Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. EAD Subcommittee Report: An Analysis of Big Ten University 2009 MLK, Jr. Celebrations

University of Minnesota

University Senate

Equity, Access, and Diversity Committee

April 19, 2010
Summary:

In February 2009, the University Senate’s Equity, Access, and Diversity Committee (EAD) created the EAD Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Subcommittee, or “MLK Subcommittee.” EAD charged the MLK Subcommittee with investigating the timing, event type, and sponsorship of all Big Ten University MLK Celebrations in 2009. This report summarizes the Subcommittee’s research methodology and findings. It also contains key recommendations the Subcommittee proposes the University of Minnesota should follow to ensure that the University’s programming better reflects the University of Minnesota’s stated commitment to diversity and inclusion. Notably, the Subcommittee recommends that the University of Minnesota develop a centralized MLK Day website where all known campus-sponsored or campus-affiliated MLK Day events are posted; promote better advertising of all MLK Day events connected to the University; fund a full-time multicultural programming position in the Office of Equity and Diversity; and establish University-Community and University-Student Group partnerships to create and sustain a University-wide MLK Day of Service.

EAD Committee Charge and Purpose of the Subcommittee’s Report:

The University of Minnesota’s University Senate updated the EAD Committee’s charge on 7-18-05. According to the Senate Bylaws, Article II., Section 5, the Committee’s charge reads as follows:

Duties and Responsibilities
a. To advise the president and administrative offices on the impact of University policies, programs and services on equal opportunity, affirmative action and diversity from a system perspective.
b. To promote compliance among the University community with equal opportunity, affirmative action and diversity laws and policies relating to students and staff.
c. To review policies, programs and services related to equal opportunity for and the diversity of students and employees, and recommend any changes.
d. To bring concerns to the Senate, as appropriate.
e. To recommend to the Senate Consultative Committee such actions or policies as it deems appropriate.

The MLK Subcommittee’s report directly addresses paragraphs “a” and “c” of EAD’s charge. The purpose of this report is to advise the University about “programs and services on… diversity from a system perspective.” Additionally, the report, “review[s]… programs and services related to… the diversity of students and employees,” and “recommend[s]… changes” based on this review.

**Methodology:**

In order to research the timing, event type, and sponsorship of Big Ten University MLK events, the MLK Subcommittee went to every university’s homepage and searched for “MLK,” “MLK Events,” “MLK Calendar,” “MLK Day of Service,” as well as “Martin Luther King, Jr.,” Martin Luther King, Jr. Events,” and “Martin Luther King, Jr. Calendar,” and “Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service.” The Subcommittee then compiled the events found from the search results into Appendix 2, “List of Rev. Dr. MLK, Jr. 2009 Events and Event Descriptions for All Big Ten Schools.” Appendix 1, “Summary of Timing, Type, and Sponsorship of Big Ten University 2009 MLK Events,” was constructed after reading through each event description to determine each event’s type and sponsorship.

Additionally, the Subcommittee went to links connected to the events pages found that referenced additional University or non-University MLK events, advertising, or materials. This investigation helped determine to what extent a given University’s MLK programming included collaborations or interfaces between the University and the non-University community surrounding the University. It also often revealed campus or local area newspaper articles or press releases about the University’s MLK Celebration designed to create wide awareness and participation in the University’s MLK programming. The Subcommittee limited its search to MLK programming at Big Ten Universities occurring in December 2008 to February 2009.

The Subcommittee, furthermore, also reviewed MLK programming at large, public Universities located in others regions of the United States. Committee members, however, opted to present only the result from Big Ten Universities in the report. This decision was made for
two reasons: 1. Since the University of Minnesota is a Big Ten University, other Big Ten
Universities present a ready-made peer group for comparison and 2. The timing, type, and
purpose of MLK programming did not appear significantly different at Universities in other
regions of the country.

**Methodological Rationale:**

**A. Methods Choice**

Although the MLK Subcommittee realizes that a more complete listing of 2009 MLK
events and programming could potentially have been obtained by conducting phone interviews
and/or written surveys of diversity administrators, student programming bodies, and University
student life departments, the Subcommittee specifically decided not to pursue these research
options. The Subcommittee feels that its “snapshot” approach of looking only for MLK events
with a web presence accurately reveals the most well-publicized and, then, likely the most well-
attended, MLK events on a given campus. The MLK Celebration-related websites,
advertisements, press releases, and transcripts of speeches from a given University demonstrate
the importance and profile that the University awards to its MLK activities. Events that are not
well-publicized do not have the ability to make a campus impact or statement about the value
that a University places on its MLK programming, and therefore, as a proxy, the value the
University places on diversity, community service, community outreach, and leadership.

Furthermore, University administrators, colleges, and departments typically want to
publicize the events that they sponsor. This is especially true when those events help promote the
image of the University as an engaged, diverse institution whose outreach and programming
efforts benefit the surrounding community. For these reasons, the Subcommittee does not feel
that its research methods would not allow it to detect significant University-sponsored MLK
programming.

