

# OFFICE OF SOCIAL EQUITY

Old Main 200, X-1161

## Committed to Inclusion

### Office of Social Equity

The primary mission of the Office of Social Equity (OSE) is to assist the University in creating and achieving a diverse and inclusive campus community. Through the Social Equity Strategic Plan, we attempt to identify innovative strategies that will ensure not only the representation of women, persons of color, persons with disabilities and others, but ensure their full participation in every facet of the Shippensburg University community as well. In addition to the issues of representation, the Social Equity document also focuses on issues of gender, program and physical accessibility, retention, and homophobia. The document encompasses every constituent group represented at Shippensburg University.

The OSE plays a major role as an advocate for the protection of the rights of all constituencies to work and learn in an environment that is free from discrimination and harassment. The advocacy is accomplished through training programs, policy development and implementation, and occasionally through complaint investigations and resolutions.

The OSE is responsible for providing leadership for the University's Sexual Harassment Fact Finding Board and the Human Relations Fact Finding Board. Both bodies are designed to receive and investigate complaints of harassment and/or discrimination.

Additionally, the office provides leadership for four University committees, staffs two major committees for the President and Provost, and manages the University's Human Understanding grants.

The OSE serves as the University's representative office for the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 Compliance; monitors all hiring; coordinates and provides services to students with disabilities; investigates complaints; develops, implements, and monitors the University's Affirmative Action Plan; and acts as an advisor to the President and Provost on relevant equity issues.

The OSE also offers the Workforce Recruitment Program for College Students with Disabilities, a program designed to provide summer and permanent job opportunities in the federal government and the private sector for college students with disabilities. This

program is co-sponsored by the Department of Defense and the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities and offers job opportunities such as computer programming, engineering, financial management, writing, scientist, and administrative. All workers receive full benefits, even those only working as summer interns, and many of the internships have led to full-time placement upon completion of their degree.

"Touching Base" is the newsletter that is printed by the OSE each semester and is used to inform faculty, staff, and students of upcoming events such as the Day of Human Understanding and the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day events. You will also find information on available resources provided by the OSE, intelligent articles, and even some interesting facts.

The OSE staff, which consists of Dr. Lois Waters (Director), Paula Madey (Equity Assistant), Penny Mowery (Staff Associate), and several student employees and graduate assistants, is always available to assist you. Drop by our office at Old Main 200 or call at X-1161 anytime!

## **What is Social Equity?**

The question is sometimes asked, "What is social equity?" The term has become familiar to those of us who work or study at Shippensburg University, but what does the term actually mean? Furthermore, what actions or rights does it protect or create? And what importance does it have for me?

The concept of social equity is used at Shippensburg University to refer to a set of standards which apply to our personal and social relationships with other individuals and/or groups. These standards consist of a bundle of rights and duties which apply to members of certain "protected classes" in society.

These "protected classes" are defined by state and federal law and include: race, color, national origin, religion, creed, gender (sex), age, disability, veteran's status, and political belief. These groups have been designated as "protected" because of certain "injustices" which have occurred against the members of these groups in the past and present. Social equity is the means used to help to redress these injuries. The term also covers the protection of certain "fundamental" rights which we all enjoy as citizens of a free society.

Therefore, social equity is really nothing more than doing justice to our fellow employees, students, or acquaintances who have, as a result of membership in a

protected class, suffered injuries now or in the past. These injuries may take many forms but generally consist of some form of harassment or discrimination which has caused the victim to suffer a loss of the equal rights and opportunities that we all cherish as American citizens.

The actual implementation of a program of social equity may take several forms. It may take the form of an extra effort to recruit employees or students from historically disadvantaged groups. It may mean providing a helper to assist a blind student by taking notes in class. Or it may consist of responding in a sensitive and expeditious way to a complaint of sexual, racial, or disability discrimination or harassment.

As you can see, social equity may take many forms depending on the issue or problem being addressed. The important thing to keep in mind is that the social equity program at Shippensburg University represents a serious effort on the part of the University community to provide an environment that is characterized by freedom and opportunity for all individuals and groups who wish to become a part of this special place we call Shippensburg University.

## **Serving Students with Disabilities**

### ADA Compliance

One of the most important challenges for university faculty is the identification of and assistance to students with disabilities. The Americans with Disabilities Act provides protection for individuals with physical, mental, or learning disabilities. The ADA upholds standards for compliance in employment practices, communications, and the policies, procedures and practices of institutions of higher education.

Disability access is an important issue in higher education. Shippensburg University has endeavored to provide an open and receptive environment for students who may have a disability and are otherwise qualified to attend the University. The institution has taken corrective action in areas and activities covering the whole range of university operations.

It is important to remember that the ADA does not require any academic institution to compromise the integrity of its programs or curriculum. What the Act does require is that institutions of higher education make reasonable accommodations for those students who are disabled but otherwise qualified to participate in the academic program.

Examples of methods and techniques which have been used to accommodate students with disabilities have included: extended time for test taking, oral (as opposed to written)

examinations, tutors, use of auxiliary aids (such as carbon-copy notebook paper), use of the Kurzweil reader (a computerized device that reads textbooks on audio tape), priority scheduling, use of a tape recorder for class lectures, access to learning specialists, notice to faculty regarding accommodation, classroom changes, and accessible on-campus housing.

Because some physical and learning disabilities are not always apparent, patience and sensitivity are important for both the student and the faculty member. A faculty member who is alert to the possibility of a need for support on the part of a student may prove to be the agent of a tremendous change in the life of a disabled student.

Resource brochures for faculty and students are available in the Office of Social Equity.

## **Human Relations Committee**

The Human Relations Committee will assist the University in ensuring equal opportunity and access to educational, employment, and contract opportunities at Shippensburg University for all persons regardless of race, color, gender (sex), national origin, disability, or religious affiliation.

The Human Relations Committee oversees two fact finding boards. The first one is the Human Relations Fact Finding Board, which has the responsibility of investigating complaints of discrimination and harassment. The second board is the Sexual Harassment Fact Finding Board, which investigates all complaints of sexual harassment, except for student vs. student complaints. These are investigated by the Student Affairs Division.

The Human Relations Committee also funds proposals and sponsors programs that advance human relations on the Shippensburg University campus.

Procedures for making a complaint of harassment or discrimination, as well as copies of the policies, are available in the Office of Social Equity.