March 17, 2011

To: Richard Sigurdson, Chair, Faculty Council

From: Mark Lawall, Chair, Equity, Diversity & Human Rights Committee

Subject: Annual Report of the Equity, Diversity & Human Rights Committee

Summary of Terms of Reference

The Equity, Diversity and Human Rights committee of the Faculty of Arts is broadly tasked with “recommending an educational and awareness program within the Faculty… to stress the importance of human rights, equity and diversity, and lead to the implementation of these principles…” To these ends the committee should work to implement the recommendations of the Employment Systems Review (n.b. these reviews are no longer carried out faculty by faculty but now by the University as a whole), and to carry out research and monitoring related to equity and diversity within the Faculty.

Activity Report

Since September 2009, the first academic term in which I was in this position of convener for the committee, the EDHR has met six times with the last meeting being in September 2010. The immense length of time between the last meeting and the current report may be interpreted in many ways, but the result is that, although much was accomplished over the past two years, there many outstanding issues to be addressed.

The first major task of the committee was to synthesize the Equity Reports submitted by most departments in the preceding few years. Committee discussion of these reports led to my writing a report on the current state of diversity in staffing in departments in the Faculty, with a particular focus on placing these numbers in a comparative perspective. This report was received and approved by the committee in August 2010 and later distributed to department heads for information with a view towards continuing the process of monitoring the current state of affairs and planning for the future. (A copy of that report is attached for information).
The second major accomplishment of the committee was the organization of a visit from Lynette Chappell-Williams, the Associate Vice President for Workforce Diversity and Inclusion at Cornell University. Her time in Winnipeg included meetings with the EDHR committee, Faculty of Arts Support Staff council, and Department Heads (or designates), as well as a general presentation attended by staff and administration from across the University. Her presentations drew particular attention to the need for a visible commitment to the importance of workforce diversity, the importance of grounding any efforts in the fundamental mission of the University (or in our case, the Faculty of Arts), and the long-term nature of successful efforts to improve recruitment and retention of members of designated groups. Among those who attended her presentations, Ms. Chappell-Williams generated considerable interest and enthusiasm.

A third area of activity for the committee was the question of exit interviews as a means of studying why people leave the Faculty and what might be done to improve retention rates. We heard past experiences of Dean Emeritus Robert O’Kell and former Associate Dean, now Vice Provost, Karen Grant.

Over the course of our meetings a wide range of other topics were raised for discussion including gender-neutral restrooms, the impact of time-tableing policies on faculty members’ lives, areas currently inaccessible for people in wheelchairs, and the accommodation of religious holidays (those that do not happen to coincide with statutory holidays), among other topics.

After an initial period, then of frequent meetings, the committee has not met since September 2010 – and the blame for this falls squarely on me as convener. The late spring would be a good time, before too many people disperse for summer research travel, for the committee to set a realistic mission and agenda for the coming