COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES DIVERSITY COMMITTEE

Report from F2019-S2020 Academic Year

Members of the Committee: Brian Krueger (coordinator with the Dean’s office), James Haile, Hilda Lloréns, Martha Elena Rojas, Megan Parry, Rosaria Pisa, Yu (Joyce) Wu, Mary Michelini (administrative liaison)

Co-Chairs of the Committee: Hilda Lloréns (Anthropology) & Martha Elena Rojas (English) This final report was drafted by the co-chairs with revisions and input from committee member and was submitted by email to the College of Arts & Sciences Dean’s office on April 29, 2020.

This year the committee decided to spend time reflecting on its role in the University, continue working on faculty development and on accomplishing a few actionable goals. We met monthly from September 2019 to February 2020, but the March and April meetings were cancelled due to COVID-19 changes. Co-chair Martha Elene Roja requested a final meeting on WebEx, scheduled for April 27, 2020, to discuss pending issues, and particularly the development of a URI land acknowledgement statement and ways to continue the committee’s work should distance learning continue into Fall 2021.

I. WEBSITE

After two years of discussion, the creation of the Arts & Sciences Diversity Committee website feels like a great accomplishment. In the committee’s AY18-19 final report the “Website Development and Dissemination” was Item #2 in the “Future Plans” section and was planned for Fall 2019. During Fall 2019, Yu (Joyce) Wu worked closely with Anna Vaccaro-Gray in the Dean’s office in the creation of the committee’s website which was completed in January 2020.

Additionally, Brian Krueger, Hilda Lloréns and Martha Elena Rojas assisted in editing, designing, and in adding content to the site. See:

https://web.uri.edu/artsci/diversity/

The current website includes a committee land acknowledgement statement, but it is just a beginning and does not represent the final statement that we would like the University to adopt and make available to our community. Ideally, a University-wide land acknowledgment statement would be placed on all University websites and available to faculty to include in their syllabi.
II. EVENTS

1. Our committee hosted the DSS Refresh workshop on 10/28, A&S Faculty Lunchtime Conversation on Disability Services for Students. A total of six faculty attended. The workshop was facilitated by Paige Ramsdell and Lisa Macaruso. We learned that 850 students on campus have DSS accommodations. They have 4 staff members who meet individually with all of these students. Accommodation letters are up 33% from Fall 2016.

2. In the committee’s AY18-19 final report organizing a “Workshop and Training by Anne Marie Vaccaro was Item #4 in the “Future Plans” section for AY19-20. The Inclusive Pedagogy and Course Design Workshop for Faculty and Instructors took place on January 17, 2020 from 9-1pm. The workshop received 25 RSVP’s and filled quickly, lunch and coffee was provided. An Ipad was raffled and each faculty in attendance received a letter from the Dean’s office documenting their participation in the workshop for their faculty file. Feedback about the workshop was positive and those in attendance expressed their wish for additional workshops like this one through the academic year. This workshop was co-organized by Martha Elena Rojas and Hilda Lloréns, with the assistance of Brian Krueger and Mary Michelini in the Dean’s office.

3. Other events co-sponsored by the committee such as La Colectiva Feminista’s visit on March 26 were cancelled due to COVID-19 (this event was co-sponsored with A&S Dean’s Fund, GWS, LAX, Multicultural Center, and SOC/APG)

III. FUTURE PLANS

1. In Dawnland Voices: An Anthology of Indigenous Writing from New England (2014), Dawn Dove writes: “My heavy heart wonders when the Narragansett spirit of this land will be honored”. The current committee members recommend that in AY20-21 the committee continue its work on the following initiatives as initial steps towards honoring that spirit.

This year we began discussing the need for crafting and adopting an URI Indigenous Land Acknowledgement statement to be officially adopted by the
University. To this end, we invited Professor Kris Bovy (Anthropology) to November's committee meeting to offer her perspective and knowledge about the land on which the University is located. Additionally, we planned on inviting Lorén Spears (Tomaquag Museum), as well as Leah Hopkins (URI senior, Narragansett Tribe Member) to offer their insights and perspectives on this important initiative. See also Addendum below (undergrad survey).

This is the initial draft of the land acknowledgement that we discussed:  

Land Acknowledgement (URI Kingston):

The University of Rhode Island occupies the traditional homelands of the Narragansett people. What is now the state of Rhode Island occupies the traditional homelands and waterways of the Narragansett and the Wampanoag peoples as well as those of the Pequot, the Nipmuc, the Niantic, and other Algonquin speaking peoples. We can honor and respect the enduring and continuing relationship between these nations and this land by learning more about their histories and present-day communities, and by learning to be better stewards of the land we too inhabit. In addition, let us acknowledge the violence of dispossession and of enslavement endured by Black and Indigenous communities in what is now the United States. As a land-grant and sea-grant institution, many of the infrastructures we use and rely on were built on their displacement, genocide, and enslavement. Their contemporary efforts to endure in the face of colonialism must be acknowledged, respected and supported.

