

# COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES EQUITY & ANTI-RACISM COMMITTEE

Report from work completed during F2022-S2023 Academic Year

## **Members of the Committee:**

Kamilah A’Vant, Assistant Dean, A&S Dean’s Office Liaison  
Chelsea Farrell, Assistant Professor, Criminology and Criminal Justice (Co-Chair)  
Karen Sweeting, Assistant Professor, Political Science (Co-Chair)  
Nikolaos Poulakos, Senior Lecturer, Communication Studies  
Shahla Yekta, Senior Lecturer, Chemistry  
Gavino Puggioni, Associate Professor, Statistics (participated in Fall 2022)  
Rosaria Pisa, Teaching Professor, Gender & Women’s Studies/Sociology  
Kate Sylvester, Graduate Student  
Joseph Amaral, Undergraduate Student  
Isaiah Aponte, Undergraduate Student

**Co-Chairs:** Chelsea Farrell (Criminology & Criminal Justice) and Karen Sweeting (Political Science).

The co-chairs drafted This final report with revisions and input from committee members. As a Dean’s advisory committee, our work this year focused on the College Survey to guide the Dean in strategic JEDI priorities and 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.

**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.

### **PRIORITY 3 and Goal 3 of URI 2023-33 Strategic Plan**

With the new university strategic plan, priority 3 focuses on fostering an inclusive, people-centered culture. The University of Rhode Island has articulated a commitment to foster a diverse, equitable, and inclusive community—a vibrant, integrated university that celebrates the uniqueness of its members and fosters a culture of valuing people, excellence, and giving back. Goal 3 of Priority 3 aligned with our charge to attract, recognize and retain outstanding faculty and staff.

To foster an inclusive culture and meaningful exchanges among people, cultures, ideas, and viewpoints that advance a better understanding of diversity the action priorities of Goal 3 for the University are:

- Action 1: Institute streamlined, contemporary, and equitable talent acquisition and retention processes and practices, including a competitive and equitable salary structure.
- Action 2: Articulate and expand opportunities for faculty and staff career progression.
- Action 3: Foster a culture of excellence that provides development opportunities, recognizes achievement, and rewards outstanding performance.

### **Committee Interpretation and Understanding of Charge**

The 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 and dedicated resources and actionable strategies. The charge and strategic goal as outlined to manage the needs of a diverse college require clear priorities that focus on advancing and improving equity and anti-racism beyond the “illusion” of progress. 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, and resources.** There remains a need for greater resources and time 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 recognize that with the support of the Dean, the committee will work to identify and critically examine ways of informing, guiding, and advocating for equity and anti-racism initiatives 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 for Fall 2022-Spring 2023:**

### **1. Created and Disseminated Faculty/Staff and Student Surveys**

Building on the committee's efforts in year one and to better understand the needs of the college and best serve all students, faculty, and staff, the committee spent most of the Fall and Spring semesters designing a college climate survey. Our intention behind the survey was to engage the College of Arts and Sciences and uncover some of the most pressing challenges/tensions that students, faculty, and staff face around equity and anti-racism in the college. The survey and data collected will be instrumental as we move into year three to inform the strategic priorities of the committee and ways in which we can guide the Dean.

- The committee agreed that surveys were necessary to better understand the issues facing students, faculty, and staff in the College of Arts & Sciences. The University-wide Campus Climate Survey did not include enough information to fully gauge justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion challenges on campus. Additionally, we were unable to gain access to the data on relevant questions. To be strategic about the initiatives we propose and the advice we offer the Dean, we created A&S college surveys to fill these critical gaps.
- Two subcommittees were formed to draft each survey. The Student Survey Subcommittee comprised Isaiah, Joe, Kate, Chelsea, and Rosaria. The Faculty/Staff Survey Subcommittee comprised Karen, Shahla, Niko, and Gavino. After drafting each survey, the full committee reviewed them before sending them to Dean Riley for final approval.
- The surveys were disseminated using Qualtrics. To increase response rates, the Dean's office sent the initial email solicitation on the committee's behalf. The committee spent extensive time designing an outreach plan to increase participation. This plan included applying to the Dean's Event Fund and receiving \$1,000 (for promoting the survey and planning our Dialogue event). Funds used to promote the survey were allocated to purchase snacks to hand out to students along with QR code cards. The remaining funds were allocated for the Dialogue Series (see below).
- Committee members volunteered to spend time at tables in front of the Memorial Union and inside Chafee to advertise the survey. Additionally, we used social media and digital advertising to spread awareness about the surveys.
- Surveys were launched on March 27th and remained open until April 23rd.
  - 548 students completed the survey
  - 131 faculty/staff members completed the survey.
  - The response rate for faculty/staff was 41%. It is difficult to determine the response rate for students, given that students from outside of A&S were introduced to our survey via various advertising channels. Our best estimate suggests a response rate of 10% for students.

