Graduate Education Council
Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, October 18, 2017
2:30-4:30 pm
101 Walter Library

Present: Robert Blair, Abhishek Chandra, Etty DeVeaux (staff), Kathryn Grace, Emi Ito, Will Jones, Joe Kapusta, Ron Krebs, Mary Jo Kreitzer, Nathan Kuncel, Scott Lanyon (chair), Jennifer Liang, Deborah Levison, Ryan Machmels, Alena Talkachova, Jerry Zhao, Char Voight (staff), David Weerts

Guests: Vicki Field, Karen Ho, Virajita Singh
1. Reminder: Membership on GEC standing subcommittees (Scott Lanyon): Lanyon reminded the GEC that preferences for membership on standing subcommittees should be sent to Char Voight.

2. Discussion: Graduate School Local Communities Strategic Initiatives (Lanyon; Karen Ho, Associate Professor of Anthropology and Director of the Race, Indigeneity, Gender & Sexuality Studies Initiative; Virajita Singh, Assistant Vice Provost for Equity and Diversity; All).

Lanyon provided a brief overview of the Graduate School’s strategic initiatives, including the three diversity initiatives: 1) Breaking Boundaries Video, 2) Alliance for Diversity, and 3) Local Communities. He also shared the goals and timeline of the Local Communities initiative, which was the focus of the discussion.

Ho and Singh then facilitated a discussion about the objectives of the initiative, and provided some exemplars and best practices for community-building work with the intention of helping to clarify what the goals of the initiative would be and what the qualities would be of the person to lead it over the next five years.

Key discussion concepts/suggestions:

○ There is a significant amount of data but 1) not everyone is aware of the data and how to interpret it effectively, and 2) it is mostly quantitative and does not assist much with the qualitative and more intangible aspects of climate issues. This will require other approaches such as focus groups.
○ What is the possible role of design thinking as an approach that students could use to be co-creators of the possible outcomes of this initiative?
○ We need to make sure we’re working “from the ground” up and involving graduate students in the development of community models and approaches.
○ Important that we define inclusivity broadly beyond just race and ethnicity. Keep in mind a truly broad-based description of diversity. We often mention race and ethnicity because this data is collected. But this is an important point and the institutional definition is much broader.
○ The needs must be defined locally. We need local efforts to better understand, refine, and translate into action.
○ Ne staff member must connect and strengthen existing communities and facilitate formation of new ones.
o Burden should not be on students, or not solely on students. Progress must be made nd change initiated on all fronts.
o Would it be possible to hire graduate students to support this initiative (say students from COSP who are already doing this work)?
o Can these initiatives reach across the divide of graduate and professional students? They should, and we should try to make that happen.
o There is value in local communities for sharing stories and experiences among students with similar backgrounds and at the same career stage, but also the need to develop a sustainable infrastructure that will enable change.
o Should the new hire be a facilitator for confidential discussions and assistance?
o What should be the role of majority students and postdocs, faculty and alumni in these local communities?
o What are things that are working that we can build infrastructure that is flexible but how can we create a sustainable infrastructure that extends and amplifies over time?

3. Strategic Outcomes for the Local Communities initiative: Lanyon led a discussion on the proposed strategic outcomes, and asked for GEC input on what was being proposed as well as anything that might be missing.

Input on proposed outcomes and additional suggested outcomes:
• Don’t limit organizing around common disciplinary interests or experiences. Leave the basis for organizing more flexible and open.
• Don’t limit the outcome related to sustainability, growth and recognition of national organization to disciplinary organizations.
• Acquire an awareness of the barriers to inclusion and diversifying the student body, since we don’t have a lot of data.

Additional comments and feedback:
• What feedback mechanism will be used to measure faculty and staff competence, awareness, understanding of diversity and its impact on the student experience?
• How are we reaching first-generation students as a constituency? Are we tracking them? Suspect that their retention rates would also be lower. Absence of community makes this group particularly vulnerable. In general, we assume a lot of cultural knowledge of our students about what graduate education is, and this constituency may have an especially hard time meeting the implicit expectations.
• Should we house support mechanisms directly under the Graduate School without a direct departmental or collegiate identification? Could this make students collectively more powerful because they are not bound by their identifies with their college or programs?
• Do we have comparative data and knowledge from peer institutions? Engineering, for example, has looked to Harvard as a successful example.

4. Update: Graduate School Strategic Planning: Interdisciplinarity and Postdoctoral Affairs (Lanyon): Lanyon shared an update on the Graduate School strategic planning related to interdisciplinarity and postdoctoral affairs, and asked for input on existing gaps and/or suggested revisions. The slides will be shared and people can send thoughts to Lanyon.