

MU Faculty Council Committee on Race Relations

Update: March 26, 2015

Faculty Council has a standing committee on Diversity Enhancement, which deals with all aspects of diversity and inclusivity. After the Chancellor's listening session of December 1, 2014, it became clear that Council as well as the faculty at large could benefit from a special committee that focused on racial discrimination at MU.

Council Support and Initial Action

In January 2015, as Faculty Council Chair, I asked Council for support to create the committee proposed above. Council expressed approval and suggested the committee be considered long-term ad hoc, meaning it would neither be a short-lived nor a standing committee. I also asked Berkley Hudson if he would consider chairing the committee, and he agreed to do this. In addition, Faculty Council passed a resolution in February that expressed support of Chancellor Loftin's efforts to improve race relations on campus.

Committee Purpose

It is our observation that the majority of MU faculty is aware of incidents of racism on this campus. And they disapprove. However, this majority does not grasp the magnitude of racial discrimination experienced by MU students of color. In other words, the majority understands racism in terms of unfortunate incidents, not in terms of daily life for the student of color.

The purpose of this Race Relations Committee is to address widespread unawareness of racial insensitivity on campus. This problem occurs with more frequency than is commonly believed, especially among white faculty who make up three-fourths of the overall faculty. This in mind, we see the uniqueness of this committee as its message; the committee focus will be the white faculty.

Committee Composition

This committee is being constructed for effectiveness. If it does not resemble other diversity committees (Fig. 1), it is because its purpose is different. The committee will be comprised of 10 to 12 members—roughly half Caucasian and half colleagues of color. It will have 2 students—one graduate and one undergraduate. It will also have a staff member and 8 to 9 faculty members. The committee will be chaired by a Caucasian professor, who can lead the communication effort to the white majority, helping them understand the problem. The committee will be supplemented with a "ring of advisors and liaisons," who are faculty, staff and administration colleagues with experience, empathy and passion for this issue.

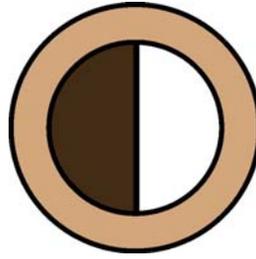


Figure 1. Graphic to illustrate composition of the MU Race Relations Committee.

Committee Approach

This committee will assume the best intentions of the majority white faculty. Therefore, the message will be one of persuasion rather than confrontation, and the intent will be to help rather than to accuse. The delivery of this message will be decided by the committee. A summary of the approach can be found in Table 1.

Table 1. The approach of the MU Race Relations Committee.

Not This Approach	But This Approach
Use positive clichés—inclusivity, diversity	Use descriptive language, negative or positive
Celebrate cultural differences	Point out inadvertent racial discrimination
Message to campus	Message to the racial majority (Caucasian)
Confront	Persuade
Minority faculty member as Chair	Majority faculty member as Chair
Broad perspective—discrimination	Narrow focus—race discrimination

Progress

It is important to appreciate the difficulty in constructing an effective committee and to understand the process of forming a committee in Faculty Council. An effective committee is not decreed, as if the Faculty Council Chair were supreme ruler. Rather, a committee is formed as the Chair describes a need, builds consensus, and receives approval from the voting members. Nor is an effective committee built in haste. Instead, it is formed with care given to potential membership, reporting line, charge, and approach. Since 2013, the most effective committees in Faculty Council were built over a 4-month period.

Construction of the Race Relations Committee at MU has been going on since January 2015. It is nearly complete. Our plan is to propose membership names to the Faculty Council Executive Committee on April 16, 2015, then to vet those names in closed session of Faculty Council on April 23, 2015. Once the committee is formed, it will begin its work.

Craig Roberts, Chair of MU Faculty Council on University Policy
 Berkley Hudson, Chair of MU Race Relations Committee