- Although we have not yet analyzed the data from the surveys, we provide the following preliminary findings:

#### **Faculty/Staff Survey Preliminary Insights:**

- Participants: 81% were faculty, 6% were staff, 0% were admin, 13% other roles
- 65% of faculty/staff have considered leaving URI (note that only 88 of the 130 answered this question)
- 59% of faculty/staff reported discrimination from at least one group – 23% of those who reported being discriminated against indicated it was by their colleagues, 17% indicated being discriminated against by administration, and 12% indicated being discriminated against by students
- Of the 20 people who sought some resolution for their experience with discrimination, 16 were not satisfied with their experience

#### **Student Survey Preliminary Insights:**

- 36% of students indicated they had seriously considered leaving URI. Of this 36% of students, 5% (N=15) indicated their reason for considering leaving was experiences with discrimination.
- When students were asked, “Since enrolling at URI, how many times have you
  - felt singled out or excluded on campus because of your racial/ethnic identity (mean = 1.8 times)
  - you personally witnessed a faculty/staff member treat a student unfairly because of racial/ethnic identity, (2.1)
  - you witnessed a student treat another student unfairly because of their race/ethnicity (2.6)
  - you heard a faculty member use discriminatory language (2.2)
  - you heard a student use discriminatory language (4.7)

## **2. Continued Dialogue Series**

Inspired by the apparent need for dialogues based on the success of our Dialogue Series in Spring 22, the committee facilitated another dialogue event on April 13, 2023.

- The committee partnered with the student-led URI group Diversity Dialogues to co-host a Listening and Dialogue Event on April 13th from 4:00-6:00 PM in the Galanti Lounge. The Dean’s Event Fund paid for food for this event mentioned above.
- 15 people attended this event, which was a low turnout
  - It was a beautiful sunny day outside
  - Late notice - so limited planning time
  - People are at capacity at this time of the year
  - Potential for targeted events
  - The committee plans to consider new ways to create in-person community conversations around these topics, and we welcome your suggestions.
    - One idea we proposed previously that we will revisit is a “lighting talk” model to invite faculty who are engaged in this work to share what they have been working on and incentivize this work with awards issued by this committee

- We hope to do more of these dialogues in the future
- The students from Diversity Dialogues took the lead and guided participants through two activities that focused on identity, power, privilege, and microaggressions.
  - The focus was on the student experience, which was helpful. However, next time we plan to be more prepared to co-lead to ensure the faculty/staff experiences are better integrated into the discussion.
- Equity and antiracism expand beyond race, yet race is a primary factor in these issues. We hope to build on these types of dialogue in the future and create space for community engagement luncheons and listening sessions. We are hopeful that these dialogues will generate more response and engagement and that students, faculty, and staff will be able to show up and participate in open and honest conversations about equity and anti-racism challenges for students, faculty, and staff. Some of the barriers to these dialogues are presented in part IV.

### **3. Reviewed Proposals for the Annual Lecture Series on African American, Black Diaspora, and Global Black Lives**

The committee remains genuinely concerned about issues of equity and anti-racism. We 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.

- The committee reviewed two proposals for funding for the Annual Lecture Series on African American, Black Diaspora, and Global Black Lives
- We recommended two funding requests to the Dean, and both were funded. Both proposals demonstrated the potential to create space for new interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary conversations and collaborations across fields of study.
  - Joint Event (Computer Science, Marine Affairs, & Journalism). Tackling the Challenge of Anti-Black Racism: Building Sustainable Collaborations Between STEM and the Humanities. Spring 2023 Event - Details forthcoming (\$13,248)
  - Joint Event (Africana Studies & Gender and Women's Studies). African-Caribbean Intersectional Engagement Series. Spring 2023 Event - Details forthcoming (\$9,451)
- This is an annual lecture series with funding allocated each year. The applications are generally due by mid-October, and committee review and recommendation by November 1st. We hope to see more proposals submitted in the future.

