The University Senate of Michigan Technological University
Academic and Instruction Policy Committee (AIPC)
Report on Inclusion Efforts
February 24, 2016

Scope

At the end of December the Board of Trustee's asked the Senate Executive committee to take action on improving the inclusive climate at Michigan Tech. This report covers the actions taken so far by the AIPC and their discussion about what future actions might be taken.

Commitment

The AIPC is strongly committed to working openly, quickly and carefully on developing policies that improve the inclusive climate of Michigan Tech. We unanimously believe that improvements can be made but we are also aware that these are difficult issues and that unwise action can make matters worse rather than better.

Process

As a component of climate how the university acts can be as meaningful as what the action is. An open decision making process that emphasizes information gathering and collaboration is essential to modeling the expected changes in inclusive behavior throughout the University.

This process requires a balance of clear actions taken in a timely manner that demonstrate commitment to acting on these issues with thoughtful, and slower, large changes that can effect greater change in the culture of Michigan Tech.

Immediate Action:

We are proposing **changes to the early term survey** that encourage faculty to request feedback on how they can improve the inclusiveness of their teaching and the overall inclusive climate of their class. This is the best policy tool for quick change in the classroom that supports Faculty identification and correction of issues. Faculty might not be part of the underrepresented group that is experiencing discomfort in class, thus, encouraging faculty to take time to reach out to everyone in their class and find out how they feel could be a powerful way for student concerns to be addressed and for faculty to learn about what is going on in their classes. We feel that this tool empowers faculty to make positive change.

The Center for Teaching and Learning has several events focused on helping Faculty teach more inclusively. Continued offerings in this area are excellent and the videos that they put together for the February 23 workshop could form the basis for more online materials for instructors looking for guidance.

Future Action:

We see several key actions to take:

1. Insure that all policy makers and on campus experts are working together and communicating effectively to find the best solutions.
2. Develop reliable tools for identifying and correcting issues.
3. Develop tools that best allow the university to understand where we are currently and if we are improving or not.
4. Work on letting everyone know what we are doing.
5. Review policies to insure we are emphasizing our values in philosophy and action.

Working Together and Communicating Effectively

The AIPC has started to investigate inclusion on campus including reviewing the current mechanisms in place to address problems and encourage best practices. In this process we discovered Michigan Tech is doing a lot, and that the AIPC has only scratched the surface of understanding the breadth and depth of inclusion initiatives on campus. The first thing we think needs to happen is to define an inclusive process for moving forward that emphasizes faculty, administration, and student collaboration. We often discovered many diversity initiatives that we didn't know were happening on campus. We recommend:

- an inventory or gap analysis be conducted by the Diversity Council
- that the Diversity Council make a presentation to the University Senate about current efforts on campus
- that the University Senate have representation on the Diversity Council
    - o 1 member from the Academic and Instructional Policy Committee
    - o 1 member from the Administrative Policy Committee
- an increase in visibility of existing efforts
    - o How to connect Center for Diversity and Inclusion, Office of Institutional Equity and Inclusion, and the Diversity Council with faculty and staff in active ways?
    - o The more policy is sent through the University Senate the more faculty will be engaged in efforts to increase inclusion and the more faculty will be knowledgeable about the values and resources of the institution. This also engages faculty across the campus, not only the faculty that self select to attend diversity workshops.
- Institute department level climate surveys

We recommend that the Diversity Council take the lead on analyzing and initiating change and that they focus on very visible and inclusive methods of decision-making. They need to model the inclusive behavior we want to see in the classroom and in departments. We anticipate that this group would prepare materials for public comment and that at least some of the final recommendations would be University Senate Proposals to provide broad faculty and staff inclusion in the decision making process and to establish changes as clear university policy. Looking at timelines it is recommended that money be set aside to compensate faculty for summer work. We think that this group

could make some progress by the end of the semester but that if large changes are desired summer work will be required.

Develop Reliable Tools for Identifying and Correcting Issues
We see this operating on three levels:
1. The ability of faculty to understand the needs of underrepresented students in their classes, both generally and specifically.
2. The ability of supervisors to identify and work to improve employees, especially instructors, who are having trouble in this area.
3. Collecting aggregate data that allows the university as a whole to understand if the climate is improving or not.

The feedback loop for instructors must happen quickly during the term of the class for maximum effectiveness both in changed faculty behavior and in meaningful response for students. Training through the Center for Teaching and Learning can help faculty plan to avoid issues ahead of time, address problems as they come up and better formally and informally monitor their classes for issues. In addition the proposed changes to the early term survey will encourage all faculty to have a formal feedback mechanism in their classes that they can discuss and act on.

Department Chairs and Academic Deans need tools to understand how faculty are performing in the classroom and to take useful action to help struggling teachers. This may be an area that could be improved and the AIPC is exploring several options. Currently students have the ability to take concerns to Department Chairs or School Deans or to the Dean of Students, to submit concerns and complaints via a form linked on the required syllabus web page, and to provide feedback on the end of term teaching evaluations. Many of the problems we are concerned about are issues that may not be reported but that "everyone" knows about. A method of reporting that uncovers these issues but that isn't overwhelmed with spurious complaints is the goal. The AIPC has been discussing the use of the web form, end of term teaching evaluations, as well as trying to come-up with other options. We have yet to settle on a specific recommendation for change.

The AIPC does have significant reservations about the end of term survey. We feel it is a very poor tool for gathering information about underrepresented students. It is best at determining trends with the majority of students and if used to highlight the feelings of small numbers of students provides vague feedback and is very difficult to separate students with important issues from those who wanted an easier class or worse are using the system to harass underrepresented faculty.

The web feedback form and complaint log is interesting in that it could provide a low friction feedback mechanism with more timely feedback to the student as well as allow the tracking of issues to identify patterns over time and across multiple individuals. We are still discussing how it is currently being used and how what unintended consequences might be involved in using it.

General data on what problems students are having and the best feedback methods for maximum impact is essential and is a much broader issue than what happens in the classroom. It covers the dorms, student organizations, cultural programming in the Rozsa and elsewhere, guest speakers brought to campus by departments and a host of other issues. The end of semester teaching evaluations don't cover much of this material. Much of this is covered in the University Climate Survey; however, we felt that different information might be gleaned from a department level survey. Each discipline on campus has its own culture and climate and much might be learned from surveys conducted at this level. It can also be easier to take action on these surveys and show clear results to students quickly at this more intimate level. This would also allow issues to be more quickly addressed that are caused by student behavior. To be most successful it is likely that department chairs and advisors would need support creating, administering, and acting on the survey instruments. The AIPC is willing to bring forward a proposal on this although it may be more appropriate for the Diversity Council to move this idea forward.