

A proposal to bring a Chief Diversity Officer to Western Kentucky University

A panel discussion addressed the need for a Chief Diversity Officer at the 2006 “Engaging the Spirit Conference at Western Kentucky University”. The classroom was full and many in attendance wondered aloud why Western does not have a high ranking administrator overseeing a campus wide coordination of diversity programs and projects. At the end of the session twenty five people agreed to form a group that would continue a discussion of how the position of Chief Diversity Officer could enhance efforts to make WKU a campus of inclusive excellence.

This group held several meetings during the fall semester, 2006. Benchmark institutions were contacted and faculty and staff associated with current departments and committees that advance the mission of diversity on Western’s campus were consulted. We found the following:

- The position of Chief Diversity Officer was broadly defined across our benchmark institutions and a great deal of variance was found in the position’s duties, authority, funding, and staffing.
- Such a position has never quite existed at Western, though from time to time there has been a person assigned to the Provost office to address some aspects of diversity at the university level.
- Western does have a number of departments and programs that work very hard to advance diversity on campus, but they struggle with funding and support.
- The 1989 Census Bureau projected that by 2030 the white population of the United States will grow by about 25 percent. During that time the African-American population will grow by 68 percent, the Asian-American, Pacific Island-American, and American Indian population will grow by 79 percent, and the Latino or Hispanic population will grow by 187 percent.
- The American Council on Education released a report in November, 2006 that reported minority enrollments rose by 50.7 percent between 1993 and 2003 while the increase for white students during that same period was 3.4%.
- The Supreme Court accepted that diversity in the student body furthers the broad educational mission of higher education in the University of Michigan Law School case.
- The American Association of Colleges and Universities has reported in a variety of publications that diversity and inclusion efforts are ways to achieve excellence in learning, research and teaching, student development, and local and global engagement.

-Pat Harris, global CDO at McDonald's equates creating CDO positions today to the creation of chief information offices and chief technology officers in the 1980s and '90s.

-Bea Y. Perdue, executive director of Bennett College's Johnnetta B. Cole Global Diversity & Inclusion Institute stated that companies are realizing that the CDO is as critical as the chief financial officer.

It seems reasonable to us to assume that in order for Western to continue the transformation to become a university of national recognition and international reach, it will need to enroll a more diverse student body. Current departments, committees, and programs aligned with the mission of diversity are doing an excellent job to attract diverse students, faculty, and staff. But the data suggests we will soon have minority students on campus that are new to Western. Are we ready, for example, to attract, enroll, retain, and graduate large numbers of Hispanic students? Do we know how to welcome their culture on campus and not alienate them? Are we ready to interact and share our culture with young scholars from Eastern and Middle Eastern countries? Will our faculty and staff be able to create a supportive and welcoming place to work to minority faculty and staff? Are we ready to employ faculty and staff of different faiths or sexual orientation? Individual departments and programs working on their own cannot address the ever changing issue of diversity on a campus. We believe strongly that the time is right for Western Kentucky University to look at how a Chief Diversity Officer would advance diversity across the board at Western. We believe the university should consider the value of a Chief Diversity Officer in bringing our campus to a higher level of awareness and understanding of the skills and values necessary for students, staff, and faculty to be successful in a global society.

Western has already made a strong commitment to the mission of diversity. We are asking that the university look at the next step in bringing inclusive excellence to Western. The QEP, one of a number of initiatives supporting WKU's strategic plan, contains three broad student learning outcomes and the second outcome specifically addresses diversity. This is a commendable learning outcome and we feel that the university will need someone new to lead the university toward this outcome. Current departments and programs are at their limit now. They need the university to create a lead position with support and funding to address the university wide goal of diversity.

Here are some specific requirements and characteristics that we feel would be essential in the creation of this position. The Chief Diversity Officer should:

- report directly to the President, sit on the Administrative Council and consult and collaborate with all divisions.
- play a central role in the development and promotion of diversity programs on campus.
- have a budget and support staff.

- consult with departments across all divisions to promote the diversity learning outcome of the QEP and to increase the hiring and retention of minority faculty and staff.
- act as a conduit to the local, state, national and international community to promote Western's image as an inclusive university.
- lead the university in a definition of diversity and inclusiveness.
- not be considered the one person on campus responsible for meeting diversity goals.

We are aware that a Diversity Environment Survey Report has been prepared and presented to the President of Western Kentucky University. We hope that some of the results of the survey could be shared with the campus to see if our recommendation is in keeping with what the committee discovered as it surveyed faculty and staff. We would ask that the leaders of Western begin a process of open dialog to address what we see as a pressing need to complete our transformation to a university that prepares students to lead and serve in a world full of diversity.

Members of our group would be willing to serve in most any way to advance this dialog. We have formed on our own out of an interest to advance diversity on campus. We admire and value countless faculty and staff who have already made great contributions to the diversity mission. We do not pretend to be experts in these matters; we only want to share our interest and passion in what we feel needs to be a university wide discussion.

Western is hiring a Chief International Officer to advance the international issue on campus, so we should also hire a Chief Diversity Officer to lead the campus wide effort toward diversity.

We will share our recommendation with the President and the Administrative Council, along with the University Senate, the Staff Council, and the Student Government Association. We are simply asking that the leadership of this campus begin a public discussion of how to take the next step in advancing diversity on campus, and how the role of a Chief Diversity Officer would make that next step successful.