**B. Methods Bias**

The Subcommittee’s methodological approach, however, likely has the potential to miss
student organization MLK programming. Student organizations often may not promote their
events on the web, because they made not have a website. Not every student organization at
every University has an actively-updated website, nor do all student organizations update their websites to feature all of their programming and events. Many student organizations use word-of-mouth, sidewalk chalking, campus newspaper articles, e-mails blasts, social networking announcements, and campus flyering to advertise their events. Having a significant University web presence, especially if the target audience of the student event is only or primarily the membership of the student organization hosting the event, then, is often not as important for student groups to pursue.

For these reasons, student organizations may not know about a centralized University-sponsored MLK Events website, even if the University has such a site where they could post their events. Many Universities that do have such centralized websites, however, do post student events (See the University of Michigan entry in Appendix 2 for a good example). It remains difficult to determine the quality of student MLK event reporting via University MLK websites and campus news articles across the various Big Ten Universities. It remains possible that this Report’s listing of student-sponsored MLK events could significantly underreport the true number of student MLK activities, especially at Universities that do not have a centralized MLK calendar or website.

This potential underreporting methodology bias in the Subcommittee’s MLK report, though, does not affect the results of this study. This is again because MLK events that a University does not promote do not have the ability to demonstrate the University’s commitment to the holiday. The main focus of this report is to analyze University-sponsored or University-advertised MLK events and projects.

**Results:**

A. The Legacy of Dr. King: Why Do Big Ten Universities Celebrate MLK Day?

The scale, number, and type of events and messages a University advertises in celebration of MLK Day communicate the meaning that the University gives to the holiday. As Results Section C demonstrates, many Big Ten Universities widely promote a variety of MLK celebration event types. The messages that many University administrators and student leaders issue about MLK Day demonstrate that they see advertising their MLK celebrations as a way to
promote multiculturalism, diversity, and inclusion of all campus community members. This theme appears across multiple Big Ten Universities that have varying racial/ethnic compositions of their administrative, faculty, staff, and student bodies. Given the universal nature of Dr. King’s messages about bridging and promoting inclusive communities, it makes sense than the number or percentage of racial-ethnic or other minorities at a given educational institution would not be a dispositive indication of the size or profile of its MLK celebrations. Celebrating multiculturalism, diversity, and inclusion benefits all members of a campus community, not just members of select minority groups.

Celebrating Dr. King’s legacy broadly also makes sense pragmatically for many Big Ten Universities. Notably, as Appendix 1 and Figure 2 show, many Big Ten Universities hold a mix of events that promote different goals – academic excellence, social justice, leadership, community service, and the bridging of university communities with other local communities. These goals, in turn, reflect the strategies that Dr. King used to achieve success in the causes he championed. In addition, these goals closely track the mission, vision, and core values statements of many Big Ten Universities. Given the similarities between MLK’s and many universities’ goals, missions, visions, and values, then, it makes sense that many Big Ten schools would choose to hold extensive MLK Celebrations.

**B. The University of Minnesota’s Mission, Vision, Values, and Strategies Support an Expansion of the Visibility and Scope of the University’s MLK Celebrations**

The University of Minnesota’s mission, vision, values, and strategies all strongly support the creation, support, and recognition of “diversity in community” across the entire campus. Encouraging diversity as well as public engagement in learning are two components the University emphasizes are necessary to help the University benefit the state of Minnesota by producing strong leaders and engaging in innovative research.

The University of Minnesota’s mission is, “built on the philosophy that people are enriched by understanding, and that the University should be dedicated to the advancement of learning and the search for truth; to the sharing of this knowledge through education for a diverse community; and to the application of this knowledge to benefit the people of the state, the nation, and the world.” The mission also states the University of Minnesota should strive to “provide an
atmosphere of mutual respect, free from racism, sexism, and other forms of prejudice and intolerance.” The description of the mission under the “Teaching and Learning” section specifically highlights that the University of Minnesota strives to “share… knowledge, understanding, and creativity by providing a broad range of educational programs in a strong and diverse community of learners and teachers, and prepare graduate, professional, and undergraduate students, as well as non-degree-seeking students interested in continuing education and lifelong learning, for active roles in a multiracial and multicultural world.” (Appendix 3).

The University of Minnesota’s Vision, moreover, describes the University’s commitment to public engagement and research from a land grant perspective, “As one of the few comprehensive universities around the world that engages in responsibilities that range broadly from medicine to land grant-oriented agriculture and extension services, our vision is to continue our preeminent role as a publicly engaged university that integrates research, teaching, and public engagement.” (Appendix 3).

Notably, the University of Minnesota’s strategies to achieve this mission and vision are to “create and nurture world-class research and information centers; function as an academic and economic talent magnet; support a diversity of ideas and communities strategically align resources with intellectual and academic goals; serve as a catalyst for economic and cultural growth in Minnesota; and improve the quality of life for Minnesotans.” One specific way the University plans to enact this strategy, moreover, includes “encouraging diversity of ideas and academic freedom and actively creating a diverse community of faculty, students, and staff.”

