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Student Leadership Conference Report 2010

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Dear President Dooley, Provost DeHayes and Vice President Dougan:

The participants of the Student Leadership Conference would like to extend our sincerest thanks to you and your staff for providing us the opportunity to take part in a historic event in the distinguished history of our University. The Student Leadership Conference held on February 5th and 6th 2010 was in response to the series of hate crimes on campus. The goal of the Conference was to gather a diverse group of students who are involved in the campus community to a) identify the problems that the University faces with regard to multiculturalism and inclusion and b) to develop actions, goals and recommendations for those problems as identified by the students of the University of Rhode Island. We are truly grateful for your vision and appreciate your ability to see past short term goals and objectives and acknowledge long term goals.

We feel that the university is trending downward in the fight against hate and discrimination. The effort of the students attending was fueled by hard work, determination, and an investment in working toward positive social change at the University. The faculty, staff, and administrators who provided support for the students were dedicated representatives of diversity efforts on campus. During our conference, we were able to develop an identity for the group of students participating. We were able to come up with the organizational name "I AM U-URI Unity in Difference". We believe this name accurately represents sentiments and encompasses the feeling of unity and dedication that we felt once the conference had been completed. We have all taken a vow to uphold and continue the progress that was made at Alton Jones here on campus, and with your continued support we plan to create some tangible outcome.

Currently at this University, students from underrepresented groups suffer daily as a result of the ignorance of their fellow campus community members. Their experiences are real and should not go unaddressed. We must erase the ever-present sense of apathy for others and come to the aid of our fellow community members. We share with you a dedication to graduating well-rounded educated students. The University should aim to produce graduates who will enter into the world with a comprehensive sense of what it means to be fully human, and the rights and responsibilities that humanity includes. As a community, students at URI should better understand injustice and its source so that they may become more involved in the effort to stop it. URI students can and will be productive global citizens if the University sets the standards for inclusion and social justice. URI students, faculty, staff, and administrators can join us as allies of all people, rallying to stop oppression and inequity. As a result, our entire URI community can acquire a sense of fellowship, cultural intelligence, and interest in the greater world. This effort must start now, here within their university. We ask that you work with us to create positive change at the University of Rhode Island.

Sincerely,

Student Leadership Conference Attendees
I AM U-URI Unity in Difference

We as student leaders who represent the University of Rhode Island community present to you this call to action:

Campus Climate

Issues

The current climate and culture here at URI has generated a history of hate crimes; this notion is supported by the perceptions and attitudes of students, faculty, staff and administrators. Students currently enrolled at the university often find themselves at a disadvantage, losing themselves and their identities. Our students continuously faced with ignorance from various facets of the university. It is evident that there is a lack of awareness with regard to multiculturalism and issues of diversity at URI, consequently hindering the progression of social change. If social change is not mandated at this university retention and attrition rates will decrease significantly.

- LGBT Students
    - These students are harassed by a majority of the larger campus community
    - These students homes have been vandalized and the response from upper administration has been minimal
    - The LGBT center is now housed in Adams Hall, which was initially devised as a temporary solution five years ago. As research indicates this community has expanded and the temporary solution is not viable or just at this time
    - Some faculty, staff, and administrators have further perpetuated ignorance inside and outside of the classroom in an extremely overt manner
    - Inappropriate and offensive slurs are directed towards students that are currently residing in Adams Hall, making this current location an immediate target for hate crimes to occur and jeopardizing the health and safety of the GLBT student population on the URI campus
    - Without support, the development of a healthy identity is challenging and academic performance is often compromised
- Students with Disabilities
    - URI is not equipped with the necessary staff and accommodations at this time to meet the unique and varied needs of these students
    - Entering and leaving most building poses as a significant issue for some students with disabilities
    - Currently, URI is struggling with creating a campus that is welcoming and supportive. This problem persists in programming and services that will facilitate choice, independence, and social participation, or adequate supports to promote academic success
- Students of Color
    - These students are faced by discrimination on a daily basis on this campus
    - Stereotypes of this specific group are often perpetuated by faculty, staff, students and administrators on our campus that are clearly unaware and ignorant of the strides that have been made within this community
    - Patterns of unhealthy race-based attitudes and behaviors are found in various facets of the university; students that are a part of the Talent

Development Program find themselves encountering these issues on a daily basis. Further, students that are not a part of this program tend to find a home within this group due to the lack of inclusion and awareness in various facets of the university

