COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES EQUITY & ANTI-RACISM COMMITTEE

Report from work completed during F2021-S2022 Academic Year

Members of the Committee:
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Co-Chairs: Yu (Joyce) Wu (Languages) and Karen Sweeting (Political Science).

This final report was drafted by the co-chairs with revisions and input from committee members. As a Dean’s advisory committee, our work this year focused on assisting the Dean with several JEDI A&S college initiatives. Below we detail the work completed on each initiative.

Part I : Context for the Development of the Equity and Anti-Racism Committee
In spring 2021, the College approved revised by-laws. As part of that revision, the new committee for Equity and Anti-Racism was created on November 5, 2021 replacing the Diversity Committee. The committee charge, membership and quorum are included below.

Charge: The Arts and Sciences Committee for Equity and Anti-Racism shall counsel the Dean by advocating for equity and anti-racism in the College. The Committee shall primarily focus on ways to repair and improve the experience of racialized and other minoritized students, faculty, and staff in the college. This shall include, but not be limited to, matters related to Goal 4 of the College of Arts and Sciences Strategic Plan 2018-2022.

Anti-Racism in this context refers to: the work of actively opposing racism by advocating for changes in institutional systems and life in the college. These institutional systems may never mention any racial group, but their effect may still create oppression and disadvantage for Black, Indigenous and people of color. We recognize that the intersectionality of race and other minoritized characteristics creates special challenges.

Equity in this context refers to: one’s condition, opportunity and voice will not depend on race, color, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, transgender status, age, disability, genetic information, marital status, status as a parent or intersections of these characteristics. To address inequities, the creation of targeted programs is often crucial.
**Membership and quorum:** The Committee shall be comprised of the following: a) The Dean, or Associate Dean, or Assistant Dean or College Diversity Officer who serves as the college committee liaison, b) six members from the full-time, continuing, Arts and Sciences faculty, three of whom shall be appointed by the Dean and three shall be elected at large by the college faculty, c) two A&S undergraduate majors who shall be appointed by the Dean d) and one graduate student in an Arts and Sciences graduate program who shall be appointed by the Dean. When appointing students and faculty committee members, the Dean shall primarily consider their degree of knowledge, expertise, and lived experience advocating for equity and anti-racism and to the extent possible appoint faculty and students from across the different academic programs. When faculty stand for election to the committee it is required that they include a short statement including any relevant experience and goals for the committee. Faculty members shall serve three-year terms that may be renewed. Student members shall serve one-year terms that may be renewed. Five members, together with the College Committee Liaison, shall constitute a quorum.

**GOAL 4 of A & S 2018-22 Strategic Plan**
Meaningful exchanges among people, cultures, ideas, and viewpoints that advance a better understanding of diversity.

**Strategies**
- Recruit and retain more diverse faculty, staff, and students at URI
- Encourage and facilitate open discourse and proactive action around issues of diversity and social justice with all members of the URI community
- Improve access to, and participation in, global experiences through study abroad, dual degree, and innovative language programs
- Improve access to, and participation in, local experiences through experiential learning, internships, volunteer opportunities, and community engagement
- Promote and formalize more regional, national, and international partnerships via scholarly exchanges and joint research projects

**Committee Interpretation and Understanding of Charge**
The new A&S Equity and Anti-Racism committee interprets and understands this charge to mean that successful JEDI initiatives require a clear understanding of the complexities and arduous nature of the work to be performed. The charge and strategic goal as outlined to manage the needs of a diverse college require clear priorities that focus on ways to advance and improve equity and anti-racism. As a committee we will work with intentionality to identify ways to foster equity and anti-racism and work diligently to strengthen the capacity of the college to manage diversity, equity, and anti-racism by integrating inclusive and equitable practices and policies, and continually working to foster an overall sense of belonging within all aspects of our college.

There is an urgent need to underscore the breadth and depth of the charge that will require dedicated resources: people, time, support, protection, resources. There remains a need for long term capacity to promote change that targets ingrained norms and culture through actionable, intentional, and targeted steps geared to improve the experiences of students, faculty, and staff. Specifically, we will strive to identify and critically examine ways of informing, guiding, and advocating for equity, and anti-racism initiatives by counseling the Dean on setting
priorities, developing awareness, expanding understanding of needs, addressing social, racial, and economic divisions, as well as ways to sustain and navigate the constraints of what is feasible within our current reality.

**Part II. Initiatives of the Committee:**

1. There are many paths and challenges to best meet the needs of students, faculty, and staff within the college. To explore these, the committee shared ideas and brainstormed about varied ways to engage the College and broader URI community. With this in mind, we decided upon an approach to engage the College of Arts and Sciences and uncover some of the challenges through a Dialogue Series designed to foster conversations around equity and anti-racism in a variety of ways: community engagement luncheons, listening sessions; web form to capture comments. We are hopeful that these forums will encourage honest conversations about equity and anti-racism challenges for students, faculty, and staff. Our first dialogue/listening event occurred on Tuesday, April 19, 2022 and we left feeling inspired by the obvious need for these dialogues.

