Senior Staff/Council Develop IE Priorities

Having considered President Robert J. Jones’ vision for the University, as well as the perspectives shared by faculty, staff and students, UAlbany’s senior staff have identified seven areas to focus on as we work toward Inclusive Excellence.

Staff in Institutional Research are extracting relevant data that will serve as baseline measures, regarding where we are as an institution. In conjunction with the President’s Council on Diversity, senior staff will then develop goals to address existing barriers that hamper progress toward Inclusive Excellence.

“Once we understand where we are, we will be in an excellent position to determine where we need to go and how to create systemic change,” said Tamra Minor, Assistant Vice President for ODI. “Concerted efforts to achieve this goal are necessary not just from any single segment of the campus but from the entire campus community. We will build on the years of work accomplished by many to diversify and make the campus more inclusive.”

The list of priorities identified by senior staff includes:

- Provide inviting websites for the University, and its academic and non-academic units
- Achieve diversity across units, levels, and schools/colleges
- Ensure that all employees’ work-related contributions are valued and that employees feel included and engaged
- Strive to develop high outcomes for ALL students regardless of group or background
- Expect equally high outcomes for ALL faculty regardless of group or background
- Promote cultural competence as the foundation for all interpersonal interactions on campus
- Understand and define IE broadly to embrace human diversity in all of its forms

Fully implementing IE on campus requires making it part of the University’s strategic priorities.
What Does Inclusive Excellence Bring To Our Classrooms?

The increasing focus on inclusion in academe comes from a clear understanding of the value of multiple perspectives in the classroom. The wish to educate all of our students effectively, and the knowledge that a combination of comfort and challenge in the classroom creates positive learning environments and experiences for all students.

Effective university classrooms of today must provide a respectful environment that treats each student as an individual who comes to the classroom community with unique contributions that can foster learning and understanding of the subject matter. When students understand the diversity that is in their classroom, and learn to recognize and value the different strengths that their peers bring, they are more easily able to participate in deeper discussions and engagement.

One example of the power of including diverse perspectives is seen when faculty invite people in from a variety of backgrounds to show how they can contribute to disciplinary conversations. Faculty can draw on others who, for a variety of reasons, might serve as role models and resources for the students in the class—UAlbany alumni who have achieved success in the field, other professors who bring a new perspective or background to the table, or community members who have contributed to the discipline. In helping students take advantage of such learning opportunities, faculty can set expectations for respectful discussions, model how conversations about sensitive topics might be carried out, and ensure that each student understands his or her role in contributing to ensuring a collegial atmosphere that allows for honest exchange.

Today’s students are more diverse than at any time in the history of higher education. It is one of our missions, as a public university, to provide the kind of learning opportunities that will develop their diverse talents, and prepare them with the skills, attitudes and values that will help them succeed. Our communities—local, national, and global—will thrive when we have been able to foster in students a sophisticated understanding of the world around them. Encouraging a culture of inclusion is one of the most powerful ways to achieve these goals.

Implementing IE

School Of Social Welfare

Is All Abuzz About UACCESS

One thing that the dean of the School of Social Welfare likes to say is that the school—faculty, partners and students—is committed to being agents of change. That philosophy spills over into all of the school’s planning including its activities related to Inclusive Excellence. Below the school outlines two of its major initiatives.

SOGI

The Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Project (SOGI) is dedicated to advancing knowledge of and the training of mental health providers on issues facing the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) communities. SOGI organizes clinical training opportunities, assists in developing specialized internships, and much needed support for LGBTQ student groups.

Arlene Lev, project director, teaches courses on sexual identity issues and works collaboratively with other departments, such as Counseling Psychology, to advance clinical skill sets and cultural sensitivity for those serving LGBTQ people and their families. SOGI has been an award-winning program both at the University and in the community. The most recent recognition is the President’s Award for Exemplary Community Engagement given to Lev.

The Buzz

Another IE initiative in the School of Social Welfare is called the “Buzz.” For a number of months, SSW has been hosting a “What’s the Buzz” forum for faculty and professional staff. As a community we understand that a rich intellectual discourse in our School is a sign of excellence. The goal of the “Buzz” is to enhance the School’s intellectual community by advancing knowledge of the profession and personal passions, in a relaxed and informal space. This initiative has created new possibilities for academic scholarship, research, and innovations.