- Academia and Student Affairs
  - Currently the academic curriculum is not interdisciplinary, inclusive and/or concerned about educating our future graduates about cultural awareness
  - Certain courses such as URI 101, COM 100, and several other general education requirements are again not reflective of a university that is "thinking big." Such courses lack dialogue, diversity, equity and inclusion nor do they reflect the vision and mission of the university which directly impacts the culture of our institution
  - Currently, URI is lacking in creating conditions necessary for all campus community members to feel welcomed, supported, included, and valued by the university and each other
  - Currently the Greek systems are not implementing diversity/inclusion in their activities to educate the larger campus community and this again reflects the lack of awareness in their recruitment processes
  - Diversity is lacking immensely and it is not practical to celebrate it in a week at URI (i.e., Diversity Week)
  - URI lacks a unifying culture and stories or traditions that can be shared by community members to encourage dialogue and transformative communication among students
  - Lack of training among student staff, faculty, staff, and administration is a crucial issue, which is a threat to the greater campus community and diversity
  - Students in certain respective majors and disciplines are currently held to different standards with regards to general education requirements and do not have an opportunity to learn about issues of diversity and inclusion
  - While the orientation program is sufficient in getting the job done by informing students about the values, mission, academic and social future of this university, it lacks in collectively and accurately depicting how we hold our students accountable and further the sort of students this university values and needs

Immediate Action

We strongly recommend a Vice President of Diversity position be created to serve as a central, one stop resource for students, faculty, staff, and administrators to seek out when they have issues related to diversity, inclusion or social injustice at URI. Importantly, **the Vice President of Diversity shall have the same status in the leadership hierarchy as the other Vice Presidents of the university.** This individual should be capable of understanding and addressing issues of hate crimes, ignorance and work towards creating a campus climate that is inclusive, as described in the vision of the Provost. We understand that this would affect the organizational structure of the university; such change is necessary and an essential component of creating an inclusive

climate. Please refer to the end of the document for a description that details the need to act immediately and institute this position of the Vice President of Diversity in order to create social change at the University of Rhode Island.

Lack of knowledge about issues pertaining to students on campus is one of the biggest challenges we face. We cannot make change if we do not understand, know or acknowledge that change needs to be made. Therefore, one immediate solution that we see bearing positive results is using campus resources to advertise and inform students about the various hate crimes, instances of discrimination, access to resources, events open to all people, and resolutions of problems on campus.

For instance, if our campus Judicial System published the outcomes of cases where hate crimes were committed on campus without names of suspects, victims and guilty parties, our campus community members might be more likely to take interest in the issues on campus. This may also give students a heightened sense security.

Short Term Goals

- Create courses that are reflective of the university's vision regarding diversity initiatives
- A GLBT-Center
- Continuous dialogue in and outside of the classroom for students, faculty, staff and administrators
- More effective training process for students, faculty, staff, and administrators
- University slogan "Think Big. We do." have a sub-quote stating how URI is founded upon inclusion, diversity, and equality. (If not, how do we expect our students to "think big" ?)
- Multicultural events be held on the quad during September, October, and April and be funded by the university. These events should include those organized by students as well as commercial events
- Students, faculty, and staff should be encouraged to participate in a march on campus under the theme "I Care" in regards to students caring for one another as a community, this could be led by the President, Provost or Vice President for Student Affairs
- The first video found on the URI homepage website titled "Small beautiful place. Really big thinking"). Include a picture of the whole campus with people walking around as an image of diversity instead of the image of two African American girls at a football game when "diversity" is mentioned in the video (more specifically a picture of the Stop The Hate Protest could be used). We wish for this video to be changed so that students do not think that diversity is a quick snapshot of African American students, but rather everyone's differences collectively harmonizing. We also wish to enhance the image of the university by showing people that the school has a more comprehensive perspective of diversity.

Long Term Goals

- A more accessible campus for students with disabilities
- Reorganizing and revamping the current general education requirements to ensure that all students are introduced to cultural awareness. These courses should also serve as forums where dialogue and experiences can be shared and discussed encouraging student to challenge difference between students in order to gain different perspectives. These courses should include but should not be limited to lessons about the use offensive and inappropriate words. The course shall be combined with the concept of a program all students must go through called "People for People," which will encourage peers to step up and speak out against offensive actions as well as be focused on the concept that all oppression and social injustice is an issue for everyone; not just an issue for the oppressed. It will emphasize the ideal that everyone must help each other, no matter the different backgrounds, to make the university, nation and world more productive and founded on equality.
- Gender neutral bathrooms need to exist in every building on campus to ensure that the message is clear that this university values diversity regardless of sex, gender, race or sexual orientation
- Residence life staff should be required to hold programs about diversity/inclusion multiple times during a semester (especially because most of the hate crimes we have come to know have occurred in the halls)

