INTERIM CHIEF DIVERSITY OFFICER’S MESSAGE

There are a number of noteworthy achievements that were accomplished in 2018–19. Nearly one in every four students at the University are students of color. Faculty diversity grew from 16% to 21%. The general education requirement explicitly outlines learning outcomes focused on diversity and inclusion. Committees across the University have sponsored staff and faculty development programs to cultivate cultural competence and inclusive pedagogy. In many ways, the University of Rhode Island is well-poised to be an innovative, national leader for diversity.

A critical component of URI’s success is also the work of the Office of Community, Equity and Diversity (CED). By collaborating with campus leaders, CED helps build institutional capacity for equity and inclusion across the University in ways that matter most to our community. Changes in our recruitment strategies, retention efforts, and institutional transformation are only possible when all members of URI contribute in meaningful ways.

This has been a transformative year for CED. A program review, staff transitions, and reorganization allowed the campus community to reflect on CED’s progress to date, as well as reimagine social justice and inclusive excellence at URI in the future. In collaboration with key partners across the institution, CED has been able to promulgate university-wide diversity initiatives that directly align with President Dooley’s transformational goals and academic strategic plan.

This report provides an overview of key issues from the spring and summer of 2019 affecting CED’s influence and impact throughout campus. It begins with an overview of community feedback that was gathered throughout the year. This is followed by several examples of CED’s application of theory to practice. Next is a discussion of projects aimed at promoting a sense of community and inclusion at URI. This report concludes with new initiatives for the upcoming year.

We are excited about the future of diversity initiatives at URI. We also remain hopeful that the upcoming academic year will bring renewed energy and enthusiasm for more initiatives that allow all URI students, staff, and faculty to thrive.

–Mary Grace A. Almandrez
COMMUNITY FEEDBACK OVERVIEW

Primed For Success

CED completed its first external review on September 12 and 13, 2018. This was the second phase of a comprehensive program review process that included self-studies of CED’s direct reporting units (i.e., Affirmative Action, Equal Opportunity and Diversity; Gender and Sexuality Center; Multicultural Student Services Center; Women’s Center), onsite focus group conversations with an external review team of subject matter experts, and action items in response to the team’s recommendations.

In their report, the review team noted “the University of Rhode Island’s sincere commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion” as well as a “general sense that the University has yet to reach its full potential in creating the welcoming and inclusive campus community everyone desires.” In response to these observations, CED immediately launched a comprehensive listening tour in spring 2019. The tour consisted of individual and group meetings with the interim chief diversity officer (CDO); five open sessions on the Kingston, Feinstein Providence, and Narragansett Bay campuses; and weekly open hours for students.

Highlights from the listening tour include:

503 STUDENTS, STAFF, FACULTY, AND ALUMNI FROM 63 DIFFERENT UNITS PARTICIPATED

100% PARTICIPATION FROM SENIOR LEADERSHIP TEAM, COLLEGE DEANS, AFFINITY GROUPS, PRESIDENTIAL COMMISSIONS, AND EQUITY COUNCIL

THE DIVISION OF STUDENT AFFAIRS HAD THE LARGEST NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS (n=75), FOLLOWED BY THE NARRAGANSETT BAY CAMPUS (n=23)

Content Analysis

A content analysis of the open session comments was conducted by the CED graduate assistant, who identified five key themes that emerged during the open sessions:

1. Acknowledgement of different lived experiences among minoritized groups on campus
2. Institutional support for affinity groups
3. Transparency in communication about diversity-related issues and initiatives at all levels of the institution
4. More faculty and staff development opportunities focused on cultural competence and inclusive pedagogy
5. Meaningful and substantial diversity programs that go beyond “food, folks, and fun” activities

These themes were shared with all participants of the listening tour. They were also integrated in CED strategic planning and priorities.
THEORY TO PRACTICE

Pedagogy and Praxis

There was a concerted effort this year to incorporate pedagogical frameworks into CED initiatives, programs, and strategic planning. Among these frameworks were:

- Appreciative inquiry (i.e., asset-based approach to address organizational issues)
- Inclusive excellence (i.e., integrating diversity, inclusion, and equity as core principles of a high-quality liberal arts education)
- National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education (NADOHE) standards of professional practice for chief diversity officers (i.e., 12 guidelines to clarify the scope of CDOs in colleges and universities)

Grounding CED work in diversity scholarship modeled a commitment to praxis. Praxis refers to linking theory to practice and reflection to inform new theory. Additional projects that facilitated praxis are:

