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JRN 200, Objective III

Observation Paper II

October 31, 2013

In response to an email invite I attended an Oakland University Town Hall Meeting on Monday, October 28, 2013 scheduled from 5:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m., upstairs in the conference room of the Oakland Center, on the Oakland University campus for the results on the Climate Survey that was conducted earlier in the year for students, staff and faulty members.

Just outside the door of the conference room a women was seated at a table in who was taking names and crossing them off the list in her hands. Her name tag read Renee Dembeck, Office of the President. She crossed my name off and allowed me entry into the room.

A gentleman who said he was from the Oakland University video department was setting up video equipment at the back of the room to record the meeting. There were several large round tables covered with a black table cloth in the room. Towards the front areas they also had a gold cloth in the center with water glasses and a carafe of ice water. There were plenty of chairs around each table. To the far right of the room was a buffet style set up of foods such as raw vegetables, hummus, and crackers that I seen a glimpse of; however, I did not go through the line and have any of the offerings. I did enjoy a glass of ice water at the table I was seated though.

Betty Youngblood, the Interim President, approached the podium first and gave her speech. She spoke on the need of developing a warm and welcoming university culture. And put the question out to her audience that tied in the focus of the survey which was, “Are we merely tolerating of those who are different or embracing them for their differences?” She concluded her speech with introducing Dr. Pat Dolly, the Senior Adviser to the president on diversity.

Dr. Dolly had overseen the whole process of acquiring the survey, sending it out via email, collecting the survey results and analysis of the results to get a baseline for a starting point on going forth to work on making a more diverse climate at Oakland University. President Betty Youngblood left the meeting immediately following her speech.

At the time the president had started speaking more people took to being seated at a table. At that point I tried to get an estimate of how many bodies were in the room and it was around 50 counting myself. There was still some movement about with people milling to and from the food table. Also, there was small chatter around the room and crunching of the food and sipping of refreshments were very noticeable from the table to my right. There were no name tags for the guests. The speaker system was nice enough to hear the presenters fairly well. Given the size of the room and those in attendance, either the room was too big or the crowd was too small because it felt somewhat empty.

Dr. Dolly introduced two women who worked on developing the questions and performed the analysis of the survey results, Sowmya Anand & Linda Owens, both with a long list of credentials to support their involvement.

These woman shared the survey results, lead by Linda Owens using a Power Point presentation, projected on a very large screen for the audience to visualize as she read the numbers.

This survey was sent in an email to the Oakland University Staff, Faculty members and the Student body in March 2013. I did not see the survey because I was not part of the student body at that time. I did ask to see a copy of the survey and a hard copy was not available.

The survey was described as a 5 point scale, with responses for Poor given a 1 and responses for Very Good given a 5. The first set of numbers discussed was the frame size of the survey:

Faculty Staff Students

The estimated frame size 1,898 1,335 18,767

Completes 258 463 1,306

Response Rate 13.6% 34.7% 6.9%

When they were digging into the result numbers the pace picked up as they moved. Linda did say that the reports were on the Oakland University website and would have greater detail as they only highlighted some of the results at the meeting not all of them. Also, they will probably send out a brief caption of the results in an email to students. She also explained that any results with less than 15 responses were collapsed to help shorten the survey.

After the survey results were read, Sowmya Anand asked us to speak to each other at our tables for about 15 minutes and then they would pass a microphone around for each table to share their questions, comments or concerns based on the data results with the survey team. The survey team will assemble tasks forces so if you want to have a voice in the solutions get involved with a task force group Dr. Dolly advised the audience members. “This will be a year – long process” she added.

I was seated at a table with two other women. One of them seemed comfortable enough to converse with me when I asked if either of them had taken the survey. She answered with a no and explained that she was their taking notes as a journalist. We introduced ourselves to each other. Her name is Megan, and she recently graduated Oakland University with a degree in Journalism and now she is a graduate student in Communications, and works at the Oakland Press and will be writing a story for the paper about this meeting.

A staff member named Jean Ann, who runs the Center for Student Activities sat down at our table and asked what questions or comments we had so far? The third student at the table had most of the conversation with her as Megan and I chatted a bit. Just after the meeting I followed up with Jean Ann in regards to a comment one of the audience members made who identified herself as an older student, and how she perceived herself to be a minority with instructors dismissing her presence because of her age. I expressed to Jean Ann how the student body is obviously composed primarily of very young people and a few of us older students do stand out when we walk into a classroom.

She asked if this might be a topic to generate interest in forming a group? I said I don’t know, it may be something to look in to. This sparked another idea which is to follow up with her another day for information that may lead to my first news story.