

August 19, 2011

Dept. of English Diversity and Retention Committee Annual Report, AY 2010-11

Chair: Alan Golding

Members: David Anderson, Joan d'Antoni, Karen Hadley (fall), Tom Byers (spring)

Role of the Committee:

The role of this committee is best summarized by reference to the university's diversity vision statement, which reads in part as follows:

“We commit ourselves to building an exemplary educational community that offers a nurturing and challenging intellectual climate, a respect for the spectrum of human diversity, and a genuine understanding of the many differences-including race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, socioeconomic status, disability, religion, national origin or military status-that enrich a vibrant metropolitan research university.”

In the further language of this statement, “diversity . . . serves to eliminate discrimination, marginalization, and exclusion based on race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, socioeconomic status, disability, religion, national origin or military status.

Diversity focuses on building community through:

- Composition of a diverse faculty, staff and student body
- Curricula and learning experiences that prepare students to live and work in a diversity and global society
- Campus life that allows students to develop leadership skills, civic responsibility and social skills while excelling academically, faculty to teach, serve and conduct research that enhances knowledge and improves the quality of life, and staff to work in supportive workplace environments
- Climate of inclusiveness with principles of mutual respect, fairness and social justice that is conducive for everyone to develop to his/her fullest potential.”

The role of the departmental Diversity and Retention Committee is to facilitate the exercise of those values within the department, to coordinate the department's contributions to diversity and retention within the larger university community, and to help ensure that departmental practices are in line with university policy and mandates on diversity.

Committee Activities:

One crucial tool for facilitating conversation around diversity is the department's annual Book in Common Project. The 2010-11 Book-in-Common was department colleague Kiki Petrosino's *Fort Red Border* (the first book of poetry used for the Book in Common), and with the financial

support of the College of Arts and Sciences and Dean Blaine Hudson, copies were distributed free to English majors who requested it. The book was taught in a number of English Department courses in the spring 2011 semester; in a pair of related events, Prof. Petrosino gave a public reading from her work on Mon. March 7, 2011 to a full Bingham Poetry Room in Ekstrom Library, and then shared a lunchtime panel and q-and-a, exclusively for English majors and minors, with Sarabande Books editor-in-chief Sarah Gorham, the publisher of *Fort Red Border*, on Tues. March 8. She also gave generously of her time and energy in visiting and talking to classes where the work was being taught.

In terms of outreach related to the Book in Common, the Department was able to provide copies to the President, the Provost, the Vice-Provost for Diversity, and the Executive Vice-President for Research to apprise them of this aspect of the department's contribution to campus diversity. We were also able to provide copies to the eighteen international participants in the summer 2011 Institute on Contemporary American Literature.

In other activities, the Committee

--coordinated the annual African American Literature Reading (co-sponsored by the Diversity Planning Committee) for Black History Month.

--inaugurated, co-sponsored and coordinated a Women's History Month literary reading, on analogy with the annual African American Literature Reading.

-- inaugurated, co-sponsored and coordinated a Veteran's Day literary reading,

--led a departmental discussion on the future of the Book-in-Common Project and on the direction and role of the Committee itself.

Projected 2011-12 Activities:

The two concrete results of the above-mentioned meeting are

(1) AY 2011-12 is likely to be something of a fact-finding year for the Committee, beyond its usual scheduling of events, as A & S starts to rethink its paradigms for approaching diversity and retention issues and as we gather information on what other A & S departments do in the way of diversity and retention activities; and

(2) AY 2011-12 will also be a year of reassessing the value and purpose of the Book in Common. This year's Book in Common choice is departmental colleague Brian Leung's novel *Take Me Home*; along with a reading and meeting with students on Prof. Leung's part, the Committee expects that events will be planned in coordination with CCHS events on immigrant and recovered histories, central themes in *Take Me Home*.

The Committee will continue to sponsor and coordinate the Veteran's Day, Black History Month and Women's History Month readings.