[Note: this was written for a syllabus or for a website and crafted to direct a reader to learn more by following links, and doing work to find out more about the history of Kingston and Rhode Island.]

Until the committee together with community members can systematically address the recommendations in Lorén Spears recent “A Guide for Land Acknowledgements” (March 2020), the A&S Diversity Committee website currently includes a briefer statement as a placeholder:

“We acknowledge that we gather as the University of Rhode Island on the traditional land of the Niantic and Narragansett people in past and present, and honor with gratitude the land itself and the people who have stewarded it throughout the generations. This calls us to commit to continuing to learn how to be better stewards of the land we inhabit as well.”
Additionally we recommend that a **welcoming ceremony** by a Narragansett elder open URI Commencement. This has the support of the Academic Affairs Diversity Task Force.

2. Create and disseminate a College of Arts and Sciences Faculty/Instructors/TA Safety Protocols with information about who to contact for faculty support in the face of student harassment, disrespect, or when instructors feel unsafe. If such a support system is not in place, we should construct one in conjunction with the Dean’s Office and make it available to faculty.

3. On the model of the faculty videos posted at the start of distance learning on the official URI Arts & Sciences Instagram, we recommend a series of brief videos faculty of faculty introducing themselves and welcoming students to URI for Fall 2021 representing a large cross section of our faculty as well as the directors of campus centers and offices that support student success and wellbeing.

4. The committee should elicit student views about campus diversity climate by carrying out focus groups with students perhaps in coordination or with the support of the University Diversity Council (UDC) as that office embarks on a university-wide URI campus climate survey in AY20-21. In past years the committee ran focus groups and gathered data on diversity from students, but said data was not disseminated or used to address diversity issues on campus. If the future committee decides to follow-up upon this recommendation, it is also advised to use the data to create or contribute to a campaign (on-line, posters, recommendations to student housing, faculty, and academic departments) for addressing and bettering the campus climate for all.

5. Advocate for a campus campaign disseminating best practices for fostering an inclusive, welcoming, and accessible environment. In essence making available the content of our Faculty Conversation with Disability Services for Students in Fall 2019 much more widely.

6. Sponsoring a faculty development series about "research productivity and finding work-life balance during/after Covid-19." This is an issue that impacts a diverse population, including caretakers, both junior and senior faculty, post-docs, graduate students, etc. We can invite speakers for workshops to address related topics.

7. Encourage faculty participation in Safe Zone Workshops.
8. Any events sponsored by the committee should include contingency plans in case we do not/cannot gather together face to face. Consider events that could succeed as web events (Zoom gatherings, FaceBook, live, WebEx lectures, Instagram series, etc). Work to amplify any community building events sponsored by:

The Women’s Center
The Gender and Sexuality Center
The Multicultural Student Service Center (MSSC)

Additionally, committee members would like to organize and co-sponsor the following events:

1. Forum on designing and organizing campus spaces for diversity and inclusivity [Something along the lines of what this article describes]. Or someone to discuss URI's own design thinking as the campus has expanded over recent years.

2. Workshop on Diversity & Faculty Tenure/Promotion/Retention. An example of a possible speaker: Trish Matthews, Professor at Montclair, author of Written/Unwritten: Diversity and the Hidden Truths of Tenure (UNC, 2016)). Read more about her and this book in LARB interview.


Addendum
Informal Student Survey about a URI Indigenous Land Acknowledgement Statement

Students in H. Lloréns APG328: Gender & Culture were asked: “do you think it is important for URI to have a university-wide Indigenous land acknowledgement statement? Please, explain your answer.” This question was formulated during the week when we read Winona LaDuke’s work and watched the documentary Miss Navajo (3/31 and 4/1 as posted to Sakai Forums).

Student responses:

1. This is the first year that I have seen an Indigenous Land Agreement mentioned and put on a syllabus. Both you and your husband have acknowledged and addressed this statement. I think it is extremely important to think about whose land we are on and how we acquired it. It is the least we can do considering we live and learn in this shared environment.
2. It is imperative that URI have a university-wide indigenous acknowledgement statement. The recognition, validation, and appreciation of the indigenous lands that the university was built on is not only an integral part of the university's history but more importantly will focus attention on the history of the indigenous nations (both physical and cultural) that were disrupted to build the nation that we are today.

3. Indigenous land acknowledgement statements! PEOPLE NEED TO BE AWARE! We are so ignorant and we need to take the time to think about history and where we are now and why.

4. I absolutely think that URI should adopt an university-wide Indigenous land acknowledgement statement. The land on which our university sits was unjustly stolen from the Narragansett peoples who called it home, and, presently, we only acknowledge this by means of a few small plaques and a monument outside the library that all tend to go unnoticed. I believe that a university-wide statement would better hold students and faculty accountable while establishing more respect for the campus that houses our community.

