March 26, 2014

To the Selection Committee for the President’s Champions for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Awards:

I am pleased to nominate the student organization Unison for the President’s Champions for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Award. Patrick McKinstry is the current student president. As Unison’s faculty advisor, I have witnessed what can happen when a group of people from a variety of backgrounds pool their strengths to make a difference. Students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (or even as an ally to these individuals) don’t always find the world a welcoming place. Even at an institution of higher learning, LGBTQ students can experience a “chilly climate,” an environment where they don’t feel completely safe. In these situations, visible support and educational programming is crucial. The first time I met one Unison member, for example, she said, “I have been trying so hard to find other people like me on campus.” Encounters like this are at the heart of Unison, and the current roster of members exemplifies the group’s spirit of openness, optimism, compassion, and activism.

Two criteria for the award are: “Regularly demonstrates behaviors reflecting equity, diversity and inclusions and champions the ideals of equity, diversity and inclusion” and “Develops unique and innovative programs and initiatives that significantly enhance Delta’s ability to facilitate full participation of all community members to benefit from working and studying in an equitable, diverse and inclusive environment.” Unison members meet these criteria and help to make Delta a welcoming environment for all. The group meets on campus once a week and regularly welcomes visitors. This year, Unison participated in both the Fall and Winter Club and Organization Days and hosted an awareness table during the Passport to Delta program. Members hosted three other awareness tables over the course of the year, distributing information to the community at large about LGBTQ issues and informing students of the college’s Safe Space program. Unison’s own mission is “to help educate the general public student body on the issues at hand that the LGBT community faces…to be a safe haven for those on campus who feel unsafe or alone…[and] [to promote] self-confidence and being yourself, for we feel that everyone is an individual and should have the right to be who they are and not have to change for anyone.” Every time a Unison member staffs a table, he or she is making LGBTQ life visible and creating that safe haven for an LGBTQ person. He or she is showing the community that one can be out and proud at Delta.

Unison members tackle LGBTQ visibility in additional ways. They have begun collecting feedback from the community via a survey they developed (see attached). In honor of Awareness Month, on April 10, Unison will facilitate a discussion of LGBTQ-related issues; this event is in conjunction with a screening of the documentary *A Fish Out of Water*. They are collecting materials for the new LGBTQ resource area in the E Wing, and they are building a relationship with Sacred Heart Rehabilitation Center in an effort to reach out to area high schools. With the help of Student Engagement, they have started providing community members with rainbow bracelets and LGBTQ-themed buttons, including one that says “Proud to an Ally.” The group is active on Facebook and Twitter.

Unison supports other campus groups and initiatives. As a part of their participation in the PB Jam event, Unison highlighted the plight of the homeless LGBTQ community while raising funds for the City Rescue Mission of Saginaw and the Good Samaritan Rescue Mission of Bay City. The Unison team came in second in terms of overall PB Jam donations. Unison also assisted with PTK’s C4 college completion event.

I am nominating the following core members of Unison for the EDI award:

* Patrick McKinstry serves as the group’s president and acts as the group’s liaison with Student Engagement. He coordinates the weekly meetings and organizes most events.
* Megan Murphy serves as the group’s vice president. She represents the group at CAB and frequently staffs awareness tables. She has researched LGBTQ resource centers at other colleges. She also works on reaching out to members of the college community.
* Aleksis Landers Tweets on behalf of Unison. She frequently staffs events and does classroom visits.
* Josh Bouchard staffs awareness tables and does classroom visits. He is the liaison for Living Proud, SVSU’s student organization.
* Cristina Rush staffs awareness tables and works with the local organization Equality Bay City. She helped the group recognize the Transgender Day of Remembrance on Facebook. She made the presentation to CAB about the need for bracelets and buttons.
* Steve Richmond staffs awareness tables. He is also a part of the Human Library project, an initiative to raise awareness of all the different kinds of diversity we have at Delta.

Please let me know if you have any questions, and thank you for giving Unison consideration.

Sincerely,

Lauren Smith

Assistant Professor of English