Diversity Task Force  
Division of Academic Affairs  
The University of Rhode Island  
2009-2010 Report

The Diversity Task Force in the Division of Academic Affairs was formed in the Summer of 2009 by Donald DeHayes, the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs. A diverse cross-section of members from the various units in the Division, as well as two members from outside the campus community, was invited to serve on the task force. We met once a month during the academic year on the following dates:

- September 1, 2009
- October 15, 2009
- November 20, 2009
- December 9, 2009
- February 2, 2010
- March 10, 2010
- April 15, 2010
- May 15, 2010

The table below shows the members of the task force, their department affiliations, email address, and phone numbers.

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The sections below describe the purpose and goals of the task force, and the general accomplishments for the year, including an endorsement of a framework for multicultural learning within the URI Community, and directions for future work.

**Statement of Purpose**

Issues pertaining to diversity, equity, and justice are integral to creating and sustaining an open and inclusive learning community at The University of Rhode Island (URI). The Diversity Task Force of the Division of Academic Affairs is
committed to promoting tolerance, respect, and equal opportunity with respect to
learning and discovery within the university. The Task Force will promote a broad
understanding and appreciation of diversity issues – engendering in our selves and
the faculty, staff, and students of the university the wisdom to listen to and respect
voices and ideas different from our own.

As a Diversity Task Force seeking to encourage a community of inclusion, we aspire
to promote an atmosphere that celebrates diversity and respect, supports learning,
and encourages understanding, integrity, and justice. With a rapidly changing
demographic profile of our nation, this endeavor becomes urgent and vital.
Attracting and retaining people from diverse backgrounds and experiences are
critical issues to URI and our Division. Equally important is to create an inclusive,
everitable, and truly pluralistic learning environment for all. This will require
reviewing what and how we teach and ensuring that issues of multiculturalism,
privilege, and differential opportunity are incorporated into the curriculum.

Specific Goals of the Diversity Task Force

1. To raise consciousness about privilege, bias, and mutual respect in the URI
   community;

2. To gather and use data on access, retention, institutional receptivity, and
   quality of experience to enhance the diversity of the URI community by
   promoting and supporting active recruitment and retention programs
   throughout the Division;

3. To promote a welcoming and respectful community that encourages
   understanding and appreciation of difference;

4. To lead efforts to ensure that the academic and co-curricular experiences of
   all students reflect understanding of multicultural perspectives and the value
   of diversity.

Accomplishments of the Task Force and Future Goals

At our initial meeting, we discussed the various actions we might take to advance
diversity in the Division of Academic Affairs. We spent subsequent meetings
consolidating the list of items and setting priorities for the year. Three major areas
of focus were formulated:

1. Developing Learning Outcomes for Multicultural Competence: Refine the
   meaning of multicultural competence and develop a set of learning outcomes
   that reflect this competency for curriculum development.
2. Building a Campus Climate for Diversity: Develop actions that would
   improve campus climate, develop faculty to be conscious of and motivated to
engage in efforts to enhance multicultural competence, and design rewards and incentives for engaging in diversity efforts.

3. Designing a Diversity Forum on Campus: Plan a forum for Spring 2010 to seek ways to deal with diversity challenges on campus (e.g., hate crimes) and explore ideas for future development.

The task force decided that focusing our efforts on the first initiative was the most critical task facing the Academic Affairs Division, and that the second and third initiatives might be the focus of future years’ efforts. After much rich discussion and debate, the task force created and endorsed a set of ten competencies that reflect multicultural awareness, knowledge, skill, and personal transformation (see Appendix).

The task force’s work will continue next year by vetting these competencies with the broad URI community, modifying them as appropriate, and reaching consensus on a set of principles upon which they are based. In addition, the task force believes that URI is obligated to put in place mechanisms to support students, faculty, and staff in acquiring these competencies and advancing diversity in the URI academic community through curricula and co-curricula experiences for students and support and training for faculty and staff. Next year, we plan to work with appropriate curriculum committees to build multicultural learning experiences into our general education and degree programs for students, as well as design, pilot, and deliver workshops that will enhance these competencies among the faculty and staff.
Appendix

A Framework for Multicultural Learning within the URI Community

Endorsed by URI Academic Affairs Diversity Task Force on May 12, 2010

Rationale

The 21st century is characterized by a rapidly expanding demographic profile of our nation and a global society replete with cross cultural opportunities, communication, and exchanges. Issues pertaining to understanding, respect, inclusion, and equity are critical to creating vibrant and inclusive learning communities at URI as well as to promoting a viable and functional global society. Multicultural learning and competence is a critical element of this fundamental understanding that must be developed and advanced in order to achieve a truly inclusive and pluralistic learning environment and community on our campus and throughout the nation and world.