Housing and Residential Life

Issues

- The expense of on-campus housing is prohibitive to many URI students. Economic diversity within residence halls is impeded by the expense of living on campus. A number of LGBT students are estranged from their parents and no longer receive support; as a result they shoulder the burden of the cost of living. Similarly students from households with limited budgets are often unable to afford housing. While payment plans are an option, they are not feasible for most students with significant financial constraints
- In-hall staff, specifically Residential Assistants whom are often experienced as unsupportive when implementing departmental procedures for room changes. RA serve as "gatekeepers" for room request changes and request tangible proof of or justification for residents' desire to change room. The expectation that LGBT students, students of color, and students from other marginalized groups quantify their experiences of hostility, bigotry, or general lack of acceptance is unjust
- Students have felt that the in-hall staff members with whom they most closely interact, namely Residential Assistants are under educated about underrepresented populations and their role in making residence halls affirming for all students
- There is a general need to revitalize the campus community's efforts to address issues of multiculturalism, inclusion, and diversity. The office of Housing and Residential Life is in a unique position to facilitate student growth and leadership. Currently there are a number of living learning communities that cater to the needs of students based on academic interests however there is no similar

program to address the needs of student whose primary interests (both within and outside of the academic arena) is social justice

Short Term Goals

- It is recommended that HRL's policy on room transfers be altered to allow students who feel unsafe or marginalized in their assigned rooms to switch rooms easily. If students from underrepresented groups are feeling marginalized in their room it should not be their job to educate either their roommates or their RAs, rather it is the job of the Department to assist them in changing to a more supportive living situation. In-hall and Assignment Office staff should not serve as gatekeepers rather they should facilitate smooth transition for students
- It is recommended that the LGBT Center and other campus organizations that serve the needs of underrepresented groups on campus be included in the process of Residential Assistant diversity training
- It is also recommended that diversity training for Residential Assistants emphasize current diversity related issues that the campus community faces
- It is recommended that HRL develop a programming model, which includes and emphasizes diversity
- It is recommended that HRL work to hire in-hall staff that reflects the diversity of the campus community in all aspects including (and not limited to) physical ability, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, gender, race, and ethnicity

Long Term Goals

- It is recommended that HRL work to develop a more universally feasible payment plan that allows students to pay throughout the academic and summer months (rather than requiring that the account be paid off prior to the semesters start)
- Finally, it is recommended that HRL develop a social justice living learning community. Students who are currently involved in campus organizations that foster and affirm specific groups and encourage the education of the larger campus community should be afforded the option of participating in a residential community that is catered to affirming connections between groups and has programming that centers around issues related to diversity and participation in a global community
  - o This community should be housed within one of the typical on-campus housing facilities so that the program is physically included in campus life
  - o Residents should apply to the LLC program to ensure community diversity and commitment to the goals of the program
  - o The members of the building community should include students who participate in campus programs and organizations for marginalized and underrepresented groups such as the LGBT Center, GLBT-out URI, the Talent Development Program, Pink Women, the Gay Straight Alliance, ASA, BOND, BAS, CVSA, and others

Faculty and Staff Training

Issues

- Students have experienced insensitivity from Faculty and Staff
    - Insensitivity is experienced by students directly in the form of derogatory comments from Faculty and Staff.
    - Insensitivity has also been experienced when a Faculty/Staff member condones derogatory comments or actions that occur in their presence.
    - Students view Faculty, Staff, and administrators as role models and mentors and the insensitivity demonstrated on campus influences their values, thoughts, and behaviors.
- Faculty members do not necessarily address issues of diversity and equity in the classroom and when addressed, it may be addressed ineffectively.
    - Faculty do not always have the adequate training or resources to address issues of diversity in classroom
- A crucial issue facing our campus is the recruitment and retention of faculty from underrepresented groups
    - All students deserve to have mentors and role models who have a shared identity and experience with them
    - Lack of diverse faculty impacts campus climate, students' education, and their qualitative experiences