The Buzz sessions grew out of a school retreat on culture and climate as we were looking for avenues to foster more collaboration in research and increase support for inventive initiatives. Community building is a key feature of Inclusive Excellence and new collaborative research and curricular agendas. Led by Lani V. Jones, the “Buzz” offers a time of sharing of both personal and professional updates and focuses on special topics for more collaborative ventures such as international field placements for SSW students.
“Action Steps Toward Inclusive Excellence” for staff and “Dialogue In Action” for faculty help cultivate an environment conducive to learning and success for the entire campus community.

“Dialogues,” said Michael Jaromin, University Life Council Senate Chair, “are highly effective in bridging differences based on ethnic, racial or cultural background, socioeconomic status, age, gender, sexual orientation, etc. These types of person-to-person exchanges foster respect for one another and encourages increased mutual understanding. As well, dialogues, especially those with trained facilitators, are well-suited for fostering thoughtful discussion of complex, sometimes contentious issues or topics within group settings.”

Research also shows that hosting these kinds of facilitated sessions take the fear out of talking openly about sensitive issues, encourages participants to speak honestly about their own views and to listen deeply to the knowledge, perspectives and experiences of others. At the same time, the act of listening respectfully to the varied views deepens participants’ understanding of perspectives other than their own. These particular dialogues are also designed to afford participants the opportunity to reflect on ways in which they can help to make our campus and surrounding communities even more inclusive.

While “Dialogue in Action” has been going on since last semester, “Action Steps Toward Inclusive Excellence” will soon be underway.

In February, a team of 17 individuals participated in a train-the-trainer designed to prepare them to facilitate the “Action Steps” sessions. D. Ekow King coordinated the two day workshop. Day One of the training included specific details regarding workshops the facilitators were being trained to facilitate. Day Two was the first of many opportunities for participants to practice what they learned through participating in a “Teach Back” session.

These “Ambassadors for Inclusive Excellence” will continue to participate in various workshops and trainings throughout the summer and will begin facilitating small group dialogue sessions in the fall of 2014. During the summer, a notice of scheduled dialogues will be released allowing prospective participants the opportunity to register for those sessions they are interested in attending.

For questions about “Action Steps Toward Inclusive Excellence,” contact D. Ekow King and/or Dr. Deborah Nazon, Assistant Director of ODI.

New Federal Regulations Impact UAlbany Employee Recruitment

For decades, the Vietnam Era Veterans’ Readjustment Act (VEVRAA) and Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act required employers to recruit, hire, promote and train veterans and persons with disabilities. The laws also prohibited any form of discrimination against veterans and disabled employees and applicants. The Department of Labor (DOL) has determined that based on the significant disparities between the number of unemployed veterans and persons with disabilities to non-veterans and persons without disabilities, employers need a more active and action-oriented approach to their recruitment procedures.

New regulations require that employers annually adopt recruitment benchmarks based on the national percentage of veterans and individuals with disabilities. These regulations are consistent with the DOL’s longstanding requirement for monitoring recruitment of qualified women and minorities. The Office of Diversity and Inclusion will measure implementation progress of the new regulations.

UAlbany remains dedicated to the spirit and impact of VEVRAA, Section 503, and all other equal employment opportunity laws and will continue to strengthen outreach efforts to groups, organizations and publications affiliated with veterans and individuals with disabilities.

Information on other rules under the new regulations can be found at [http://www.dol.gov/ofccp/regs/compliance/Resources.htm](http://www.dol.gov/ofccp/regs/compliance/Resources.htm). The link also includes a listing of recruitment resources.
There are 106 graduate and 431 undergraduate students currently registered with the Disability Resource Center (DRC), according to Carolyn Malloch, the Center’s Director. Less than 20 of these students have visible disabilities. The overwhelming majority of the students registered have an “invisible disability.” The invisible disabilities may include psychiatric disabilities, such as anxiety, depression, and PTSD; medical disabilities like chronic illness, migraines, and cancer treatment; traumatic brain injury, Attention Deficit Disorder, Asperger’s and Autism. Below, Malloch responded to some commonly asked questions.

