

Rationale for The College of Education's Diversity and Community Enhancement
Committee 2010 – 2011 Theme
4/10/2010

The College of Education's Diversity and Community Enhancement has chosen as its 2010 theme, "Connections". Throughout the 2010 - 2011 academic year, the DCEC will work to sponsor discussions and events that invite participants to explore connections - those connections that unite us as a community, those that exist but that we don't draw upon, or those that don't exist but could or should.

The theme of Connections links the work of the DCEC to the College's Framework to Foster Diversity Plan for 2010 - 2015.

Specifically, Challenge 5 in the plan calls for building

...the capacity of all persons delivering academic services (tenure-line as well as fixed term faculty members and academic advisors) to address diversity issues through professional development activities and provide support to sustain the community of individuals engaged in these activities.

Questions of what it means to address diversity issues and what sorts of activities and discussions are productive have been a central question of the Theme Subcommittee. Drawing on Connections as our theme will allow us to focus on discussions and events that bring together members of the College Community and beyond to continue to simultaneously improve our understanding and act on what we know or believe.

Another important match is to Challenge #2, which notes that:

The theme that emerged most clearly from our planning process involved a need to improve the exchange of information and ideas between a) the College and Department diversity committees; b) the College and the Departments; and c) individuals within the College and the various groups and resources dealing with diversity within the larger University. There is a sense that we are pursuing many initiatives and programs that seem to be isolated and fragmented and that there is a need for a centralized means of disseminating information and ideas (p. 4).

The Plan goes on to identify the maintenance of web-based resources for supporting the development of shared goals and practice strategies, the housing of resources, and a guide to diversity related projects and events. It calls for greater coordination with the Department committees without requiring a one-sized fits all approach. Rather, the Plan suggests conversations that help us understand what the existing beliefs and resources, strengths and needs are from the perspective of the departments.

These goals are a good match for work the DCEC has already begun. The Resources Subcommittee has begun to revise and operationalize a web-based model for resources. In the coming year, this subcommittee can continue to develop both the vision for what is possible and the routines to ensure that the work is done. The Community Subcommittee has been working to make better connections with the Department level committees. Naming "connections" as our theme enhances our ability to focus both time and resources to make headway on this effort. We need to understand what the Department level committees do, what they perceive as their strengths and needs, and also to make connections among individuals, programs, initiatives, projects and courses in a way that allows for a more powerful collective intelligence about diversity and community in the College. We also need to consider that there are other potential ways to think about making connections -- connections across Colleges, across campuses, across different with different roles or experiences, and into the community.

In choosing this theme, the DCEC recognizes that it can be difficult to put such an abstract idea into visible practice. Whereas our earlier themes focused on group identities in a way that gave us some obvious direction for educational events, this theme could easily become an understandable excuse for very busy people to achieve little. Therefore, a critical part of making this plan work will be for the subcommittees to have a clear set of objectives for their work during the year. We do not want the DCEC to lose visibility, momentum, nor the justification for its budget. In some ways, this theme then may require greater vision, more effort and perhaps even more commitment to staying on track and producing some outcomes about which we can be proud.