- 283 students, staff, and faculty participated in CED workshops facilitated by Joanna N. Ravello, director of community and organizational development, in the spring semester. Training topics included fundamentals of diversity, implicit bias, microaggressions, inclusive college environments, and student development. Several academic and administrative units have discussed continuous education and collaboration with CED on these and other diversity issues to inform their day-to-day work.
- Alycia Mosley Austin, assistant dean of graduate recruitment and diversity initiatives, and Director Ravello launched the third cohort of the Diversity & Inclusion Badge Program (DIBP). This year, 11 doctorate and 13 master’s students representing 13 programs earned certificates of completion. Since its inception in spring 2017, 41 graduate students have completed the program.
- In May 2019, Assistant Dean Mosley Austin and Director Ravello presented a workshop on the DIBP at the New England College Personnel Association (NECPA) Summit. This provided a framework for student affairs professionals to develop a similar program on their respective campuses.
- In May 2019, the CED staffing structure expanded to include an undergraduate scholar in residence (co-sponsored by the Graduate School) and graduate assistant (in collaboration with the College Student Personnel Program). These scholars assisted with projects focused on the DIBP, online resources on diversity and inclusion, formation of a new diversity council, and listening tour content analysis.

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283 students, staff, and faculty participated in CED workshops

CED staffing structure expanded to include an undergraduate scholar in residence and graduate assistant
Community Engagement

Dedicated effort was focused on including more members of the URI community in conversations and initiatives that promote diversity. Outreach to students was a top priority. Various community engagement projects include:

• Interim Chief Diversity Officer Almandrez hosted weekly open hours for undergraduate and graduate students at the Kingston Campus. More than 30 students attended at least one open hour session. Open hours will continue in the fall at the Kingston Campus. Monthly open hours will also be offered at the Feinstein Providence and Narragansett Bay campuses beginning October 2019.

• Student Senate created a new liaison position to CED to promote communication and collaboration. The inclusion of student leaders in CED planning has been helpful in understanding the student experience, gathering feedback, creative problem-solving, and informal advising/mentoring.

• Intentional outreach and consistent communication with affinity group leaders representing Alumni of Color Network (ACN), Faculty Staff Association of the African Diaspora (FSAAD), Rainbow Network (LGBTQ faculty and staff), and Women of Color Network (WOCN) helped formalize CED’s support and commitment to these groups.

• As a University community that values diversity and inclusion, it is critical that issues of bias are documented and addressed in a timely, compassionate, and effective manner. Oversight of the Bias Response Team transitioned to CED and has expanded its membership. Representatives from CED, Dean of Students Office, Department of Public Safety, Division of Academic Affairs, Feinstein Providence Campus and Narragansett Bay Campus meet on a monthly basis to discuss cases, review current issues, and participate in training. Workshops on bias response reporting will be offered to the campus community in the 2019–20 academic year.

• A weekly Community Connections program was piloted on the Kingston Campus in summer 2019 to provide a space for students, staff, and faculty to gather in an informal setting. Thirty-one community members attended at least one Community Connections lunch. These gatherings will continue on a monthly basis beginning fall 2019.

Our Future and New Initiatives

On the Horizon

The last few months have been an important opportunity for CED and the wider community to reflect on the future direction of diversity initiatives across all URI campuses. The following are exciting projects on the horizon for 2019–20:

• The search for the permanent chief diversity officer will begin in fall 2019.

• The search for the new director of diverse faculty recruitment and retention was launched in July 2019.

• An ad hoc committee comprised of staff, students, and faculty was charged by President Dooley in June 2019 to present recommendations to the senior leadership team regarding the name, structure, objectives, and membership of a new advisory board to the chief diversity officer. The new council will be in place in fall 2019.

• The CED summit will take place in October 2019. During this gathering, the campus community will learn about promising practices that reflect the goals and objectives of the CED strategic plan and engage in discussion with colleagues on ways they may implement the plan in their respective units.

• A new website will serve as a centralized hub featuring diversity resources and information across the University. The website will be launched in spring 2020.

• CED will pilot an engaged department/program initiative starting in fall 2019. Four academic and administrative departments/programs will work with Director Ravello in a sustained capacity to develop action plans and change interventions to institutionalize identified diversity projects. The four departments/programs are: Jumpstart, Department of Nursing, Physical Therapy Department, and Rose Butler Browne Leadership and Mentoring Program.

• Plans are underway to launch a campus climate survey in 2020.

• Undergraduate scholars in residence will develop a curriculum and guide to train students on facilitating social justice dialogues. The training program will be launched in spring 2020.
All of us in the academy and in the culture as a whole are called to renew our minds if we are to transform educational institutions—and society—so that the way we live, teach, and work can reflect joy in cultural diversity, our passion for justice, and our love of freedom.

– bell hooks
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