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Intellectual Diversity Act, Report and Survey, House Bill 154

Submitted by: Michelle Haberland

4/21/2008

Question:

Would the Faculty Senate and appropriate administrators please comment on the impact of HB154, Intellectual Diversity in Higher Education Act (http://www.legis.state.ga.us/legis/2007_08/fulltext/hb154.htm), on the Georgia Southern University community? The bill, passed in 2007, requires that each of the units under the Board of Regents engage in the preparation and publication of an annual report on Intellectual Diversity at that unit. How was the 2007 study of our campus prepared and by whom? Where can one find a copy of that study? Would the Faculty Senate and appropriate administrators please comment on the process behind the creation of the "University System of Georgia Intellectual Diversity Study," a random, system-wide survey of student opinions about diversity on system campuses? Finally, what faculty governance structures are in place to ensure that the concerns of faculty are reflected in the University's annual report and the student survey?

Rationale:

Although the text of the bill suggests the promotion a tolerant campus atmosphere, the survey of students is remarkably limited in its conceptualization of categories of potential discrimination, giving great attention to certain categories and maintaining an utter silence on others. Few issues are more critical to our mission as a university than intellectual diversity.

Senate Response:

From the 6/24/2008 Minutes: The SEC received one request for information about House Bill 154, the Intellectual Diversity in Higher Education Act, asking when, how, and with what results Georgia Southern had prepared a report on our own Intellectual

Diversity. Provost Bleicken has informed the SEC that we prepared no such report because it seems that the bill never went to the Governor, perhaps in part because the University System worked against it. An unspecified person or group has apparently conducted surveys of system students that suggested that some students at some unnamed universities were having their rights trampled on. These surveys were suspect in their methodology and conclusions, so the USG had UGA run a survey with sound methods sampling students across the entire system regarding their experience vis-à-vis free speech issues. The results of this survey are not yet available; at least GSU has not seen them.