We hope to continue to support these efforts in the future and strongly encourage departments to participate.

### **Part III. Next Steps and Future Priorities**

We hope to execute the initiatives outlined below effectively. 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. We will continue in our efforts 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. The strategic priorities of the committee will be

informed by data analyzed and interpreted from the college climate survey. We envision:

1. Planning a committee retreat at the beginning of the 2023-2024 academic year to help organize and strategize what efforts the committee will prioritize. The survey data are instrumental in this effort and require the work of committee members to analyze and interpret the survey data before the start of the next academic year. To better plan the year and outline our priorities - this will help the committee to strategize earlier in the year and execute the plan
2. The retreat will help the committee be more efficient with our limited time to cover a vast and complex charge.
3. Partnering with other 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 correct phrases to cultivate an environment that is equitable, inclusive, fair, and just for all.
  - a. The committee will continue its efforts 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 scope, size, and severity of equity, inclusion, and anti-racism challenges. By focusing our energy and combining resources, we can collectively plan, execute, and evaluate diversity, equity, and anti-racism within the college and the broader URI community.
  - b. 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.
4. Exploring the committee's role in understanding the depth of existing training on campus.
5. Advocating for change focuses on operationalizing and embedding JEDI work within the college as something 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, including equity and anti-racism challenges, curriculum design, classroom practices, assignments, videos, speakers, etc.
  - a. Review the Department DEI Reports provided by the Dean's office to better understand how departments engage in JEDI efforts. This will also help inform our plans to highlight those excelling in this area.
  - b. We proposed to the Dean in 2022 a College Department Award for Excellence in JEDI work. We are still outlining what this will entail to spotlight departments integrating and operationalizing JEDI across the curriculum and into departmental structures.
  - c. We are exploring paid workshops for faculty to learn how to incorporate equity and anti-racism in classroom environments where such efforts are prioritized. We have also discussed joint events with other colleges and/or departments - (e.g., Anti-Racism Book Club or Brown Bag).
  - d. 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 incredible

- work and rewarding them for it.
- e. Our goal in carrying out these efforts is to provide exposure to how departments are working to articulate and link actions 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.
  6. We will continue to make a conscious effort to address all components of our charge. Resistance and push-back are part of the process. Although we anticipate it, it is instrumental that leadership bodies continue to prioritize and communicate the essential nature of the committee's work in meeting and fulfilling the University's strategic priorities.

#### **Part IV. Challenges/Concerns**

1. Creating a safe and brave environment for this committee and the broader A&S college community to feel safe and protected to engage openly in dialogue is crucial. Resonant in our preliminary climate data assessment is the prevalence of fear.
  - a. There is hesitancy to engage in the sensitive nature of equity and antiracism discussion due to possible retaliation, retribution, penalties, and people remain cautious in how they navigate power structure and fear of being ostracized.
2. The committee discussed issues around faculty composition, workload distribution, inequities, exclusion, and student social events that are not always welcoming to everyone.
3. We need committee members committed to executing and actively participating in the committee's efforts. This includes more than showing up sporadically to the monthly meetings. The burden of the work for the committee continues to fall on the co-chairs, who spend an additional 50 hours per year on committee work.
4. Preliminary climate survey results indicate that existing policies and practices to address discrimination experiences require reexamination for effectiveness in generating equitable outcomes.
5. Discussion around URI support for faculty who perform JEDI work and populations of color not feeling safe and welcomed on campus. The ongoing issue of feeling isolated from the broader URI community. This challenge aligns with the retention of faculty of color.
6. 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, and foster inclusion and equity while giving students, faculty, and staff a forum to share their voice and feel safe doing so—protection of faculty and staff are vital.
7. We must enhance our visibility and work conscientiously and collaboratively to build trust, connect, and engage with the URI A&S community (students, faculty, and staff). We need support, and we need resources to realize and make progress on our strategic priorities.
8. 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 much work to be done, and the committee will need your support as we move forward.