DAY OF METANOIA: VIOLENCE IN THE COMMUNITY

A REPORT FROM THE STEERING COMMITTEE

On Thursday, October 4, the University of Connecticut observed a Day of Metanoia as a first step in confronting the issue of violence in our community. Specific acts of personal attack, property destruction and racism that have aroused deep concern are rooted in apathy, prevailing attitudes of sexism and racism, and a willingness to condone violence by others. Our objective for the day was to ask each member of the community to look to him or herself, to ask how he or she contributed to violence and, in turn, how individually as well as institutionally we could contribute to reducing and eliminating violence. We hoped to promote light rather than heat, reflection rather than accusation.

Was this day a success? We find some satisfaction in the attendance - almost one thousand at the Ballroom session and related TV hook-ups, some 600 at afternoon workshops and large numbers at dorm programs and the evening ceremony. We find some satisfaction in a clear verbal commitment by the administration to work to develop a sense of community at the University. We find some satisfaction in the awareness and concern expressed by many students - a willingness to help, to reflect, to change.

Our satisfaction is tempered by a great deal of concern. Many attended one or more parts of the Metanoia program; many more did not attend. Some observers have suggested that the program was "preaching to the converted": that those who most need to look within did not attend. Many faculty participated in the program as discussion leaders, panelists and facilitators, but many more did not attend. Many suggestions offered by the Ballroom audience were well received. Some revealed the depth of racial tension on this campus and the absence of a forum or a process to address race-related issues. The quiet dignity of the closing ceremony was marred by insults and obscenities shouted from several South Campus dormitories. Some
observers were relieved that the insults were not overtly racist and that no objects were thrown at the walkers. If that represents "progress", then our satisfaction must be balanced with the realization of how far "the community" still has to go.

Whatever success the Day of Metanoia achieved lies in our understanding of the depth and complexity of the problem of violence in our community. Although the Steering Committee was charged only with organizing the Metanoia, we feel responsible both for summing up our impressions of the day and also for sharing with the community the response we received. Out of the questions, suggestions and concerns raised by all participants - audience and panels - comes a partial agenda for study and action.

It is imperative that all members of the University community recognize that every individual and every structure within the University are responsible for reducing violence and those attitudes which give rise to it. Change in one realm (individual or institutional), however, will be ineffectual unless accompanied by change in the other, so that members of this community must strive for change in both their public and their private lives. What follows is a compilation of suggestions submitted to this committee by diverse members of the University community. We, as a committee, have not attempted to judge the merits of these suggestions.

Suggestions for personal change

1. We must identify ourselves as potential and actual sources of violence - of sexism and racism.

2. We must pledge ourselves individually to confronting our own racist and sexist responses, as well as our more overtly violent actions.

3. We must recognize our common humanity with all other members of the University community and act on that feeling, beginning with simple friendliness to other people, especially when we think another person is "different" or "won't like us." Moreover, we have a responsibility to exert peer pressure to reduce
those attitudes and actions which lead to ill feeling and violence.

4. We must seek to learn ourselves, to provide friendly support for others in their search, and to explore together why we engage in stereotyping and violent action. This supportive learning must occur both in and out of the classroom.

5. We must object when people engage in racism, sexism, or other forms of violence in our presence and/or report incidents of violent behavior in any form.

6. While the Day of Metanoia focused on racism, sexism and physical violence we must recognize the extension of such violence and insensitivity as reflected in homophobia, nationalistic chauvinism, agism and ethnic and religious discrimination.

Suggestions for institutional change

1. Retain the concept of a yearly day of metanoia but change the name because it is confusing. Time spent explaining the term results in a tremendous loss of energy.

2. Retain both the word and practice of metanoia and, in addition, sponsor regularly scheduled town meetings as a way of averting campus crisis and promoting a sense of community.

3. Admit minority students to reflect the percentage of minority population in Connecticut.

4. Increase the hiring, promoting, and granting of tenure to more minority and female staff.

5. Increase minority and female representation in police and other sensitive jobs on campus.
6. Support and press for the upgrading of state job classifications in order to remedy the wage inequalities between men and women and between whites and minorities on campus.