As a community, URI is making insufficient progress in its goal of becoming an inclusive, respectful, and just campus. According to a recent report developed by students attending the Equity Leadership Conference, some students from underrepresented groups experience disrespect, prejudice, and discrimination on our campus. Often the needs of these students are inadequately addressed, which may signify that many community members are ignorant of issues of social justice, including prejudice, discrimination, and hate.

In order to produce a community of learners who are educated about these issues and are prepared personally and professionally to live in a diverse world, the Diversity Task Force of the Division of Academic Affairs believes developing and enhancing knowledge pertaining to multicultural competence is critical. Furthermore, the Task Force believes the primary vehicle to create multicultural learning and competency is through the curriculum. URI students have also recognized that they need to better understand injustice and develop “cultural intelligence” to become productive global citizens. They have identified “lack of knowledge” about issues related to cultural awareness as one of the “biggest challenges” at URI and also emphasized that the curriculum is a primary means for providing that learning and awareness. The URI Academic Plan, Charting Our Path to the Future, also explicitly pushes us to “raise consciousness .... about privilege, bias, multiculturalism, and diversity” and “support learning about diversity throughout the curriculum.” Now is the time to enhance multicultural learning as a core value of our institution toward the larger goal of encouraging a deep and profound understanding of diversity for all at URI.
Multicultural Competency

Goal

The Academic Affairs Diversity Task Force proposes a set of ten Multicultural Competencies that will provide context for multicultural understanding at URI and serve as learning goals for all URI students and as core elements for multicultural curriculum development. The goals are to ensure that all students at URI develop knowledge, awareness, and skills in regard to diversity, equity, and multiculturalism and provide a foundation for individual transformation and the development of inclusive and pluralistic communities on campus and throughout the world. “Diversity” in this document refers to disenfranchised/oppressed groups in U.S. society, including (but not limited to): class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and physical/mental ability. We have identified the following multicultural competencies, which are pertinent to the enhancement of all individuals and groups of students, staff, and faculty:

Specific Competencies

Exposure/Awareness

- Awareness of the meaning of diversity and multiculturalism, including the legal and ethical aspects of affirmative action, prejudice, and discrimination;
- Awareness of identity formation and development, and how our own identities and those of others affect attitudes and behavior;
- Development of a multidisciplinary appreciation of multicultural diversity and origins of American society as well as diverse cultures around the globe, including recognizing commonalities and differences across cultures;

Knowledge/Understanding

- Knowledge and understanding of power structures, privilege, and explicit and implicit prejudice and how they relate to American society, including within our University community;
- Knowledge and understanding of the history and patterns of difference, discrimination, and oppression with regard to different groups, including, but not limited to, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, class, ability, and culture, and how they relate to American society, including within our University community;
- Knowledge and understanding of the social construct of race and its social, political, economic, and behavioral consequences;
Skills

• Development of problem solving and analytical skills about diversity as a means of constructing action plans for addressing diversity issues in the community and resolving conflicts linked to difference;
• Ability to carry out meaningful cross cultural discourse with people whose voices, experiences, and ideas are different from our own for the purpose of creating a shared vision of American and global society;
• Development of advocacy and change management skills for achieving social equity;

Transformation

• Developing the capacity for deep understanding, reflection, and empathy with regard to the current and past experiences of marginalized groups at URI and across the nation, including issues of discrimination, injustice, and hate, and summoning the internal courage to confront such issues.

Framework for Multicultural Learning in the Curriculum

After vetting these competencies with the broad URI community, modifying them as appropriate, and reaching consensus on a set of principles upon which they are based, the Task Force believes that URI is obligated to put in place mechanisms to support students, faculty, and staff in acquiring these competencies and advancing diversity in the URI academic community through curricula and co-curricula efforts.

The Academic Affairs Diversity Task Force recommends the:

• establishment of a new multicultural requirement for all undergraduate students defined by attainment of at least one of the above stated competencies from within each of the four categories;
• development of courses and/or experiential learning opportunities that serve to develop these competencies in our students and satisfy the requirement;
• establishment of a Faculty Senate Diversity Curriculum Review Advisory Committee to aid the Curriculum Affairs Committee and/or the University College and General Education Committee, as appropriate, in evaluating courses that appropriately address the agreed upon set of multicultural competencies.

An academic requirement for all URI students, built upon the agreed upon set of Multicultural Competencies, can be achieved through a general requirement for all students or by a set of courses or learning experiences offered through the perspective of the disciplines/professions associated with each college. In either case, the learning outcomes associated with the course/experience would need to explicitly address at least half of the defined competencies.