Muhlenberg College
President’s Diversity Strategic Planning Committee
Meeting #2:  May 24, 2013; 5:45 p.m.
Hoffman House, Dining Room

In Attendance
Cynthia Amaya Santiago, Ken Butler, Susan Clemens, Barbara Crossette, Matt Dicken, Troy Dwyer, Melanie Ferrara, Kim Gallon, Luis Garcia, Corey Goff, Karen Green, Randy Helm, Chris Hooker-Haring, Callista Isabelle, John Ramsay, Robin Riley-Casey, Adrian Shanker, Zachary Tanne, Jeremy Teissere

1. Call to Order; Review of April 23, 2013, Minutes
President Helm called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. He asked if the tone as well as the content of the first meeting’s minutes struck a proper balance of transparency and confidentiality. There were no issues with the first set of minutes.

2. Laying the Groundwork for an Environmental Scan / Institutional Research:
President Helm said that freshman class financial aid exceeded its budget by $700,000. Fortunately, the administration was able to find savings to make up the difference for this year by examining a three-year evaluation of its utilities budget, and through other budget examinations.

By reducing departmental budgets from a 2% to a 1% increase, the President has been able to set aside $125,000 for ongoing diversity initiatives. He has also proposed a one-time set-aside of $250,000 from any funds left over at the end of the fiscal year for one-time expenses, but this will need to be approved by the Board of Trustees once the books have been closed.

President Helm stressed that we will receive many more compelling initiative proposals than we will be able to fund. While this is true of any strategic planning process, we will most likely need to make tough decisions on which initiatives will have the most impact on the College community.

President Helm also explained that Mr. Marquis Hunter, who was hired part-time in Athletics and part-time at the Multicultural Center, and whose position was funded in part by an NCAA grant which was not renewed, has had his contract extended by the administration for an additional year using College funds. This was done as an interim measure until the Committee can decide which initiatives qualify as priorities. If continuing (or redefining) his position is a priority, then it will need to be funded through the planning process’s allocations.

a. Demographic/Statistical Data vs. Attitudinal/Experiential Data
President Helm distributed a document listing possible sources of both internal and external data that we may wish to use in our benchmarking research, pointing out the
differences between statistical and attitudinal data, and longitudinal and latitudinal sets of data, and noting the potential value of all these kinds of information. The President noted that, as Ms. Ferrera had stated in an email to him, some kinds of diversity will be more difficult to identify and track than others; for instance, there may be much less available longitudinal data on LGBTQ students/faculty/staff than on racial/ethnic diversity in the College community. Mr. Shanker stated that, concurrent to the data gathering process, a review of all College forms should take place. He cited recent changes to the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) document that students applying for financial aid must complete; children of same-sex parents may be disadvantaged unless they have the proper reporting instruments. Ms. Riley-Casey stated that the attitudinal data will be not only important to our process, but to the path the College takes in the years and even decades to come. Dr. Teissere said that, for all the student data that is readily available, this Committee needs to remember that it will also be important to gather data from and about the faculty and staff, as diversity is an important issue for the entire community.

b. Discussion of Possible Benchmark Group Criteria
Mr. Hooker-Haring distributed a document that showed the benchmark group the College utilized in its past two strategic planning processes (Bucknell University, Drew University, Dickinson College, Franklin & Marshall College, Gettysburg College, Ithaca College, Lafayette College, Lehigh University, Skidmore College, Susquehanna University, Ursinus College and Villanova University). The document also contained two other lists: our most recent private college admissions overlaps as identified in the most recent Admitted Student Questionnaire, and the ranking of institutions just above and just below Muhlenberg on the U.S. News & World Report annual college rankings. Another distributed document showed financial resources per student for Muhlenberg and a number of comparative institutions. The President noted that, while our strategic planning processes have focused on our admissions overlaps as benchmarks, we may need to look beyond admissions overlap for our benchmarks when it comes to diversity planning.

Mr. Hooker-Haring stated candidly that the admissions cycle that just ended had been especially challenging, given the uneasy climate on campus that began in late January and lasted most of the spring. Because the community grappled with a sudden increase in dialogue about diversity, and everyone was trying to make sense of conflicting messages that were being conveyed, that struggle became evident to prospective students. Mr. Hooker-Haring made it clear that he understood the need for the community to have this dialogue, but he was disappointed that the conversations were not more nuanced and substantive.

Mr. Garcia described his frustrations early in the semester when he felt that the administration was not working diligently enough toward making the community both more diverse and more welcoming. He said that the high number of conversations in which students engaged early in the semester tended to inflame passions at a faster rate.
Dr. Gallon noted that there was a decrease in the percentage of African-American students in the incoming freshman class, and she asked Mr. Hooker-Haring if he thought the campus climate had a direct effect on lower percentage. She also stated that it is important to remember that there are students of color from affluent families who do not need financial aid to attend Muhlenberg; we should not make the assumption that all students of color require aid.

Mr. Hooker-Haring responded that those students of color who do not require need-based aid have a large number of quality institutions from which to choose and asked the Committee to consider how the community’s struggles must have appeared to prospective students.

Ms. Cynthia Amaya Santiago also noted the tension on campus regarding the diversity conversation this spring and the impact that had on prospective students and families who were considering Muhlenberg.

Dr. Teissere said that one of the Committee’s primary goals should be to stimulate and perpetuate across the campus the kind of honest and nuanced conversations Mr. Hooker-Haring described. It is extremely difficult work, and it must begin with honest dialogue around the Committee table.

Dr. Gallon said that the difficulty we at Muhlenberg encounter when talking about diversity and difference is not unique to this institution; the country continues to try to find a way to engage productively on topics of race, ethnicity and gender that brings about change. She agreed with Dr. Teissere that this kind of engagement is the work of this Committee.

Ms. Green thanked the members of the Committee for their candor and their courage in expressing their feelings so forthrightly. She feels that the Committee began to achieve a level of trust in this meeting, and she hopes that that trust will continue to grow as the Committee continues its work.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:47 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Ken Butler