On Thursday, December 1, 2005, Interim President Brian Levin-Stankevich convened a campus-wide listening session on diversity at Eastern Washington University. It was coordinated by the President’s Advisory Committee on Diversity, chaired by Carlos Maldonado, attended by six representatives from the Board of Trustees (See a list of the leadership participants on page 8), and facilitated by Dr. Raymond Reyes of Gonzaga University. About 100 people—students, faculty and staff—attended over the course of the two-hour hearing.

What follows is a thematic summary of the key issues identified in the hearing, and an outline of the action steps Eastern leaders have committed to take. A complete transcript of the proceedings, as well as copies of written comments, are available at www.ewu.edu/x30041.xml.

One of the first outcomes from the listening session was a call by the President’s Cabinet for a benchmark report on what diversity activities are currently supported at Eastern, with the goal of identifying areas that can be strengthened or improved.

The Interim President has also asked the President’s Advisory Committee on Diversity to respond to the issues identified at the hearing by coordinating a series of action work sessions. These meetings will be designed to convene members of the campus community to develop specific action solutions that will enhance and advance diversity efforts at Eastern. A timetable of the action work sessions is available on the diversity website.
The Hearing: Gathering to Listen

Eastern faculty, staff, and students who attended the December hearing were welcomed by student Victor Rodriguez who introduced Committee chair Carlos Maldonado. He noted that the hearing was designed to give participants an opportunity to give voice to their concerns directly to university leadership, who were charged with being active listeners.

Interim President Brian Levin-Stankevich echoed the importance of listening, especially in light of events and meetings early in the spring of 2005, which did not satisfactorily resolve key issues at Eastern. The hearing was designed to enable the university community to continue and advance the conversation, much as had been done in similar conversations five years earlier. The results, he hoped, would be to openly and honestly address the challenges that face the institution and move forward to create change.

Ines Zozaya-Geist, member of Eastern’s Board of Trustees, thanked Dr. Levin-Stankevich for his leadership and attentiveness to the Board’s diversity priority. She recalled the legacy of her father who, when he arrived in the United States in 1955, spoke two languages but no English. He benefited from an employer who understood his strengths and respected his skills. She reiterated that everyone was at the hearing to learn from one another—and what better place than at an institution of higher education?

Facilitator Raymond Reyes then outlined the logistical parameters, which permitted each speaker to have up to four minutes to contribute. He reminded the group that what they were doing in the hearing was counter to the prevailing culture and that “listening is the first responsibility of love.”

The Reality of Diversity at Eastern: The Case for Change

Students, staff, faculty, and alumni painted a verbal picture of the current state of diversity at Eastern. While the university has an expressed commitment to fostering a diverse institution, many speakers felt that change has been too slow. An alumnus noted that five years ago when there was a series of forums on diversity there was hope for change but little has happened since then. She regretted Eastern’s low visibility in communities of color and asked “what are we really doing to change?” A student leader from the Native American Student Association said that each year his group must focus its activities on defending its interests and members, instead of using the club to enrich students’ experiences.

“There is diversity within diversity,” noted a speaker who reminded the audience that diversity is more than race and ethnicity and that EWU does not have a clear understanding of diversity itself and what it means for the campus.
In addition to overt discrimination, speakers also talked about lack of support for diverse students and faculty. A student noted there was no place beyond the Chicano Education office where she felt comfortable or welcomed—a sentiment echoed by an African American faculty member about her students and the African American Education Program. A speaker accused the administration of seeking diversity of color but not providing the support or environment that will help students across the university.

**Focus on the Issues**

Comments at the hearing centered around four themes: students, faculty and staff, learning and discovery, and campus and community culture.

**Students**—Many students of color do not feel they are heard or supported beyond such offices as Chicano or African American Education. Administrative decisions often are perceived as arbitrary and inconsistent, with few opportunities for student involvement in the decision-making process. You don’t deserve to be on the Board or in power if you do not recognize our struggle, one speaker admonished. “The system is unjust; diversity is not a buzzword; This is my life. It is urgent. It is real.”

