THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
Committee for a Multicultural University

Minutes of November 21, 1996

Present:  R. Megginson, A. Nadasen, C. Smith (Chair), J. Su, P. Wilhelm (Secretary), Y. Wulff

Absent:  D. Deskins (SACUA Liaison), Y. Kuniyuki, S. Pandit, W. Yang, J. Salazar

Items Distributed:

1.  Agenda
2.  Copy of Report 836 of the Office of the Registrar on Minority Enrollment -- Fall 1996

C. Smith called the meeting to order at 5:07 pm

Approval of Agenda.  There were no changes or additions to the agenda

Announcements.
1.  C. Smith announced that he was still awaiting a reply from the Chair of the Task Force to Review DPSS regarding the memorandum sent to them from CMU last week.

2.  J. Su notified the committee that he had been appointed to the Council for a Multicultural University and that he will be the liaison to that committee from CMU.

Approval of Minutes of November 7, 1996.  The minutes were approved without revision.

Discussion of Group 2 suggestions on definition of diversity.  Y. Wulff and J. Su presented the information and ideas they had come up with on a definition of diversity.  Wulff presented various definitions of diversity from several sources: the Michigan Mandate, Draft 5.3; the University of Michigan Library's Diversity Statement; and diversity statements from the University of Maryland and the University of Connecticut.  Wulff observed that the question before the CMU is whether, after working for a few years on the issue, the committee wants to deal with a narrower or broader definition of diversity.

J. Su presented his ideas beginning with the definition of diversity according to the Oxford English Dictionary.  He observed that none of the historic definitions deal with race or anything we might think of when using the term diversity.  Su stressed three points in his reflection on the definition of diversity:
1. In his first point Su posed the question: What is the distinction between diversity and affirmative action? He noted that in light of D. Deskins statement that the approved diversity statement of last year had been lowered to an affirmative action statement. Su posed another related question: Why do we want diversity? Su offered two options:
   a. Do we want diversity because we really want affirmative action and want a way to justify it?
   b. Do we want diversity because diversity itself has merit?

2. Su's second point was that if the CMU chooses option b, then we need to answer: What, in fact, is this merit? Su suggested that one approach to answer this question is a "capitalistic" one -- that more opinions produces a better product. Su countered that diversity is not obviously better than homogeneity to many people.

3. Su's third point was a challenge to the committee to think about what diversity stands for that affirmative action does not.

Y. Wulff quoted from the definition of diversity from the foreword of the Michigan Mandate, Draft 5.3. The committee then discussed the practical merits of diversity in light of a diverse world. Su asserted that a problem with the Mandate's definition is that it seems to stress a need to understand or interact with strange people, but it does not stress a need to cultivate diversity within each individual. Wulff noted that the relevant question is whether educators are working with students to tell them what to think, or are educators trying to give students a broad range of experiences and the tools to develop their own conclusions. Wulff asserted that the University environment should adopt the latter approach. The question arose as to whether the University orientation program has been engaging in thought police activity with regard to diversity. One member noted that changes were being made to the program.

Su raised a few more points in the discussion. He asserted, first, that the University should not have a diverse population just because the world is diverse. Secondly, Su suggested that the University will not necessarily be better off just by having a diverse population.

The discussion turned to the definition of affirmative action. Wulff observed that the term is very carefully defined in the law, and that the CMU could look at that. Su suggested that affirmative action invariably includes an idea of correcting past wrongs, while diversity does not necessarily include that idea.

Y. Wulff moved the discussion to the various diversity statements she had found. She noted that the University of Maryland statement contains a unique distinction between primary dimensions and secondary dimensions. According to that statement, primary dimensions are those things which cannot be changed, including sexual orientation, while secondary dimensions include those things which can be changed. Wulff suggested that this distinction is
a helpful one to make. C. Smith observed that universities do discriminate against secondary dimensions without fear of law. Smith suggested that there are two types of diversity statements. The first type states: We do not discriminate against ... The second type states: We are open to people of all ...

Discussion turned again to the Mandates foreword and definition of diversity. Wulff observed that the Mandate shifts focus from individuals to the larger question of economic benefit as a society. Smith observed that the Mandates foreword orients the reader toward numbers, not benefit. Smith also noted that there was a goal to make the University society look like the society outside of the University at the time.

A. Nadasen stressed that society is changing in the United States. He observed that the issue of minority integration into US society was growing because of the fact that the White population will not be able to deal with minorities. Smith asked what the effect would be if the US chose to make itself a White-dominated society, like South Africa. Nadasen stressed that that would be morally wrong. Smith agreed. Su suggested that the only way for a cause to secure acceptance is either by a moral appeal or by offering benefits. Nadasen stressed that in this case the survival of the US is the benefit. Wulff suggested that within fifty years more than half of the US population will be non-white.

Nadasen added that with regard to affirmative action, the idea is not so much to level the playing field as to get rid of attitudes of discrimination. He suggested that discrimination can exist in the midst of talk of diversity. Smith stressed the need to put something of this meeting's discussion in writing as a definition of diversity. He also stressed the need for a constructive process in developing a definition.

Fall Enrollment Statistics. Smith directed the committee to the distributed Report 836 from the Office of the Registrar on minority enrollment, dated Fall 1996. Smith stressed that these numbers could not be studied outside the context of other years, and that the year that one starts looking at these numbers makes a difference. Smith asked Wilhelm to obtain these same statistics back to 1976. He also asked Wilhelm to obtain an Ann Arbor News article by Stephen Cain on enrollment statistics. Nadasen stressed the importance of looking at graduation rates in addition to these figures. Smith noted that J. Matlock would be useful to the committee in obtaining that information.

Old Business. The committee took up no old business.

New Business. The committee took up no new business.

The next meeting was set for December 12, 1996 in 6065 Fleming at 5:00pm. The meeting was adjourned at 6:14pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Paul A. Wilhelm
Secretary to the Committee