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ACADEMICS (/ACADEMICS)	FUTURE STUDENTS (/FUTURESTUDENTS)	CURRENT STUDENTS (/STUDENTS)	ALUMNI (/ALUMNI)
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Oakland University Senate (/?sid=230)

Senate Home Page
[\(/senate/\)](#)

Senate Members
[\(/?id=7559&sid=230\)](#)

Senate Committee Charges
[\(/?id=7570&sid=230\)](#)

Committee Members
[\(/?id=7571&sid=230\)](#)

Constitution
[\(/?id=7572&sid=230\)](#)

Steering Committee Members
[\(/?id=7573&sid=230\)](#)

Reports and Proposals
[\(/?id=7574&sid=230\)](#)

Senate Archives Index
[\(/?id=7575&sid=230\)](#)

[OU Home \(/\)](#) > [Oakland University Senate \(/?id=0&sid=230\)](#) > [Senate Committee Charges \(/?id=7570&sid=230\)](#) > [Senate Committee Annual Reports \(/?id=7578&sid=230\)](#) > [Committee on Human Relations](#)

Committee on Human Relations

Annual Report

2001-2002

Date: Thursday, 11 Apr 2002

Yesterday, I chaired and attended my very last meeting of the Human Relations Committee naturally, as I move gently toward retirement in two years, this puts me in a reflective, even valedictory, mood.

During this academic year, the Committee met monthly; and we were all struck by two obvious facts--that the Committee had very little actual business before it--and that this is clearly a good thing!

Only one issue of substance was raised one Committee member was concerned that the University's failure to fill in the gap left by the loss of the grant for SSS (Student Success Services) meant that we were walking away from a group of students (usually economically and academically disadvantaged students) whom we had helped in the past.

The Committee considered this issue, but not everyone agreed that this was a problem--or, at least, that it was a problem we could actually solve. However, we invited Glenn McIntosh and Gloria Sosa to attend a meeting and give us their perspectives. Both agreed that the 10% graduation rate of the SSS meant that this program was really a poor investment of our resources. Both felt that our main goal at present should be the increase of FACULTY members of color and that we should be investigating new methods of teaching, of tenure-rewards, and of collegiality.

Beyond these matters, members of the Committee felt, as I did, that to a certain extent the Human Relations Committee is a truly STANDING committee precisely because of its own success. I realized that when the Committee was created, in the late 1980's--and I became its first Chair--many of its stated goals have, in fact, been achieved there is an Office of Equity; there is an Ethnic Diversity Requirement in the curriculum; and there has been a significant change in the cultural climate on campus and in our community.

For example, this year, our first meeting occurred the day after 9-11. We thought we could help--organize panels, bring in guest speakers, etc. But before we could anything we discovered to our happy surprise that all these things WERE being done--from President Russi's call to faculty to devote class time to discussion of the issues to the work in the Center for Student Activities and the Residence Halls which resulted in MANY panels, lectures, discussions around the issues of race and ethnicity.

So whither the Human Relations Committee?

At times, I think the Committee might actually be put on ice for a time--to be revived when and if it is again needed. Alternatively, it might be constructed on the model, say, of a Student or Academic Conduct Committee--that is, formed as needed from a pool of faculty and staff already identified as knowledgeable and interested in these issues.

Either of the two continuing members of the Committee, Barbara Hamilton and Addington Coppin, would make an excellent Chair for the next academic year; and they too have discussed possible future directions and potential organizational models for the Committee.

Personally, I feel very proud of having been a part of the work of this Committee for almost 15 years and am grateful that I had a chance to be part of it.

And so I pass the torch it's still alight--but in a markedly different world.

Respectfully and sincerely,
Brian Murphy

[2001-2002 Committee membership: Brian Murphy, Chair (Department of English), Anahid Kulwicki (School of Nursing), Addington Coppin (School of Business Administration), Barbara Hamilton (Department of Rhetoric, Communications and Journalism), Vice President for Academic Affairs appointees: Josephine Hairston, Rasul Chaudhry, Vice President for Student Affairs appointees: Rakhi Roy, Geri Graham, President of the University Student Congress appointees: Rhonda Hanna]



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Future Graduate Students (/grad)
Current Students (/students)
Alumni (/alumni)
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Donors (/giving)

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