Short-Term Goals

- It is recommended that faculty can create an inclusive space in the classroom by having a disclaimer on syllabi (i.e., "come to me if I say something insensitive")
- It is recommended that student evaluations of teaching at the semester should incorporate diversity related questions, such as the following:
    - Were diversity related topics covered in class?
    - Was the classroom an inclusive environment where the diverse viewpoints and backgrounds of an individual were respected?
    - Did the professor intervene if derogatory language or an incidence of bias occurred in the classroom?
- It is recommended that the university revise New Faculty Guide offered to all faculty at orientation
    - Expand the diversity section, specifically details about its significance both inside and outside the classroom
    - In areas where resource centers are mentioned, include the GLBT center and broader range of contacts regarding multicultural affairs
    - Work with students, faculty, and staff who are already active in diversity initiatives on campus in revising this crucial manual that sets the tone of URI standard's for faculty
    - Ensure that this information is communicated to new faculty members by their respective departments
- It is recommended that the university develop a similar diversity section as part of the orientation for new staff and new administrators

- It is recommended that the university develop a task force or identify an existing structure where faculty, staff, and administrators can discuss issues pertinent to faculty/staff diversity training on campus, while collaborating with students

Long-Term Goals

- It is recommended that strong commitment needs to be demonstrated at all levels of the hiring process in order to recruit and retain of faculty with diverse backgrounds
- It is recommended that Faculty/staff training should be ongoing and required and should include the following components:
  - Diversity to be viewed as a value
  - The validation of diverse perspectives
  - Material that includes case studies, videos, and other interactive training that demonstrates the qualitative experience of being oppressed
- It is recommended that an anonymous and effective response system to report bias incidences with faculty/staff should be developed
  - Have this information also available on syllabi
  - Have policies in place to resolve grading conflicts
- It is recommended that the university develop a Faculty support system to assist them in teaching diversity topics and addressing multicultural sensitivity in the classroom
- It is recommended that the university develop an assessment system to continual evaluate the effectiveness of diversity training for both faculty/staff/administrators
- It is recommended that the university develop an assessment system to continual evaluate diversity initiatives within the classroom

Student Leaders and Student Groups
Issues

- Our hope is to develop a University community that works as a cohesive unit to address any issues that it faces. This community should support all of its members. Members of the URI community should share the goal of working toward positive change
- As students of the University of Rhode Island we have often felt a lack of support for the voicing of student opinions. We appreciate the opportunity to be heard through this document and hope that the Equity Council Student Leadership Conference is the first of many forums for student voices
- There is a lack of general sense of belonging to a community at the University of Rhode Island. The URI community needs to develop traditions and a distinct culture which helps University all students to feel included
- Advertisement, attendance, and support of sporting events on campus is inequitable; while our male sports teams are fully supported female athletic events are frequently less well advertised and attended
- Currently less than thirty percent of the student body votes for the elected members of the Student Senate. A large number of students are unaware of when

elections are held, who the candidates are, what seats on the senate are open, and there is generally a great deal of confusion regarding the processes of the Senate and the Senate's involvement in student organizations. The general student population should be informed about the benefits of having a Student Senate and the role that the student senate plays in campus life

Short Term Goals

- We as students of the URI community, recommend that steps be taken to create a more accessible campus for our physically disadvantage brothers, and sisters who struggle with basic everyday, needs which many students take for granted
    - The University needs more support to help students of varying physical ability
    - The University needs to take steps toward constructing a more accessible campus, so that all students have physical access to all that the University has to offer
- It is recommended that the University's website be edited to more accurately reflect student organizations, activities, and events The Page should have a list of all the organizations created by students. Mission statement, lists of organization goals and information about what the organizations offer should be accessible via a link
- It is recommended that Homecoming serve as an event to unify and reinvigorate the campus community. Homecoming should be reformed and improved; entertainment, games, activities, and amicable competition should be the focus of the event
    - Homecoming should be moved to the quad and it should include more community building events such as a bonfire, dances with themes, games, rallies on the quad, etc. Such events would help to boost the pride of the teams and supporting fans
    - The Homecoming budget should be made public to the University's students and students should be included in the planning process
- We recommend a reform of the Student Senate structure
    - Training for students in leadership position on the Senate should be mandatory. Specifically Senate members should be trained on meeting facilitation, budgeting issues, and general leadership skills
    - To help inform the student population about the functioning and processes of the Student Senate, Senate members should attend URI 101 courses to talk about getting involved in the Student Senate, and how the Senate serves the URI community

Academics and Curriculum
Issues

Our group has come to believe that the current condition of academic instruction and curricular vision for the students here at The University of Rhode Island could be enhanced. We believe that these specific areas are essential to the very essence of what it

is to become educated at a post-secondary institution, and could be better leveraged by utilizing some of the feedback and solutions included in the following documentation

