

April 2010

What I Learned from My Year as Program Director for the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Danny Alexander

Johnson County Community College, dalexand@jccc.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarspace.jccc.edu/mvoc>

Recommended Citation

Alexander, Danny (2010) "What I Learned from My Year as Program Director for the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion," *Many Voices - One Community*: Vol. 1: Iss. 3, Article 4.

Available at: <http://scholarspace.jccc.edu/mvoc/vol1/iss3/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Office for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at ScholarSpace @ JCCC. It has been accepted for inclusion in Many Voices - One Community by an authorized administrator of ScholarSpace @ JCCC. For more information, please contact bbaile14@jccc.edu.

What I Learned from My Year as Program Director for the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

by Danny Alexander, professor of English, Diversity Fellow



I won't lie. I learned some negative truths. I learned that three-fourths of our programming events could be focused on diversity within the white, straight population, and many people on campus would still view our office as being overly focused on ethnicity and sexuality. I also learned that people thought we were spending

great amounts of money (we weren't) simply because of the amount of activity we took part in, very often promoting other groups, and again three-fourths of the time with donated labor. I learned way too many people do not realize what serious problems our campus has in terms of respect for the needs of diverse communities on the campus and in the community.

But the most important thing I've learned is that those numbers don't represent a significant majority. In general, I've found that, in my sometimes feeble attempts to lend support in our many areas of interest, I have met a great many more people eager and willing to help. I won't offer a comprehensive list here for fear of leaving someone out, but I've been very grateful for the tireless efforts to help address our diversity needs coming from part-time and full-time folks in a range of areas, including Staff Development, Counseling,

Admissions, Dining Services, Housekeeping, Stagecraft, Computing and Media Services.

And, of course, there have been the students. We have been so lucky to have students drop by our office simply to offer words of encouragement, but some have helped us in chauffeuring guests to and from hotels and the airport, while others have helped us in editing our materials and planning and facilitating our events. With events such as Earth Day and Multicultural Night, I've had the pleasure of sitting in the passenger seat while our students took us where they knew we needed to go.

And almost half of our events were planned and run by faculty, both full and part time, who took the initiative to give presentations, facilitate discussions and/or serve on panels. We have an incredible amount of talent on this campus, and with a couple of exceptions, I think the very best things I did this year involved helping to showcase that talent. Other people have facilitated work like this long before I came along, but with my mission, it only underscored the diversity (as Dr. Leiker puts it elsewhere in this journal) that lives next door.

Our biggest challenge, in many ways, was to avoid competing with ourselves as an institution. For that reason, at the end of the first year, we had a meeting with almost all of the





various programmers who host diversity events on this campus – everyone from the Campus Activities Board to International Education to Arts Education and Staff Development – and we talked about how we might strategically plan our calendars so that we are not in conflict with one another.

So far, our planning for 2009-2010 has been based on a SharePoint calendar that attempts to bring together all diversity programming on campus, and our mission will be to cross-promote all such efforts whenever possible.

Though I will no longer be in this position as program director, as an ODEI Fellow I will continue to advocate my vision that we work strategically to remove the fetters to diversity on this campus. Key to that effort is that we work in a collaborative endeavor with every corner of the campus, the Johnson County community, and the greater metropolitan area to raise awareness about our varied struggles to address the needs that bind our diverse communities together.

One of the highlights of my spring semester was a speech I initially dreaded, a talk I gave to the Leawood Chamber of Commerce. My fears turned out to be groundless. In a time of economic upheaval, the chamber recognized that change was inevitable and that embracing the growing diversity of the Johnson County population was crucial to much more than our spiritual well-being – it was key to our community's ongoing viability. They were hungry for me to share our experiences at JCCC. I look forward to the day when that hunger is more pervasive right here in our own campus community. After all, I learned nothing more clearly this year than how hobbled I am by what I don't know. I suspect I'm not alone.