5. I think that URI should have an Indigenous land acknowledgement statement: I believe that the university is on Narragansett land, and our school should respect those who lived here before us. While I think that a statement is a great step, I feel as though without action, it is not entirely meaningful. Perhaps URI should offer more courses dedicated to Indigenous history, culture, and philosophy (which I know that LaDuke is not too keen on, but I think it’s an important step to get people acquainted with Indigenous peoples and thoughts). Hosting Indigenous speakers like LaDuke, or having them teach courses, would also be a step in the right direction. I think it is important to recognize that Indigenous people still exist; they were not pushed off from their homes hundreds of years ago and relegated to the land of the past. So, I believe that acknowledging the past is crucial, but it is just as crucial to combine this acknowledgment with awareness of the present and progress for the future.

6. I really appreciated the Indigenous land acknowledgment statement you and Carlos Garcia-Quijano put in your syllabus and talked about on the first day of class (these are the only professors I had who did this). I think every class should have this land acknowledgment statement. It’s incredibly important we acknowledge the people who lived here before us, and whose land was stolen so we could live and learn here.

7. I do believe that URI should have a university-wide land acknowledgement statement. This is because we do run a full campus on land that is not originally ours, and was most likely taken unfairly from the people who were here long before us. It shows self-awareness of the foundations that we live upon and within and an appreciation for the things we get to have that they do not. And although we are unable
to go back and fix the harm we may have caused, we can give the indigenous communities some sense of justice and respect.

8. Yes we need to acknowledge where our land came from because most of the time how we/our ancestors acquired land was not right. Most land was basically stolen and it needs to be acknowledged that it occurred.

9. I definitely believe that it is important for URI to have a statement for the Indigenous land acknowledgement for the Indigenous people that still live here to be accredited and reflect on history of how this town came to be, but also so that individuals are aware that this land hold great meaning to a group of people, and that it should be respected in the way in which they want it to be.

10. I think if URI were to have an Indigenous land acknowledgement statement, it would be a good idea because it might inspire people to learn more about the indigenous people, and maybe people would respect the land more.

11. I think it is important for URI to have a university-wide Indigenous land acknowledgement statement. It is important to acknowledge where the land being used for this university came from, and who it came from. After the uncountable injustices served against indigenous people committed in this country, a land acknowledgement statement is the least that the university can do.

12. Yes I think it is important for URI to understand who first used the land that the university is based on. How can we learn to work in and change our environment/society for the better if we can’t acknowledge the past. I think a statement of acknowledgement of indigenous land could do more good than harm for our school, so it sounds like a good idea to me.

13. Yes I think it is important for URI to understand who first used the land that the university is based on. How can we learn to work in and change our environment/society for the better if we can’t acknowledge the past. I think a statement of acknowledgement of indigenous land could do more good than harm for our school, so it sounds like a good idea to me.

14. 100%! I believe that any type of history needs to be acknowledged at a place of education. Students of URI should know who walked the same grounds as they do every day on their way to class. I am surprised that URI does not host many events that have to do with the Narragansett Tribe knowing that there are many native families that live in the Kingstown, South Kingstown and Narragansett area. I believe that the university could do a better job at including more indigenous classes and events where students can learn about different types of foods, music, fashion, etc.
Land Acknowledgement Additional Resources

A Guide for Land Acknowledgements by Lorén Spears

Tim Ives, State Archaeologist (RI Historic Preservation & Heritage Commission)

Land Grab Universities - Investigative Journalism Report
https://www.hcn.org/issues/52.4/indigenous-affairs-education-land-grab-universities

URI Historic Timeline
https://www.uri.edu/about/history/#event-university-of-rhode-island

A recent article worth noting about land acknowledgements here:
https://yaledailynews.com/blog/2019/10/27/158410/?fbclid=IwAR0vcCqNSnW-cY_Ra8_dlvK5A RAwPw7zlajc94PBo1QXnF9A3mQ8tvbCJrU

Yale’s recent land acknowledgement statement appears here:
https://secretary.yale.edu/services-resources/land-acknowledgment-statements

Northwestern’s is perhaps a better and more capacious model:
https://www.northwestern.edu/native-american-and-indigenous-peoples/about/Land%20Acknowledgement.html

Harvard’s practice is to invite a culture bearer or member of leadership to welcome visitors at conferences and major events. According to Leah Hopkins (Niantic/Narragansett, URI ’20), and Community Engagement Specialist at The Haffenreffer Museum of Anthropology, Brown University, the benefits to this are:

A. Reinforces that Native people are here;
B. Supports the individual and values them for their time;
C. The speaker brings to bear the importance of certain aspects that a crafted acknowledgement may overlook;
D. Encourages participants to return to their home university or organization and do the same, which can open the door for future collaboration