Another speaker expressed frustration at always having to “sugar coat” issues or requests when speaking to university leaders. He pleaded for more courage by faculty and administrators in making decisions that will support students of color. A former student attended a national conference on diversity but had no way to share what she learned with the campus leadership.

Several students commented on the application process for the Board of Trustees’ Diversity Grants as being too complicated, a point echoed by a staff member of the university’s Grants Office, who wrote that the application was too formal and would benefit by being more student-friendly. (Note: The student application for the Diversity Grants has been simplified and the deadline for 2006 was extended.)

Student recruitment was an issue addressed by several speakers and writers. A staff member from Admissions noted that Eastern’s recruitment efforts face several challenges: a predominantly white, female recruiting staff; no department serving Asian students, Eastern’s largest community of color; and a lack of unity and leadership across Eastern’s multicultural communities. She reiterated the unit’s dedication to hiring more diverse staff and to reaching out to all student groups. Eastern’s recruitment of students of color may be affected—perhaps unjustifiably—one writer noted, by a negative perception of the region generated...
by ongoing publicity about Idaho’s white supremacist groups. One writer suggested that Eastern reach out to gifted minorities in local high schools to identify and nurture potential students.

A second writer also suggested that international diversity could be increased at Eastern by reducing international tuition rates to be closer to resident tuition and therefore more attractive to students from abroad.

A written comment (available in full online) from the Financial Aid and Scholarship Office outlined the ways in which that office has administered $82 million in annual financial aid in support of socioeconomic diversity, educational access and academic diversity, and also worked to support diversity through its outreach and cross-campus support efforts.

**Faculty and Staff**—While many faculty and staff attended the hearing, and also wrote in afterward, a number of individuals commented on how the same people attend such gatherings while the majority of faculty and staff do not—precisely the group that needs to become more involved if diversity is to be realized across the campus.

A student commented that he felt many professors needed to learn more about diversity—he suggested educational sessions for faculty. The need for more professional development around diversity was underscored by a staff member who commented on the number of national grants that call for better integration of diversity into the curriculum and her perception that so few faculty, chairs and deans at Eastern are knowledgeable or actively working in this regard. She challenged everyone, from the Provost on down, to pledge to examine the ways in which students are taught so that all can be successful and to invest in professional development programs that are proven and effective.

An African-American faculty member commented that because there are so few faculty and staff of color at Eastern they are stretched thin, serving on committees, advising student clubs and organizations, and supporting diversity efforts. Eastern needs to do a better job of following up with those faculty who leave and those who stay to discover ways in which faculty and staff can be supported.
Learning and Discovery—A student applauded the African American Education program and credited it with helping him to understand his own identity. He suggested that African American Studies needs to be a full department and offer a major.

Other comments reiterated the importance of integrating diverse perspectives across the curriculum, and the lack of support for faculty who attempt to do so. One faculty member commented that efforts by faculty to integrate multicultural perspectives into their classes are often not recognized in Eastern’s reward, tenure and promotion processes. Faculty members who do make diversity a priority can be devalued by their colleagues. She asked the Board to support such faculty work as part of their teaching mission.

One student lamented the fact that existing academic structure affects diversity by isolating study into disciplines. She suggested, for example, that Chicano Education could partner with English or History with African American studies so that there could be broader understanding. “Even though everybody verbally supports the idea of integration, when you want to take action by cross-listing a course, for example, there is no way to go.”

A participant at the hearing later wrote in to note that a missing piece of the discussion was language and Eastern’s lack of support for language programs which can help to bridge cultural differences.

Campus and Community Culture—Students from different ethnic and racial backgrounds discussed a campus atmosphere that ranged from unsupportive to discriminatory. One African-American student described how a roommate had to move from the residence hall because he was being harassed. The speaker asked for more direct administrative response to such experiences. Do something! the speaker urged the panel.