2. We are genuinely concerned about issues of equity and anti-racism and recognize that we need to account for the platforms we create that affirm a commitment to engage with minoritized and marginalized populations to put better safeguards in place. Our goal is to schedule a dialogue session each month alternating time, modalities, and topics.
   a. We will send out a schedule at the beginning of each semester beginning Fall 2022 -with the first event in September.
   b. We plan to schedule in-person lunch sessions - open forum.
   c. We hope to partner with groups on campus who are involved with varied initiatives including microaggressions, anti-ableism efforts, and ways to educate and improve language competence that goes beyond merely knowing the right phrases to cultivate an environment that is equitable, inclusive, fair, and just for all.
   d. We will make a conscious effort to address all components of our charge.
   e. We know that we will experience resistance and push-back, but we remain hopeful that we will figure out ways to navigate and break through barriers.

3. An objective of the committee is to advocate for change that focuses on ways to operationalize JEDI work within the college as something that is ingrained in all that we do. We started initial conversations about incentivizing DEI work through invited talks (using the lightning talk as a model). This will focus on different kinds of JEDI work across the college to include: equity and anti-racism challenges, curriculum design, classroom practices, assignments, videos, speakers, etc.
   a. Plans to reach out to the college/ department chairs to identify departments doing exceptional JEDI work.
   b. Highlight the work of students, faculty and staff in a way that lifts the voices of those who are often left unheard. Highlighting people who are doing awesome work and reward them for it.

Our goal in carrying out these efforts is to provide exposure for the varied ways in which departments are working to articulate and link actions both implicitly and explicitly to broader objectives and to hopefully navigate the complexities of JEDI reality directly.
addressing the constraints to advance equity and anti-racism. We have reached out to Michelle Fontes-Barros to gain insight into her work in CELS and learn about lessons learned and best practices we can examine as we work to design and formulate initiatives.

4. We are exploring paid workshops for faculty to learn how to incorporate equity and anti-racism in their classroom environments where such efforts are prioritized. We have also engaged in conversations about joint-events with other colleges and/or departments - (e.g. Anti-Racism Book Club).

5. We proposed to the Dean a College Department Award for Excellence in JEDI work. We are still in the process of outlining what this will entail to spotlight departments integrating and operationalizing JEDI across the curriculum and into departmental structure.

6. The committee will work to reinforce the core values of JEDI across the college to inspire students, faculty, and staff to be change agents advocating for equity and anti-racism. We have started conversations with student organizations to mobilize our effort and navigate the different scope, size, and severity of equity, inclusion, and anti-racism challenges. By focusing our energy and combining resources, we can work collectively to plan, execute, and evaluate diversity, equity, and anti-racism within the college and across the broader URI community.
   a. Chelsea Farrell met CED’s undergraduate scholar in Residence who leads the students’ Diversity Dialogues on campus. These student-led Diversity Dialogues are designed to bring awareness and educate students. It is a student-led and student-focused group that hosts various presentations related to topics like microaggressions, Race in America, implicit bias, among others. Faculty can ask the facilitators from Diversity Dialogues to come to their class to host one or more of these presentations. They have curated activities based on examples of student experiences at URI. They collect data via feedback forms but these forms only ask about how the presentation/facilitation went, not about actual student experiences with racism, sexism, etc. on campus. We think this group may be useful to partner with in our committee work because they likely have great ideas about how to gather more information from students about their first-hand experiences at URI. (for more information, see https://web.uri.edu/diversity/initiatives/diversity-dialogues/).

7. Members of the committee have also reached out to SOS, Pink Women, B.O.N.D. and M.U.S.I.C to introduce ourselves and learn more about the types of work they are doing on campus to determine how we may be able to coordinate efforts in the future.

8. We believe in sustaining efforts and setting reasonable expectations. To do this, we have revisited Recommendations/Event Proposals from the Previous Diversity & Ad Hoc Curriculum Committee on C3 Gen Ed Courses. We will work to carry out the following priorities set forth by the previous committees:
• Annual Lecture Series on African-American, Black Diaspora & Global Black Lives to promote knowledge building, dialogue and understanding about Black life in the Americas and beyond.
• Recruitment and Retention Efforts focusing on faculty of color. We encourage all faculty and graduate students to explore the National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity resources that URI has subscribed to (See more information here https://web.uri.edu/diversity/training).
• Access and implement anti-racist/anti-discriminatory teaching pedagogies in all disciplines in A&S.
• Allocate resources to support the recommendations and create processes to establish accountability and oversight.