Immediate Action

- It is recommended that the training of all faculty, staff and student leaders is a high priority issue for our group. By training all of these groups- at times training them together- will develop synergy at all levels of our University and begin to show the communication relationships at URI that are so needed. Cohesion among these groups should be the goal of the University and training that creates higher levels of understanding is a solution that we feel could be enacted right away with some of the faculty here at URI as well as outside parties
- It is recommended that the university revise/reframe and restructure URI 101 to incorporate both didactic and experiential components of diversity

Short Term Goals

- We believe that the language we use for our issues, in turn, begin to define them. Because of this, we feel that it is necessary to take a closer look at how we define "diversity" and "inclusion" for our University and all of its community members. In order to make manifest all the things that are included in our "Think Big…" attitude, we believe that understanding people who do not fit traditional and cliché categorizations is something that should be of high priority to URI. To complete this vision, we feel that a re-definition of diversity to include cultural intelligence and competence should be included in URI materials such as the handbook
- To further our previous goal, we believe that an introduction of a diversity component to URI 101 would provide immediate results in our efforts to develop more well-rounded students. Ideally, a course dedicated to diversity and cultural sensitivity would be best, however using URI 101 as a platform to reach our ultimate goals is a short-term goal worth exploring

Long Term Goals

- We believe that a capstone project on diversity is a viable option that will allow all students to come into intimate contact with human difference and afford them the opportunity to dissect issues of dominance, power, status, hegemony and discrimination. It will also allow students to complete a rigorous academic career that will truly challenge them to broaden their understanding of human existence
- Faculty training that is more robust and creative is a long-term goal that can yield results immediately! We feel that any training focused on ultimately having the best, most understanding, culturally and socially- sensitive faculty possible will begin to take effect right away. This will allow the University to assess its progress on an annual or regular basis so as to ensure that we are always moving faculty forward

- Preparation of students is essential for those embarking on an academic path here at URI. In order for students to achieve this goal, we feel that its important for each student to have a strong foundation of knowledge regarding cultural diversity. Competence in this area is just as much part of education as other dedicated areas of instruction in the university curriculum

Why We Need a Vice President for Diversity
at the
University of Rhode Island

As students of the University of Rhode Island we feel as if the University is not sensitive to diversity. That is why we are proposing the need for a Vice President of Diversity on campus. In many instances, these individuals and their units are the "face" of diversity efforts and carry formal administrative titles like vice provost, vice chancellor, associate provost, vice president, assistant provost, dean, or special assistant to the president for multicultural, International, equity, diversity, and inclusion — to cite only a few of the most frequently used titles.

In the last five years, no fewer than 30 institutions have created these new roles. However, A review of recent higher education job listings illustrates the scope of this phenomenon, as institutions moving towards the Vice President for Diversity are swelling in number and differ by type, control, size, and geographic location. Institutions like the Berklee College of Music, Oklahoma State University, Harvard University, Xavier University, Miami University, Marquette University, Washington State University, and the University of Virginia, have recently hired inaugural officers. These roles have been constructed in an effort to build diversity capabilities similar to those found at institutions like the University of Michigan, University of Connecticut, Indiana University, the University of Washington, Brown University, the University of Denver, and Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, to name a few of the places that have had these positions for some time.

The emergence of these offices in higher education is not without historical precedence, as some institutions had "vice president for minority affairs" roles in the 1970s, when the first large group of African Americans enrolled at what were nearly all-white colleges and universities. These early units were often criticized as a symbolic appeasement to protesting minority groups and others demanding infrastructure for newly admitted minority populations and campus change. While these positions have been consistently mentioned in diversity plans, senior Leadership and others were often resistant, falsely criticizing these roles as "ghettoizing diversity" by putting the full burden on the shoulders of one person, and creating a campus police officer who would "tell people what to do." Additionally, many individuals believed that these officers would simply be "student development specialist" or "affirmative action officers" in new clothing. What distinguishes the current Vice President of Diversity from its historical predecessors is the functional definition of diversity as a resource that can be leveraged to enhance the learning of all students and is fundamental to institutional excellence, in addition to its historic definition as the presence of individuals that differ by race, gender, or some other social identity characteristic.

In order to properly infuse diversity into the most important academic and student affairs aspects of the University, the need to act immediately and institute this position of the Vice President of Diversity is essential in instituting social change. Time is of the essence and viable in attaining the actions, goals, and recommendations that we present in this document.