

Student Senate Diversity Committee 2014-2015 Academic Year
Members: Zach Hollstrom, Chair, Jessie Poole, Christy Crouse

This year, the Diversity Committee focused on the following events and policy endeavors.

Addiction Hurts Conference Sponsorship: In the Fall 2014 semester, a group of students approached the Diversity Committee with an idea for an event on campus to raise awareness about addiction. They wanted to bring in two professional speakers from a local Preferred Family Healthcare site to talk about the different kinds of addiction that they deal with, what the signs of addiction are/what addiction looks like, and how to support and refer people that are struggling with addiction. Oftentimes it can be difficult to get a good turnout of students to come to events on campus and this was something that the Diversity Committee determined fit our mission and was in our committee's interest to support. We made the decision to co-sponsor the event to help raise awareness for addiction and we provided 50 dollars of our 500-dollar miscellaneous budget to buy refreshments for the event. The event was branded Addiction Hurts and held in the Alumni Room. It had a turnout of about 30 students, which we determined was a successful number of students for a small-scale professional speaker on a weekday. While the event was successful and accomplished the purpose that we had envisioned, it received a small minority of opposition in the weekly Student Senate meeting because of a concern that we were setting an inappropriate precedent by sponsoring an event that students were putting on as technically part of a class project. Student Government does not currently have a policy for or against this sort of sponsorship, and it had not yet been determined by the Executive Cabinet that all these types of event sponsorships would be handled exclusively through the Grants and Sponsorships Committee. Whether or not committees should sponsor events from students that are not doing so on the behalf of an organization is an important one for the future and deserves a conversation, but without a Student Government Policy regarding the matter, the Diversity Committee felt comfortable supporting the event because of how well it meshed with our mission and our responsibility to promote awareness of the range of human experience as part of diversity. This superseded any concerns about our sponsorship of the event.

Open Housing Resolution: This was the biggest project of the year for the Diversity Committee. We worked closely with PRISM to advocate for an Open Housing Policy on campus that began under the moniker of "Gender Neutral Housing". We focused our efforts on promoting and achieving the model that our Director of Residence Life, John Garner, came up with in his report on the operational feasibility of implementing a gender neutral housing option, which was originally prepared for President Paino, but has since been made public. This project took exceptional effort the entire year to get any kind of progress at all. We had to do extensive research for the resolution, and speak with multiple departments of the university and meet with many administration members going as high as John Gardner and President Paino themselves.

We also had to hold a lot of discussions with student senators outside of Student Senate meetings to alleviate concerns that they had before our resolution was first and second read. This served to create a positive atmosphere around the resolution when it was read at our Student Senate meeting as any debate or controversy surrounding the resolution had already been handled. This allowed the resolution to pass without a single dissenting vote.

Board of Governor's Presentation: After our resolution in support of Gender Neutral Housing did not elicit action from the administration, our committee asked to attend another meeting with President Paino to seek alternative methods of promoting our cause. We sought an audience for PRISM members with the Board of Governor's, and it was determined that myself, the chair of the Diversity Committee, and Jessie Poole would be afforded an audience with the Board of Governors at their February 2015 public meeting. Jessie and I researched extensively and put together an 8 minute oral report/presentation for the Board of Governors to convince them of the importance of implementing an Open Housing Program. While our presentation was significant and effective, the most important aspect of Board of Governor's Presentation was PRISM's role in it. We coordinated with them to begin a letter writing campaign. We asked that members of the LGBTQ write respectful but meaningful testimonies/letters describing their experiences living on campus and how an Open Housing Policy would have better served them than the existing system on campus. We brought two of these letters to the Board of Governor's meeting, distributing a copy of each for each Board member. We also filled the gallery with members of PRISM and supporters for the Open Housing Policy to demonstrate the support on campus for a new housing option. Without this, our presentation would have been empty rhetoric and just another idea. However, because of the student presence at the meeting and the personal stories in the letters that PRISM provided us, our presentation was effective. At the time of this report, it is my understanding that the Board is planning to discuss the Open Housing Policy at their next official meeting on June 13th, 2015, in Hannibal, Missouri. It is crucial that the next chair of the Diversity Committee makes it his/her business to follow up and continue to advocate to the Board for an Open Housing Policy.

Diversity Week: Each year it is the responsibility of the Diversity Committee to host a Diversity Awareness week on campus. How the committee chooses to go about this is up to them. The vision we came up with was a simple model that would be easy to follow and remember for student attendance and would thoroughly accomplish our goals for the week without being an overwhelming amount of content. Our concept was to have a different diverse theme every day during the week, Monday through Thursday. The themes we chose were globalism/understanding race, the LGBTQ community and the gender binary, a career workshop for international students, and understanding disability, autism, and fetal alcohol syndrome. We chose not to make Friday part of diversity week because it is difficult to achieve high student attendance on weekend events that are not social in nature. We decided to host one

guest/professional speaker every night of the week at 6 PM in the SUB, and to do publicity tabling during the day. Our speakers were Carol Bennett, the Associate Dean of Multicultural Affairs, a member of PRISM, the Career Center/International Student Affairs Office, a member of Students Supporting the Exceptional Community, and a professional speaker from Jefferson City that spoke about Fetal Alcohol syndrome. We found speakers by reaching out to student organizations and by talking with our advisors. Our method for tabling during the day was to allow Senators to serve their weekly office hours by working our diversity publicity table in the SUB instead of spending it in the Student Government office. Our preparations for Diversity week included making reservations months in advance for rooms in the SUB and tables, ordering posters weeks in advance, ordering food for events from Sodexo in advance, and creating social media posts. Using office hours for tabling worked exceptionally well, and with a large committee it would be simple to fill in the gaps between office hours. We had good turnouts in three of our four speakers, pulling between 25 and 40 people for each event. The only one that had low turnout was the career workshop for international students. It is the opinion of the Diversity Committee that this was because of the timing of Diversity Week. We chose to schedule it the week before Midterm Break, and midterm exams seemed to be particularly concentrated in that week this year more so than years past. There is never a week when Truman students are not busy, but it is possible that a different week could have resulted in slightly higher turnout. Overall, the Diversity Committee considered Diversity Week to be a success and was quite happy with the presence it achieved on campus.

Flags and Maps Resolution: The committee sponsored and wrote this resolution to build multilingual campus maps to help international students or students with language barriers better navigate campus. They would also create a stronger aesthetic appeal for our campus for prospective students and a more welcoming, and safe environment for incoming students. Flag poles to symbolize every nation represented by a student at Truman would be a nice gesture to the international community and send a message of inclusion to anyone visiting our campus while also increasing aesthetic appeal. The committee recommended in the resolution that these be included in future renovations on campus.