

CONFERENCE ON SOCIAL EQUITY AND GOVERNANCE

This year's theme was Social Equity and Governance, and since I am an associate member of the Standing Committee on Social Equity and Governance of the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA), I agreed to coordinate the activities.

After a thoughtful presentation the night before by Dr. Ron Carlee, County Manager in Arlington, Virginia, (see separate article) the kick-off event for this year's theme was a one-day conference on September 27, 2002, co-sponsored by the Virginia Chapter of the American Society for Public Administration, which also provided a number of scholarships to defray the cost of attending for MPA students. The goals of the Conference on Social Equity and Governance included enhancing current and future public administrators' sensitivity to issues of social equity and their ability to integrate these issues in professional decision making and learning more about initiatives to foster social equity underway in the Richmond metropolitan area in order to formulate an initial action agenda in response to the needs and opportunities presented at the conference. The Honorable Viola Baskerville, Member, Virginia House of Delegates, spoke on "Why Should Public Administrators Be concerned with Social Equity," and provided examples with her own legislative efforts on behalf of women. Panels of Richmond-based leaders discussed "Concepts and Issues in Social Equity" and "Obstacles to Implementing Social Equity in Public and Nonprofit Organizations." The Honorable Sara Redding Wilson, Director of the Commonwealth's Department of Human Resource Management, used her presentation time to solicit suggestions from the approximately forty attendees on the best ways to implement the Commonwealth's anticipated reduction-in-force, which was to be announced two weeks later. Professors Njeri Jackson and Marcia Penn facilitated a "fishbowl" discussion on "Developing a Community Consensus for Social Equity." Prof. James Phillips facilitated a discussion on "Next Steps." The conference was closed by Fr. Robert Colvin, the President of the Virginia Chapter of ASPA.

As with last year, this year's theme was also integrated into the Capstone class. Working in groups, the students conducted research on social equity issues in the Richmond metropolitan area. The students made ample use of resources from the NAPA panel and the United Way. Each group researched a different public policy area and wrote on the pros and cons of this concept, the most important social equity issues in this policy area, and recommended strategies to improve social equity in the Richmond area. Groups made formal reports on social equity as related to environmental justice, racial profiling, k-12 education, interjurisdictional annexation issues, special education, homelessness, and children's health care.

Students' evaluations of this assignment included comments such as: "As administrators we need to be conscious of equity in theory and actual practice," "...really got better idea of the various inequities in existence in regard to levels of health care," and "I think that SE as a mainstay in the PA curriculum is an excellent idea." Some members of the NAPA panel also were impressed with what we were doing at VCU and asked to have copies of the student reports. I have been invited to present a paper on Teaching Social

Equity in the PA Curriculum with student responses at this fall's conference of the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration.