The monthly meeting of the Council for Diversity and Interculturalism of 2010-2011 was held on November 16, 2011 in the Gordon Ball Board Room at the Brenda Lawson Athletic Center. Present at the meeting were, R.J. Hinde, Rabia Gibbs (UT Libraries), Charles Houston, William Hill, Teressa Gregory (for Annazette Houston), Kent Wagoner, Jenny Moshak, Tom Cervone, Marva Rudolph, Margie Nichols, Herb Byrd, Anton Reece, and Tracy Childress.

I. Commission Reports
In a recent meeting, members of the Exempt Staff Council asked if the CDI should work to create a unified diversity statement now that the Leadership Group, the body that was spearheading the effort, is non-operational. Margie Nichols stated the Chancellor may want to empower the CDI to complete the work on the diversity statement.

After a general discussion, it was agreed that Ms. Nichol’s staff in Creative Services will resume the Leadership Group’s efforts and integrate the unified diversity statement into the new web design. A presentation will be made at the January CDI meeting.

II. Diversity Advisory Council
Theotis Robinson presented information on the System Diversity Advisory Task Force. He stated that Interim President Jan Simek appointed the Office of Equity and Diversity Organizational Review Task Force and charged it with determining how the University of Tennessee System can become more effective in advancing diversity across its campuses. Additionally, the Review Task Force was directed to identify obstacles that limit diversity among the student body, faculty and staff.

The Review Task Force generated a report that was presented to the Board of Trustees in October 2011. Notably, the report recommended that a more permanent body should be formed to address diversity issues. Accordingly, the Board of Trustees formed the Diversity Advisory Council (“DAC”). The report also stated that the President should hold the chancellors and institute vice presidents accountable for diversity efforts.

Mr. Robinson stated that Damien Williams, Vice Chancellor at the University of Wisconsin serves as a consultant for the project. Final policy recommendations will be presented at a Board of Trustees meeting in June.

After highlighting the members of the DAC and its various committees, Jenny Moshak asked whether any of the members of the DAC self-identified as being a part of the LGBT community. Mr. Robinson stated that no one did.

Anton Reece asked whether the DAC has a definition of diversity that guides its efforts. Mr. Robinson stated that the DAC has not produced a formal definition of diversity.
Dr. Marva Rudolph inquired funding sources for the DAC’s activities and initiatives. Mr. Robinson stated that he would like to see 2% of next funding campaign dedicated to diversity programming. He stated that the goal for the next funding campaign will be $1-2 billion.

After a general discussion of the DAC’s committees, Council members asked whether the Faculty and Staff Diversification Strategies Committee will work to develop domestic partner benefits. Mr. Robinson replied that while he is in favor of such efforts, he is not sure that the present political climate will support change on that front. Council members stated that several institutions have been successful in implementing domestic partner benefits including the University of Kentucky and The University of Florida.

Ms. Nichols asked if paying for the domestic partner benefits with private money would eliminate some of the opposition. Mr. Robinson stated that the political opposition would most likely remain. Ms. Nichols then stated that it is possible that leadership may be assuming that the response to a push for domestic partner benefits will be negative when there are indications that it may not be. For instance, the University has been publicizing LGBT events and it has received no negative feedback.

Ms. Moshak stated that the University does not compare to its peers with regard to the provision of partner benefits for LGBT persons. Mr. Robinson stated that he will raise the domestic partner benefits issue with the DAC.

III. OIT Data

Kent Wagoner of the Office of Information and Technology (“OIT”) led a discussion on the diversity-related data available to OIT and how it may be useful to the Council. As a sample for the discussion, he generated data racial diversity data using the Simpson’s Index of Diversity. Mr. Wagoner focused his remarks on the central challenge presented by generating diversity data—presenting meaningful measurements. Robert Hinde and others stated that expressing diversity related-data using a small set of numerical values can sometimes produce skewed or otherwise misleading results.

Mr. Wagoner also stated that his ability to generate data is limited to the information the University chooses to collect. Notably, he cannot produce data regarding LGBT persons because the University does not provide an opportunity for those persons to self-identify.

After a general discussion, the group stated that the University should utilize quantitative and qualitative measures to capture its diversity. Mr. Reece asked whether anyone knew of any model for gathering qualitative and quantitative diversity measures that has been successfully utilized at other institutions. Answering this question may require a benchmarking exercise.

IV. Next Meeting

The Council will not meet in December. It will reconvene next year, on January 18th.