



NIOT BG Meeting Minutes – December 3, 2020
Virtual Meeting via WebEx

Attending: Ana Brown, Emily Dunipace, Gary Saunders, Heather Saylor, Jennifer McCary, Marilyn Yakumithis, Michael Campbell, Adam Skaff, Taylor Jefferson, Tom Klein, Bill Herald, Breion Hawkins, Jan Larsen, Kate Jefferson, Michael Smith, Dawn Shinew

Meeting started at 3:04. Emily welcomed everyone. Discussion about possibility of using Zoom for future meetings. Ana Brown indicated she would set up spring meetings on Zoom.

Gary Saunders moved to approve the minutes from the November meeting. Tom Klein seconded. Minutes were approved.

Open Dialogue/Current Landscape – Tom Klein discussed activities related to Fareed Zakaria’s recent book entitled Ten Lessons for a Post-Pandemic World. Working with Kiwanis and church. Would like to provide additional opportunities for discussion through NIOT. Emily thanked Tom for his work. Tom quoted poet, XXX “We need to love one another or die.”

Emily discussed the extent to which pandemic can describe to many things happening right now – racism, sexism, ableism.

Gary talked about health care workers in our community who are under a great deal of stress. In the spring there were demonstrations of appreciation for health care workers but that is not happening now, though the situation is as bad if not worse. Still have a movement in the larger culture claiming that COVID is not a real threat, making the work of health care workers even more challenging. BG’s Ministerial Association has talked about how this might be done through each congregation. There is a sense of urgency as the holidays draw nearer.

Jennifer shared that there have been a couple of bias incident reports at BGSU. One from November 7th related to the initial calling of the election – mostly students bantering on social media and one student’s comments was reported to be racist, sexist, and homophobic. Staff worked with the student to understand the lines between free speech and hate speech. On November 20th, a report came from off campus about interactions during a gaming session and a BGSU student using racist slurs. This report was also addressed with the student.

Committee Reports – Nothing to report.

Community Partner Reports

- BGSU Hillel: Marilyn reported that most students left for the break so it has been quiet. Preparing for Hanukkah and hosting a virtual candle lighting ceremony on FB. Begins Dec. 10-17 every night at 6 pm.
- BGSU Athletics: Dealing with COVID. Have a game tonight. Status changes on a day to day basis. Basketball starting. Athletes wearing t-shirts with social justice messages. Football team did a unity march before a game. Trying to organize a unity march near MLK Day. Using social media to highlight these efforts. Conducted a unity march on campus and it had a good turnout. Trying to keep social justice issues front and center.
- BGSU Police: Most students have migrated home so things are pretty quiet. On campus population down to about 100 students.
- BGPD: Ana and Adam participated in a panel discussion hosted by BRAVE. Good discussion and had a lot of positive feedback. BGPD is interested in participating in similar opportunities.
- HRC: Launched community reads “So You Want to Talk about Race”. Close to 75 participants in the first session. Next meeting in on Monday, Dec. 7th. Meet briefly as a whole group and then divide into smaller groups for discussion. Will continue with this format. Some discussion about how NIOT might help to expand the impact of these discussions.

On-Going (Old) Business

“Imagining a Safe and Inclusive BG” – Emily mentioned an earlier conversation in which she said that BG is “92% White” but she checked and the actual figure is 83.4% White.

NIOT’s United Against Hate Week – Breion described the various tasks for each day to promote United Against Hate Week through social media. Goal is to initiate conversations and raise awareness. Would nice to have more engagement but this is a new initiative so may take some time to get this going. Hoping to have more participation by the end of the week. This is the national United Against Hate Week so NIOT’s FB page has been visited by mayors and members of other communities.

Planning Focus Areas and Creating the NIOT Calendar for 2021 – What should the priorities be for NIOT in 2021? Possibility of a virtual Interfaith Breakfast. Trying to make connections with other community partners – lots of similar agendas but many of the other groups have a much more focused agenda. Tom mentioned the anti-Muslim comments after 9/11 that encouraged him to offer an Inter-Faith/Multi-Faith dialogue. Tom asked whether NIOT has been addressing religious divisiveness? Emily pointed to the InterFaith Breakfast. Gary mentioned two panel discussions on Islamophobia panel discussions that were well attended. Received a request from a community member for NIOT to focus on LGBTQX community with the goal of increasing understanding and feelings of welcome. Possibility of hosting a NIOT community group conversation with other NIOT groups or similar groups from the area. Might be able to make this happen through personal connections at other universities and communities. Gary recommended a focus in order to get into some particular experiences. Police/community relations? Race relations in schools? Education/interaction with businesses? Emily gave an example of a national NIOT meeting focused on the rise of extremism and recruitment to extremist groups in our society, especially given the online activity of children and young people.

Upcoming Events – HRC has the MLK Celebration in January. Will be a virtual event this year. Gary reminded the group that some of the virtual experiences are better and have had more engagement than face to face interactions, though it is still possible to draw people together for important events.

Possibility of bringing some national leaders to BG community. Speakers from the Southern Poverty Law Center might be a good place to start. The national NIOT organization also has good connections for speakers. Ana mentioned the Beyond the Dream speaker series, Black Issues Conference, LatinX Conference – lots of BGSU activities planned for spring.

Next Meeting – Thursday, January 7, 2021; 3:00-4:30 pm Virtual Location