7. Encourage the development of the Network of University Women as a way for women to support each other on campus.

8. Require first year students to take a course on human oppression.

9. Offer an interdepartmental course on racism and acknowledge the importance of such interdepartmental courses (including Women's Studies) by allowing them to fill university requirements.

10. Offer seminars and symposia on subjects raised at the day of metanoia.

11. Establish task forces of staff and students in each department or program to review courses for inadvertent or unacknowledged inclusion of sexist and racist materials, and to encourage use of appropriate course materials on, for example, minorities, women, homosexuals, the poor.

12. Challenge any remarks in the classroom which reflect those attitudes which contribute to ill feeling and violence.

13. Press the state legislature for more funds to expand the security force.

14. Provide better lighting and repair existing but damaged lights.

15. Enforce penalty for destruction of lights and other campus property.

16. Provide financial support for Rape Crisis counseling and educational programs.

17. Expand student patrol and escort services.

18. Demand more responsible coverage of campus news. CDC funds might come from voluntary allocation of student fees.

19. Expand educational programs within residence halls, emphasizing workshops on topics raised during the day of metanoia.
20. Study the IDC experiment as an example to be followed in other dorms, particularly the IDC's emphasis on providing support to its members (including support from faculty).


22. Evaluate present enforcement of campus alcohol policy.

23. Promote conscious and continuous efforts of residence hall staff to alert students to keep doors locked, walk with friends, confront strangers in the hall, etc.

24. Improve communication within residence halls and between residence halls (both staff and students) and administration about incidents of racism or assault.

25. Continue effort by residence hall staff to follow up with disciplinary hearings when individuals are identified in acts of violence.

26. Review discipline procedures and then enforce policies.

27. Consider including both individual and social unit discipline.

28. To identify those responsible for racial harrassment in dormitories, utilize the strategy of suspending the entire dorm until the offenders are identified.

29. Develop community forums within residence halls.

30. Continue the work begun under the Alcohol Grant.

31. Create task forces or standing committees to study and recommend action to eliminate such problems as sexual harrassment, sexism, racism, and homophobia.

32. Streamline grievance procedures and train faculty and staff to deal more effectively with grievances of both students and staff.

33. Provide some place or forum for people to go to clear the air on a given issue without fear of reprisals.
34. Develop a resource list for students and staff identifying offices, committees and individuals assigned and trained to provide assistance and services.

35. Review all University publications, including the By-laws and standardized forms, for sexist language and photographs.

36. Structure University activities, both inside and outside the classroom, to stress cooperation rather than competition, which often fosters racism, sexism, and the destruction of learning materials.

37. Make a greater effort to integrate foreign students into the University community.

38. Support the reestablishment of the former Storrs Men's Collective.

39. Guard against "territoriality" by groups or individuals claiming a given issue as "theirs." We must all work together, complementing rather than duplicating or resenting the efforts of other people or groups.

40. Establish a committee or task force to review the quality of life on campus and to explore ways in which we can develop a spirit of community.

Procedural Recommendations

The Metanoia Steering Committee recommends that the University Senate's Executive Committee take responsibility for the evaluation, management, and oversight of these suggestions. Such management can take the form of assigning tasks to standing or special committees, meeting with administrators to urge implementation of specific suggestions or, if necessary, establishing a broad-based study committee to make recommendations in certain areas.

We hope that the Senate Executive Committee would urge all who consider and act upon these suggestions to adopt a policy of "informed action"; to study if necessary but to act with the sense of urgency the situation demands.
The success of the Day of Metanoia can not be measured adequately by
numbers: in the reduction of overt acts of damage to person and property in
the community. Ultimately the day's success can only be found in an increased
commitment by each individual to every other, and in the realization that we are
a community. October 4 can represent the beginning of the difficult but necessary
process of building community awareness and individual concern. It can represent
the last time we talked about the problem of violence in the community. We
believe that the university must provide not simply the opportunity for intro-
spection, but leadership in addressing the issue. The University community,
administration, faculty, students, staff, and local residents must work
together to insure that this report and the Day which gave rise to it represent
the first steps, not the last.

The Metanoia Steering Committee

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