaging as they hoped for.

Maria Johnson Lane: I did not feel that way. Facilitators did not really push this issue. They could have been more proactive to make people more engaged into the reporting session.

Alecia Davis: Moreover, people did not follow rules. They were asked not to repeat the issues that were covered already. However, people reported every little things even if someone else covered the specific issue already. So people get long winded. It was towards the end of the day and people already reached sort of a saturation point. One gentleman brought his one-year old kid and they kid was so quiet and did not become disruptive at all. I was thinking if a kid is not feeling bored, we must be doing something good and enjoyable!! The kid became little restless towards they end and I suppose that was the point when people just wanted it to be over. This may be the reason for not getting as much engagement as expected in the report back session.

Lilia Neville: One more critique was that there was lot of leaders and people wanted to know who was there. It could have been a better opportunity for community engagement and networking if everyone had an opportunity to introduce themselves. This point never even crossed my mind and I did not think it would have feasible to have 80 people introduce themselves.

Alecia Davis: I thought changing of sessions/tables would have been a chance to network.

Maria Johnson Lane: Again many people did not follow rules and change tables.

Lilia Neville: When people registered, we collected information about their background and used the information to diversify the seating arrangement. Our goal was to ensure that we achieve diversity in each of the small groups so that we have diversified perspective in the discussions. However, I heard from someone that they had an uncomfortable group and there was sort of small group tension that limited the dialogue.

In summary, I think it was a successful event and in most part, people were pleased with their experience. I have digitized the feedback and Syed will digitize the solutions. I am looking forward to it to get a bigger picture.

Eric Stokes: It is good to see that we are taking some steps with the feedback received.

Unfinished Business/Past Events

a. Ida B. & Beyond Initiative Funding vote

Lilia Neville: In our last meeting, Dr. Roessner came to give presentation on their funding request for the Ida B. and beyond event. We had a motion in that meeting to postpone the decision until we get a little more information on the CFB's own overall budget. We were waiting for a grant application that we submitted for CFB from the Office of Research. Two days after the meeting, we received the news that we did in fact receive the grant. So we are now less strapped for funding CFB's own projects and have some funds to allocate to others. We have about \$500 for supporting other programs. Dr. Rossener requested for \$500. We discussed the possibility of granting \$250 instead of the requested \$500 amount and keeping the remaining \$250 available for other funding requests that we may receive in spring semester. So we need to decide whether to grant the full requested amount or grant partially \$250.

Robert Nobles: Are we the only source of funding for them?

Lilia Neville: No, they have asked and received funding from other sources including a Ready for the World grant. When they asked funding from smaller entities, they asked for \$500. I noticed in the funding sheet that some other department granted \$250. So if we grant \$250, we will not be the only party to grant partial funding. I personally think that thing this is a good initiative and we should support it. My personal opinion is to grant \$250 instead of exhausting all our funding on one initiative.

Susan Benner: They have not exhausted all other possible funding sources and so they can manage the remaining \$250 from other sources.

[Robert Nobles makes a motion to grant \$250 funding for Ida B. event and Marshall Stewart seconds the motion. The commission unanimously votes to grant \$250 funding for Ida B. event.]

b. SGA Proposal for gender neutral, family-style bathroom vote

Lilia Neville: My apologies that I have distributed an older version of the SGA bill on gender neutral, family style restroom issue. Jennifer Dobbins later sent us the correct bill that was passed in the SGA and we have emailed you this updated bill for review. When we discussed the bill in our previous meeting, we as a group had some concerns about the feasibility of requiring restroom renovation in existing buildings and not having any specific funding measure outlined in the bill. Also the bill did not set any specific timeline for ensuring compliance with the proposal. The corrected bill now specifies the timeline and funding measures. It also proposes for gender neutral family style restrooms in new constructions and major renovations only. Please review the corrected

proposal and express your opinion whether we can be supportive of the SGA proposal. We are voting on this because SGA specifically asked for endorsement from the commission on their bill.

Robert Nobles: if voted in favor of this, who will have the responsibility of taking action?

Jennifer Dobbins: When we discussed this, I also had the wrong version of the bill. This new bill specifies for the proposed restrooms in new constructions and major renovations. We had the LGBT commission meeting last Monday. VC Hall and David Irvin attended the meeting. David is the Associate vice chancellor for facilities services. David informed us that the construction of gender neutral family style restroom are already included in their 2011 facilities plan. Any new construction approved since then has provision for gender neutral family style restrooms. As it stands, the arrangement of the proposed restrooms are taking place in all new constructions.

