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Panel vies for increased diversity in workplace

By Clary Tedford
STAFF WRITER

The Diversity Careers Panel hosted the third annual Diversity in the Workplace: Finding a Common Ground presentation from 4-6 p.m. in the Mountain Suites of the Highsmith University Union on Nov. 7.

UNC Asheville's Career Center sponsored the event to provide opportunities for students to gain understanding about some of the issues pertaining to diversity in the workplace, according to Deborah Miles, executive director of the Center for Diversity Education.

During the presentation, panelists shared their positive and negative experiences related to diversity. Brian Davis, special events assistant at the Grove Park Inn, shared a negative work experience due to his sexual preference.

"As a gay man, I'm not allowed to donate blood," Davis said. "The Grove Park Inn actually participated in the Red Cross blood drive. I believe we actually had a couple of stations set up on our property not too long ago."

Davis attributed his frustration to the fact that his O negative blood type would have otherwise made him a perfect candidate.

"I know that I'm fine, my blood is clean. It's not a problem, but I know why they have the regulations," he said. "But it still angered me, considering how many individuals fall into the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community at the Grove Park Inn."

Another panelist talked about ethnic diversity, citing demographics as an important factor in determining workplace diversity.

"As far as African-American folk in downtown Asheville, it doesn't look like it caters to a lot of their social entertainment, and that's one of the biggest challenges. It's just so expensive to live here," said

panelist Ernie "Big E" Howard, social worker at the Randolph Learning Center.

Racial discrimination in the workplace could cost employers big bucks. According to the United States Equal Opportunity Commission, race-based charges concerning workplace discrimination accounted for \$61.4 million dollars in monetary damages in 2006.

The largest annual monetary compensation since 1997 occurred in 2001 with \$86.5 million dollars total for the year. The EOC protects employees from discrimination, as long as their employers have at least 15 employees.

According to Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, it is illegal for employers with 15 or more employees to discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex and religion.

At the panel, speakers discussed how race discrimination differs across cultures. For example, Hope Huskey, business development specialist for the Cherokee Business Development Center, said she was concerned about diversity in the workplace on the Cherokee Indian Reservation.

"Sometimes it's hard to overcome a community or small town mentality," Huskey said. "You want to make sure the person is the best person for the job and for what you're trying to do. You can't just say, 'Oh, he's so-and-so's cousin' or 'We really like him because he's from a different Indian tribe.'"

Title VII applies to state and local governments, as well as employment agencies, labor organizations, and the federal government. These rules do not apply to Indian reservations. Effective May 18, 1988, Section 703(i) of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 sets forth appropriate measures for employers wishing to uphold the American Indian preference exemption.

Students at UNC Asheville agree overall



OKSANA KUKHARETS - STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Panelists Brian Davis, special events assistant at Grove Park Inn; Johnnie Grant, owner and publisher of Urban News; Eric "Big E" Howard, school social worker at Randolph Learning Center; Hope Huskey, counseling and technical assistance to business owners on the Qualla Boundary; and Sarah Nunez, a consultant for non-profits wait for questions while Holly Witenmyer talks to the audience at UNC Asheville's third annual career panel, focusing on diversity in the workplace.

workplace diversity is important.

"I work construction and there's no diversity in my workplace," said Brantly Tyson, senior art student. "It's good to give everyone an equal opportunity."

Ben Berger, senior literature student, said he might not have realized how important diversity was if it was not for his current job at Rezaz, a restaurant whose owner is Persian.

"Before that I worked at the Biltmore

Forest Country Club, which hired people who knew what the country club expectation was," he said. "It had very strict rules and regulations. I think that we're working toward that equality we crave and that we try to have," he said. "I don't think we will ever reach it, of course, but at least it's an ideal."

Spectator Roger Miller, licensed clinical social worker at Randolph Learning Center, said employers need to evaluate workers on job performance as opposed to

where they come from or how they look. "The workplace really needs to reflect the makeup of our community. It's a diverse community," he said.

The panel also included Johnnie Grant, Urban News owner and publisher; and Sarah Nunez, consultant for non-profit and special events including Fiesta Latina.

Miles served as co-moderator with Bryan Stuart Schaffer, assistant professor in the management and accountancy department.

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