TO:  Marcus Thompson, Chief Administrative Officer, Mississippi Board of Trustees
Institutions of Higher Learning
FROM: Martin Hatton, MUW Chief Diversity Officer
DATE:  30 November 2011
RE:  MUW Campus Diversity Progress Report to IHL Diversity Committee

Leadership of the MUW Diversity Committee is comprised primarily of members of the campus Planning and Institutional Effectiveness (PIE) Council, the current chief diversity officer being the chair of PIE Council. Tentative membership of the MUW Diversity Committee was approved during the October 21st PIE Council meeting and was reported to the IHL Diversity Committee on October 24th. One initial member of the MUW Diversity Committee who was named to the subcommittee addressing the use of underrepresented professionals, contractors, and other vendors stepped down as was reported to the IHL Diversity Committee on October 28th; that position was filled on November the 8th by Dr. Irene Pintado, Assistant Professor of Health Education (please see “MUW_Diversity_Committee_Members_28Oct2011update” PDF attached for current structure).

The MUW Diversity Committee is led by a steering committee comprised of the CDO, the chairs of four subcommittees, and the SGA Vice President. Subcommittees have been meeting to review the responsibilities outlined in the IHL Diversity Plan and have been charged by the CDO to begin developing definitions of diversity that represent criteria addressed within the IHL Diversity Plan, criteria addressed by the Department of Labor, and factors that reflect the makeup, mission, and strategic goals of MUW.

The key question or concern raised within subcommittees had to do with orientation. Steering committee chairs requested more information from the CDO, who in turn requested copies of power point presentations from the IHL Diversity Committee. IHL provided a copy of the March 29th presentation by Dr. Wendy Thompson from the Tennessee Board of Regents’ Office of Access and Diversity. Both CDO’s from Mississippi IHL institutions with active diversity plans offered to come to the MUW campus and present their diversity plans. Dr. Tommy Stevenson, Director of the Office of Diversity & Equity Programs and CDO for MSU presented an overview of MSU’s diversity plan on November the 8th in a general assembly of MUW faculty, staff and students. Dr. Rebecca N. Woodrick, Director of the Office of Affirmative Action/EEO and CDO for USM spent most of the day on November the 15th meeting first with the Director of Human Resources and university General Counsel Mr. Perry Sansing in the morning, meeting with two of the MUW Diversity Committee’s subcommittees (addressing employment and contracting) in the early afternoon, and then presenting USM’s diversity plan in a general assembly of MUW faculty, staff and students in the late afternoon. Additionally, Mr. Terry L. Woodard, District Manager of Sodexo (outsourced enterprises/contractor for campus facilities management and food services), offered an “Insights on Innovation” luncheon devoted to diversity for the MUW Diversity Committee and the wider MUW campus community on November the 7th.
The steering committee met briefly just prior to the November 18th PIE Council meeting to review reactions to the prior two weeks’ worth of diversity presentations, subcommittee activity, and progress toward defining diversity for the MUW campus. The MUW CDO provided both the steering committee members and PIE Council a summary of criteria to consider (please see “PIE_DefiningDiversity_18Nov2011” PDF, attached) as a basis for generating discussion. One steering committee chair provided the following as her group’s organizational definition, taken directly from Sue, D. W. (2010). Microaggressions in everyday life: Race, gender & sexual orientation. Wiley & Sons: Hoboken, NJ:

*We define a multicultural organization as committed (action as well as words) to diverse representation throughout all levels, sensitive to maintaining an open, supportive, and responsive environment, working toward and purposefully including elements of diverse cultures in its ongoing operations, carefully monitoring organizational policies and practices to the goals of equal access and opportunity, and authentic in responding to changing policies and practices that block cultural diversity* (p. 225).

Another member of PIE Council not on the MUW Diversity Committee provided a very thoughtful set of criteria for consideration (please see “Kempker_Diversity_28Nov2011” PDF, attached).

The CDO clarified the goal of this activity—to consider the essential defining criteria for the development of a campus diversity mission statement and for very specific operationalization into our 5-year plan (the concern being attempting to do those steps prior to clearly explicating diversity for the campus would be premature and would confound progress). The CDO also stressed the IHL Diversity Plan’s timeline, indicating that MUW must conclude the bulk of its exploratory work by February 1, 2012. The defining characteristics, mission statement, background research/data gathering, and the initial outline for each year of the 5-year plan must be developed by February 1st in order to begin the process of refining the plan in campus committee discussions and securing cabinet-level approval, including budget, by May 1, 2012.

Subcommittees are continuing to meet early in December. No meeting is set yet for the steering committee, but plans are to meet early in January once campus is back in session for the SP12 Term.