Tara Davis: Why is SGA proposing something that is already in the facilities plan?

Jennifer Dobbins: I am not completely sure, but I think SGA is proposing it to show student support.

Eric Stokes: I see in the bill that they are proposing to build the gender neutral restrooms in Hodges Library and Student Union. So it does require renovating existing buildings.

Jennifer Dobbins: They already have several gender neutral restrooms in Hodges. The new UC construction will have gender neutral restrooms.

Marshall Stewart: I think it will be valuable to see which buildings does not have the gender neutral restrooms and which specific building this SGA bill targeting for construction of such restrooms. It will then help us evaluate whether to show our support for this bill.

Jennifer Dobbins: Hearing from David was great because many of us at the LGBT commission was not aware that this facilities plan was in place since 2011. One issue that David pointed out is that many older buildings are not in compliance with newer building codes and if they try to make smaller restroom renovations, the fire marshal will ask for bringing the whole building in compliance with the building code. So this will turn smaller renovations projects into a multi-million dollar project. To get around that they are looking for neighborhood of buildings that have most issues with their buildings and identify the specific buildings that will be most cost-efficient to renovate. This way they will gradually move forward to all older buildings to bring them in compliance with the code.

Lilia Neville: So does the SGA bill aligns with this plan of action?

Jennifer Dobbins: Yes, SGA proposing to make gender neutral restrooms in new constructions and major renovations. So it does align with the facilities services plan.

Syed Kamal: So is the SGA bill now closer or similar to the proposal that LGBT commission passed on the gender neutral restroom issue?

Jennifer Dobbins: It is essentially in line with the LGBT Commission's proposal.

Syed Kamal: So since we already supported the LGBT Commission's proposal, I think there should not be any problem with endorsing a bill that is similar to the bill that we have already supported.

Lilia Neville: Yes, we already supported the proposal from LGBT Commission on this issue last semester. The SGA bill is very similar to the bill that we have already supported. So it will make sense to support this bill as well.

[Tara Davis makes a motion to endorse the SGA bill on Gender neutral family style restrooms. Kaylyn Harris seconds the motion. The commission unanimously endorses the SGA proposal]

c. Ferguson Report Back feedback

Lilia Neville: On November 18th Commission for Blacks along with Multicultural Student life, Multicultural Mentoring Program, Africana Studies and Office of Vice Chancellor for Diversity co-sponsored a report back session in alumni memorial building for a group of student, alumnus and community members who travelled to Ferguson to participate in the protest earlier on in Fall semester. There was a panel discussion at the event and it was moderated by Anton Reece, the Director of Student Success Center and Dr. Josh Inwood, a professor in Geography. There was very large turnout. People were even standing in the hallway just to hear the dialogue. The event got local media attention. Since there was many co-sponsoring organization involved, we decided that we will not conduct evaluation survey on the event. So I do not have any formal participant feedback to report. But in general people were very satisfied with the event and they wanted more events on this issue. However, there were other grass root student organizations that organized events on this issue and provided the opportunity for others to get involved and express themselves. I know there was a march in market square and a student gathering in multicultural student life building.

Alecia Davis: Right after the verdict, students gathered at BCC to protest and had a discussion event. Anne Jefferson trying to continue the conversation. I am not sure whether she brought it to VC Hall's attention yet, but I think she is planning to continue with the initiative to have further dialogue on this issue. This event was covered at 11PM news.

Lilia Neville: In the report back session, it was great to see lot of young people interested in being politically active.

Alecia Davis: It was standing room only event. Still I was pleased to see such a big turnout. The subject was difficult for some attendants, but they handled it well.

Latasia Woods: It was a very eye opening experience for some students too. One of our students attendant the event for extra credit, but she was really excited about the experience and wanted to share so much about the event. She was excited to get to know about the current state of the affair and the event changed her viewpoint.

Lilia Neville: I know some students attended because the honors program requires them to attend certain number of events. It would be great if student come on their own, but encouraging them to attend for extra credit also goes a long way by changing their perspective on issues like this.

Robert Nobles: Is this more about being part of the national effort or is there any local issues involved as well?

Alecia Davis: Anne Jefferson trying to continue the issue because, I think, she believes there are some local issues too. However, we did not talk about this. She is trying to push this issue so that people understand someone should not be dehumanized because of race.