By more actively and visibly celebrating the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday in co-sponsorship with community groups, the University of Minnesota would have a strong opportunity to send a message that it values diversity and connects with all parts of the Minnesota statewide community, in accordance with its named mission, vision, values, and strategy. Celebrating diversity in a broad-based way on MLK Day makes strategic sense, moreover, given that the Martin Luther King Day holiday is the only diversity-themed holiday on the University’s academic calendar. This fact, combined with the standard for MLK celebrations set by other peer institutions, suggests that the Office for Equity and Diversity would strongly benefit by hiring a multicultural programming representative to help coordinate
MLK celebration planning and advertising, including the creation and maintenance of a centralized MLK Celebration website. This person would help ensure that MLK Celebration programming coordinated with other OED and campus-wide diversity programming in an organized, equitable manner.

Creating and funding this position, especially funding the creation of the centralized MLK celebration website, would allow prospective faculty, staff, and students who are not geographically close to the university to better evaluate the campus’ climate toward diversity. This resource, especially for those who may not be able to travel and would also likely not know about offices or leaders involved in diversity programming, might be the only glimpse of what that campus community’s commitment to diversity and inclusion represents. Ensuring that competitive potential students, staff, and faculty members can gain information about the University of Minnesota’s campus climate surrounding all types of diversity would help the University achieve its strategy of helping the University of Minnesota become, “a universal academic and economic talent magnet.”

C. Event Types

Many Big Ten Universities organize a large variety of MLK events and programming designed to reflect the full legacy of Dr. King. As Figure 1, Figure 2, and the Appendices demonstrate, regardless of when their academic spring session starts, many Big Ten Universities give awards to recognize community leaders furthering Dr. King’s dream; sponsor academic competitions such as essay writing, speeches, and scholarship contests; host creative performances or concerts; organize and promote a Day of Community Service; bring in commemorative speakers, hold workshops and leadership conferences about social justice, peace, or interfaith organizing; host receptions or meals; sponsor exhibits or film festivals about Dr. King; hold a research symposium; or shows films about Dr. King himself or topics related to his work. The content of these event types, moreover, demonstrates the strong connections that Dr. King’s life and legacy have to many Big Ten Universities’ missions, visions, and core values, especially toward the mission of promoting engaged, inclusive campus communities.

Figure 1: Number of Big Ten Universities Promoting a Given Type of MLK Celebration Event.
Figure 2: Number of Event Types per Each Big Ten University.
D. **MLK Celebration Advertising, Sponsorship, and Timing**

All Big Ten Universities had a website dedicated to the promotion of MLK Celebration programming. These websites are listed in the table in Appendix 1. Many Universities made a concerted effort to promote all known MLK events going on in their area, regardless of the origin of the event’s sponsorship. Several universities, such as the University of Wisconsin-Madison, have developed collaborations with existing state-wide or local area community MLK programming and events when designing their own MLK programming.

Many universities, moreover, have MLK Celebrations that either start before or extend well after the MLK holiday itself. In the case of the University of Michigan, MLK celebrations extended over approximately a 6 week period. More commonly, other Big Ten Universities’ programming in honor of MLK Day lasted one to three weeks. It was also not uncommon to find Universities that tied their Black History Month programming to their MLK Celebrations, at least for some events, since February is Black History Month.

E. **Spring Semester Start Dates and MLK Programming**
In 2009, four Big Ten Universities – the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, the University of Iowa, the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and the University of Minnesota – had Spring class schedules that began after the MLK holiday. The remaining seven universities had start dates before the MLK holiday. Excluding the University of Minnesota, which is the school under special analysis for the purposes of this report, the average number of types of events of schools that started before the MLK holiday – 7.33 – vs. the average number of types of events of schools that started after the MLK holiday – 7.86 – did not appear significantly different.

Recommendations:

A. The University of Minnesota should create a centralized MLK website with an MLK Event Calendar where all members of the University community, whether student organizations, staff and employee organizations, academic units, departments, institutes, colleges, or other divisions could post their MLK-related events and programming.

B. The University of Minnesota should seek to create strategic partnerships with potential non-University of Minnesota affiliated organizations in local and state government; community non-profits and organizations; and other Minnesota Colleges and Universities to hold collaborative MLK-day events and programming that encourage members of the University community to engage in service and outreach that benefits Minnesota.

C. The University should ensure that all completely or partially University-sponsored MLK events are well advertised within and beyond the campus community.

D. The University of Minnesota should create a Day of Service, i.e. “A Day On, Not a Day Off,” modeled after other Big Ten Universities’ Day of Service. The creation of such a Day would also help the University of Minnesota answer the federal government’s call for all Americans to engage in community service on MLK Day.

E. The University of Minnesota’s Office of Equity and Diversity should create a full-time multicultural programming position dedicated to MLK celebration and other diversity programming coordination and support.