9. As a means to attain additional resources to support our efforts, we have also explored social equity grants through the Office of Research Development that aligns with the charge of this committee. Jody Lisberger reached out to Karen Markin, Director of Research Development, who provided a list of the following grants:
   a. William T. Grant Foundation: Research Grants on Reducing Inequality
      This program funds research studies that aim to build, test, or increase understanding of programs, policies, or practices to reduce inequality in the academic, social, behavioral, or economic outcomes of young people ages 5-25 in the United States, along dimensions of race, ethnicity, economic standing, language minority status, or immigrant origins.
   b. W.K. Kellogg Foundation: Equitable Communities: We want all communities to be vibrant, engaged and equitable. Foundation website: https://www.wkkf.org/what-we-do/overview
   c. NSF: Racial Equity in STEM Education Program Description (EHR Racial Equity)
      Persistent racial injustices and inequalities in the United States have led to renewed concern and interest in addressing systemic racism. The National Science Foundation (NSF) Directorate for Education and Human Resources (EHR) seeks to support bold, ground-breaking, and potentially transformative projects addressing systemic racism in STEM. Proposals should advance racial equity in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education and workforce development through research (both fundamental and applied) and practice. https://beta.nsf.gov/funding/opportunities/racial-equity-stem-education-ehr-racial-equity
   d. NIH: Training Modules to Address Resiliency and Wellness, and Structural Racism and Discrimination in Research Training Environments
      Addressing Structural Racism and Discrimination to Reduce Disparities: There is increasing appreciation in the broader scientific community about the need to address the impacts of structural racism and discrimination on
trainee career development (see NOT-GM-21-033). Applications are encouraged for the development and implementation of training modules focused on addressing structural racism and discrimination to reduce disparities and to promote access, inclusion, and equity in the research training environment. Modules should focus on how to create research training environments free from harassment, intimidation, and discrimination where everyone participating feels safe and is treated in a respectful and supportive manner.


Part III. Challenges/Concerns
The committee engaged in several open discussions to understand and relate the charge and responsibility to the work that we reasonably do. In doing so, concerns/challenges were raised about some systemic and structural problems that continue to hinder efforts and ways to address them:

1. Creating a safe and brave environment for this committee and broader A&S college community to feel safe and protected to openly engage in dialogue.

2. The committee discussed issues around the composition of faculty, workload distribution, inequities, exclusion, and student social events that are not always welcoming to everyone.

3. Discussion around URI support for faculty who perform JEDI work and populations of color not feeling safe and welcomed on campus. Continued issue of feeling isolated from the broader URI community. This challenge aligns with retention of faculty of color.

4. Disparities and inequities are often amplified or tempered at different levels (individual, interpersonal, departmental, college, across departments/colleges, etc.). To work realistically to promote equity and anti-racism by fostering inclusion and belongingness - we need to work collectively and consciously to improve our interactions, sense of safety, foster inclusion, and equity while giving students, faculty, and staff a forum to be heard, and feel protected.
   a. At our first dialogue event in April 2022, students expressed a lack of response and engagement and want a more inclusive classroom environment to avoid feeling tokenized when they are the only person from a minoritized or marginalized group present in different spaces (e.g. classroom, social events, etc.).
   b. Students also expressed the need for a stronger DEI focus in the classroom, specifically in courses with an emphasis on DEI.

5. The scope of our charge is very broad and we need to identify priorities within the college to target our efforts and develop intentional and meaningful initiatives. We are working on a brief survey that will go out to the college in Fall 2022.

6. We need visibility and will need to work conscientiously and collaboratively to build trust and connect and engage with the URI A&S community (students, faculty, and staff)

7. We all have to be part of the solution to mitigate the harms of discrimination. So we ask for your help as we work to address all components of our charge. There is a lot of work to be done and the committee will need your support as we move forward.
Part IV. Next Steps

PROPOSED CHANGES FOR COMMITTEE: ACTIONABLE STEPS AND PRIORITIES

1. We will strive to break down divisions and build the trust and solidarity needed to ensure that all minoritized and marginalized groups within the college have an equitable and inclusive experience.

2. We will revisit the time allocated per month for the committee. Strategically meet two times a month (for 45 minutes to an hour each) or establish subcommittees to work outside regular monthly meetings (e.g. Dialogue Committee, Marketing Committee, Outreach Committee, etc.).

3. We are hopeful that we will be able to effectively execute the initiatives identified in Part II. As a committee, we will continue to work intentionally to devise practical and tangible steps to improve equity and anti-racism for minoritized and marginalized groups (i.e., students, faculty and staff) in an informed and respectful manner.