Q: Sometimes a student’s behavior appears as if it might be related to or resulting from a disability. Are there guidelines for how to deal with such a situation, especially if the student is disrupting the class?

A: I look at behavior in terms of how the average student is expected to behave. A student with a disability needs to meet that standard. Behavior should always be approached from a discussion of, “in my class the accepted behavior is ______. You were doing _____ that is not acceptable in my classroom.” You are permitted to ask a student if there is a reason for their behavior. The discussion can then move on to HOW the student intends to manage his/her behavior in class.

If a student reveals a disability, ask if they are registered with the DRC. If a student is not registered with the DRC, please encourage the student to do so. Being registered is an official recognition that allows reasonable accommodations to be implemented. Once the process begins, an interactive discussion is held to develop an academic plan.

Q: If a student asks for an accommodation but has not presented a letter from the DRC, should faculty require that they get one?

A: Yes. It is the faculty member’s responsibility to inform the student that a letter from DRC is required to receive an academic reasonable accommodation.

Q: What other resources are available to students with disabilities?

A: The DRC also provides a testing office for less distracted test taking. Students are encouraged to make individual appointments with the office to design and implement a plan that best addresses their needs and accommodations.

The DRC can also facilitate priority registration to aid students in meeting medication needs, pain management, and creating, if necessary, alert cycles to have classes when the student can best benefit from instruction.

Other services include, but are not limited to, provisions such as interpreters, FM devices to work with hearing aids, assistance getting information in Braille, learning how to use a live scribe pen, and text-to-speech software training.

Submitted by The Disability Resource Center

More information about the DRC can be found at:

Disability Resource Center
Campus Center 137
1400 Washington Ave.
Albany, NY 12222
Phone (518) 442-5490
Fax (518) 442-5400

http://www.albany.edu/disability/
Tips For Making Your Classrooms Inclusive

Dr. Susan Rankin, an expert in social justice advocacy for LGBTQ students in higher education institutions, offers suggestions for how to make the campus and classroom more inclusive. Rankin has conducted research on the effects of racism, sexism, and heterosexism in institutional and organization settings, including universities. She is currently a senior research associate with Rankin & Associates, a consulting firm and an education professor, recently retired, from Penn State University, who assesses campus climate with respect to making the classroom respectful of LGBTQ students.

To use gender pronouns of his/her/their preference, and should address students by their preferred names, regardless of official records.

Instructors can also be more vocally affirming in the classroom by highlighting campus resources for LGBTQ students, including student organization, means of changing student record information, counseling and health services, and support groups. Although syllabi may have non-discrimination policies included, faculty should specifically mention that their classroom space is affirming and welcoming for people of all social identities, including cisgender LGBQ students and transgender students.

Seeing an LGBTQ instructor embrace his/her/their identity in the classroom can give hope to students that they can live an open and fulfilling life, providing guidance in aligning students’ social identities with their aspirations.

What are the major recommendations you have for the campus to be focused on when addressing campus climate for LGBTQ identified students? For faculty and staff?

As per the last chapter in the 2010 State of Higher Education for LGBT People report, I offer the following recommendations. For more information on specific actions with regard to each, review the report and the resources and developing more inclusive LGBT policies and programs.

What has been the response to that report?

We are currently seeking funding to repeat the study to examine how the climate has changed since 2010. I did a similar study in 2003 and while the climate appears to be improving, homophobia and heterosexism still exist on campus for queer spectrum and trans-spectrum people. The report was well received and I feel has assisted campuses in providing resources and developing more inclusive LGBT policies and programs.

Where do the specific weaknesses lie? Where do campuses typically fall short?

The only place where students are a captive audience is the classroom. If we wish to make systemic transformation around these and other social justice issues it will happen through curricular reform. A great pre-read for incoming first year students is Allen Johnson’s book: Johnson, A. (2006). Privilege, Power, and Difference (2nd Edition). Boston: McGraw-Hill Higher Education.

Word choice can have a lasting impact on LGBTQ students; thus, using the word “partner,” instead of “husband” or “wife” can contribute to a more inclusive classroom environment. Further, faculty can demonstrate a more inclusive climate for transgender students by using language that encompasses all people and genders. Instructors should respect a student’s requests to use gender pronouns of his/her/their preference, and should address students by their preferred names, regardless of official records.

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