By Kristin Luciani   Feb 28, 2013

Campus Speaks Out on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion at Town Halls

Photos by Erik Jepsen/UC San Diego Publications

The need for community outreach, staff and faculty education, and a focus on retention were a few of the common themes expressed by UC San Diego community members at campus town halls to discuss equity, diversity and inclusion. Moderated by Linda Greene, vice chancellor for equity, diversity and inclusion, the town halls offered a forum for UC San Diego students, faculty and staff to share their experiences and ideas for improving the campus climate and supporting a diverse campus population.

The Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Town Halls, held Feb. 25 and 26, were conducted as part of UC San Diego's overall strategic planning process, for which a variety of town halls have already taken place over the last few months (see plan.ucsd.edu).

"What we do must be grounded in an honest assessment of UC San Diego's strengths and challenges," said Greene. She explained that the subject of equity, diversity and inclusion deserves several town hall meetings to be sure that leadership hears from students, faculty and staff on this

important topic. "Today, we want to gather your perspectives," she said.

Attendees were asked to share their thoughts about how UC San Diego could better support and attract a diverse campus population as well as what the campus could do to create a more inclusive and engaging environment.

Staff member Billiekai Boughton, chair of the Veteran's Association at UC San Diego, stressed the importance of remembering minority groups that do not fall into the category of historically underrepresented—a sentiment that was echoed by several others. "Our student veterans are not treated as part of diversity," she commented. "There is no retention program for them, and we don't track them to know how many graduate." Veterans bring a different worldview to campus, she explained, and have extensive experience working with a diverse group of people. "I feel that is a huge benefit to diversity on our campus." Boughton suggested establishing a student veteran resource center on campus to support this group.

Issac Garcia-Muñoz, a graduate student in the department of music, talked about community outreach programs as an important way to foster diversity and inclusion. He described a children's music ensemble he works with in Spring Valley that has enriched his own educational experience, as well as exposed a group of historically underrepresented students and their families to what UC San Diego has to offer. He noted that funding for programs like this is critical.

Several attendees spoke about the need for UC San Diego's student body, as well as faculty, staff and leadership, to represent the rich diversity of California, and specifically the San Diego region. Beyond the numbers, many spoke about the need to focus on retention of diverse students, faculty and staff. Campus education—through intergroup dialogue, training faculty and staff about what diverse hiring practices are allowed, and other processes—was identified as a critical component toward making UC San Diego a more inclusive environment.

"We are very concerned about equity, diversity and inclusion in the strategic planning," said Patrick Velasquez, director of the Office of Academic Support and Instructional Services (OASIS). "We stand ready to support the process; we simply want to be included."

Jim Lin, a professor of mathematics who has been at UC San Diego for nearly 30 years, emphasized the importance of communication with respect to diversity best practices. "Just having this town hall, a two- hour conversation about diversity, I regard this to be a major victory."

Several speakers emphasized that the entire campus must take responsibility for equity, diversity and inclusion. As one staff member said, "Equity, diversity and inclusion needs to be integrated with all university efforts."

The next strategic planning town hall on equity, diversity, and inclusion for UC San Diego faculty, staff, and students will take place at the UC San Diego Medical Center in Hillcrest on March 15 from 2-4 p.m.

Campus members can track the progress of UC San Diego's strategic planning process and give input at plan.ucsd.edu. Individuals interested in being part of a work group or focus group on equity, diversity and inclusion may contact diversity@ucsd.edu.

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