Cynthia Manning: There are some local issues. There have been incident similar to this in the past in Knoxville.

Robert Nobles: I wanted to know is there any local issue that we need to engage with local authorities. Or it is just about aligning with national issue. From CFB's stand point, do we believe that there are local issues that we need to deal with local authorities?

Lilia Neville: If we see anything with UTPD, it would be certainly a commission issue. We have several

commissioners who are involved with communitywide initiatives. But as an advisory group to the chancellor, the commission's priorities should be campus-oriented.

Robert Nobles: Should we invite the UTPD to come to meeting and ask whether measure taken to make sure something will not happen?

Lilia Neville: I do not see anything wrong with having an initial meeting. But if we are to follow that path, then we have to make sure that we follow up.

Eric Stokes: I like the idea of asking question. I too thought about the goal of protests events: whether the goal of the event is simply to bring awareness on this issue or do we want to bring some change in our local community as well. As a commission, we need to be supportive of the student actions and demonstrations, but we need to be selective about how we support.

Robert Nobles: That we need to make sure we understand what we are supporting.

Eric Stokes: There are certainly some local issues that were not nationally broadcasted. But we need to make sure what sort of change that we want: whether be it community awareness program or be police training on dealing with these issues. Any community wide change is beyond the scope of the commission.

Alecia Davis: It was more for awareness. It was about what happened and make people aware. It was more for a national support.

Latasia Woods: Students will not see what happen in other part of the city. UT is their city.

Tara Davis: I think it was more of an educational issue. My daughter is here at UT and she does not know a lot about the violence. It was educational experience for her. She came home thanksgiving and talked about the report back event and discussion happened in residence halls since then. It was interesting to see her mental growth already based on the discussions. So even if we do not get any tangible or deliverable out of the protests, but it is still a very big education experience for the students on the world perspective and social issues.

Robert Nobles: My personal concern would be to make sure that they are safe and they are following necessary protocol in the protest events. There was some incident during the event. It is great that they are learning from the events. But it is also important to make sure they do not end up with a police record for violating protocols during the protests.

Kaylyn Harris: I was not able to attend the event, but what I heard about the event was all positive. Some people had arguments with the drivers. But those were isolated events. The president of NAACP informed me that even the KPD were very helpful. I feel was the whole student participation was conversational. It was never about being angry. It was everything about educational. Ferguson report back was positive in this sense. As commission, our main goals is to focus on UT and this is our community. But there should be some program to educate students about local perspective. We have shown that we can protest peacefully.

Latasia Woods: I just want to add that we need to make sure the protests are peaceful and appropriate channels are made aware of the events. Our appropriate channel is the Dean of Students. She is all about making sure they student are safe. So she need to be notified of such initiatives.

Susan Benner: The event slogan "Without justice there can be no peace" can be a worthwhile tool for thematic workshops and discussion events. It can be interpreted as threat. It can also be an expression of democracy. We need to hang on to this phrase and make a localized event for proper interpretation of it. I don't know how the event was organized and who were communicated. But from my limited view of the media coverage, I did not see any faces that are not of color out on the streets. It would have been powerful if diverse people was there. I

wonder whether they entire campus was given the opportunity to participate and invited. If not, it was a lost opportunity.

Tara Davis: There were flyers for the event. But I do not know how or where they were distributed. There were reporters at the event, and they were asked not to report the event. I think that Students were not involved in violence.

d. Co-Chair Voting Results

Lilia Neville: We just have few minutes left and I want to cover few more topics. First, Dr. Robert Nobles is our newly elected co-chair. He was officially elected in November and appointed by Vice Chancellor Hall in November. His official term will start from our January meeting. His first order of business was the decision that we will arrange lunch for our commissioners at our monthly meetings from now on.

Upcoming Events

Lilia Neville: We have Trailblazer Series with Dr. Mark Dean on February 26th and the Black Issues Conference on February 7th. We will talk more about these events in our January meeting.

New Business

Lilia Neville: The online submission form for the Black History Month Calendar is now ready. The address is tiny.utk.edu/blackhistorycal. If you know of any campus or community event during the black history month, we would like to publicize it. Please go ahead and make a submission.

Announcements

Latasia Woods: My last day here at UT is Friday. I will be leaving UT and will be joining Emory. I would like to thank everyone for the opportunity to serve in the commission. It was truly a privilege.

Lilia Neville: We appreciate your service and contribution in the commission.

Adjourn

[Lilia Neville adjourns the meeting at 1:01PM]