Speakers cited several examples of negative or unfair treatment of minority groups, including the staging of the affirmative action bake sale against the warnings of the Black Student Union that such an event could spark violence (and will if held again, a speaker warned). Speakers perceived inconsistent standards by administrators regarding which events are supported or denied. There is no point to these hearings, a speaker said, if it all ends here.

Students also spoke of racism in the community, specifically the high school, where visiting EWU African-American students were automatically identified as athletes, not students.
Additional examples cited by speakers included:

- insufficient pictures on the Eastern website reflecting positive minority events;
- limited support for Islamic students, including no Arabic speaker in the International Education Office or a designated place for Islamic faculty, staff and students to pray;
- the assignment of international students to food service jobs because of perceived language problems;
- lack of attendance by faculty and staff at events sponsored by groups of color;
- no interpreter for the hearing impaired at the forum;
- perceived inequities in funding ethnic and cultural programs over sports or other activities;
- some signs without Braille across campus;
- little discussion of the needs of the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community in campus discussions about diversity.

Several comments regarding the hearing itself focused on how it was structured. The set-up, with the Committee and Board at a head table was deemed to be intimidating. Organizers were also criticized for starting 15 minutes late.

**Ideas for Change**

While many speakers were pessimistic about the pace and even the possibility for change at Eastern, others reiterated the importance of taking action, in addition to listening to comments. One African-American student said he knew that change could not happen quickly but he did want to see some movement.

Several comments addressed the need to define more closely what is meant by diversity, so that it can form a common foundation for the campus community to work toward, together. Speakers spoke about “building stronger bridges” across common concerns.

Specific suggestions for how to do this included involving students more in solving the diversity problem, providing professional development and education for faculty, staff and students, communicating more effectively about what support systems are available to students and being more consistent in how administrative policies are enforced.

Several speakers spoke eloquently about the need to inspire individuals across the campus—beyond the impassioned students of color present at the hearing—to understand their own relationship to diversity issues and to take responsibility for

“As an institution we must expect more of ourselves. It is our collective responsibility for change.”

Seems
change. A fear of change was identified as at the root of Eastern’s perceived inaction and speakers called on the institution to expect more of all its members. It will take all of us to change, said one speaker. “It is our collective responsibility.”

Next Steps

The creation of a diverse university—one that supports students, faculty and staff from all backgrounds, races and ethnicities; integrates diverse perspectives throughout its learning and discovery; and fosters an environment that enhances academic learning and the community it serves—is a continuous process that requires the involvement of all its members. In response to this challenge, the administrative leadership of Eastern Washington University reiterates its commitment to diversity as an institutional priority and sets forth the following immediate actions:

1. Charge the President’s Advisory Committee on Diversity to identify immediate and intermediate tactics to address the issues raised in the forum. These recommendations, along with budget implications, should be ready for implementation as soon as possible.

2. Charge the President’s Cabinet to identify and monitor specific, measurable outcomes for increased diversity in recruitment, hiring and training efforts.

3. Partner with the Faculty Organization and the Faculty Fellow for General Education to recommend specific, measurable outcomes for the integration of diverse perspectives into the curriculum and into the renewal of general education.

4. Fill the position of Faculty Fellow for Diversity with the specific charge to address the issues identified within this report.

5. Fund and implement as soon as possible a “First Responders” program to address student, faculty and staff concerns about a negative campus environment. The program, to be modeled after the Violence Prevention efforts, will identify and train individuals who can be advocates for individuals to university administration.

6. Charge the Provost to explore new partnerships with local higher education institutions to jointly recruit faculty, staff and students of color.

7. Commission a benchmark report on existing diversity efforts to assist the university in identifying opportunities for supporting successful programs and meeting needs not currently addressed.

8. Revise the Board of Trustees Diversity Grant criteria to be more student friendly to encourage more participation.
For More Information

Information about diversity efforts at Eastern, a full transcript of the December 2005 hearing and updates on the action steps recommended in this report are available at www.ewu.edu/diversity.

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