

# **SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY**

## **Chancellor's Workgroup on Diversity and Inclusion**

**Final Report  
March 11, 2016**

### **INTRODUCTION**

On October 16, 2015, Chancellor Kent Syverud directed this Workgroup to build on the work done by other campus groups and, guided by the Academic Strategic Plan, make recommendations to help “sustain an inclusive, accessible campus of opportunity for a richly diverse student body.”

While Syracuse University has a history of inclusivity, inclusion does not always mean equity and acceptance; too often, it manifests in marginalization as well as overt and covert discrimination. This Workgroup reaffirms that tradition and makes the recommendations below to move the institution forward in a positive and progressive way.

We believe Syracuse University's academic excellence depends on our commitment to diversity and inclusion. As Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, “An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity.” In creating institutional frameworks and infrastructures that support the ongoing work of inclusivity, we aim to serve not just marginalized and underrepresented members of the campus but the entire community.

### **DEFINITIONS**

The Workgroup views diversity and inclusion as interconnected concepts shaped by a social justice framework. We value individual and group differences and recognize that identities are varied, complex, and intersecting.

We define diversity as the presence and/or representation of the individual and group differences that make us unique. Diversity is not always noticeable and can be invisible.

We define inclusion as the deliberate and ongoing act of creating and maintaining systems, practices, and spaces that respect individual and group differences and that systematically address broader issues of discrimination, oppression, and exclusion.

Diversity (or the lack of diversity) is a fact, while inclusion is a set of dynamic and intentional actions.

### **PROCESS**

We have met several times a week since October, inviting testimony from representatives of many campus groups, including undergraduate and graduate students, staff, and faculty, about experiences regarding race and ethnicity, gender and

sexual orientation, internationalization, religious identity, military status, (dis)abilities, and other intersecting identities. We read and discussed the university's mission statement, as well as student concerns and demands, and reports from previous Senate and campus workgroups that made recommendations around these issues. We also held two open campus forums, where all members of the community were invited to offer testimonies and concrete suggestions about how to make our campus more inclusive. We issued an Open Letter and several news releases to the university community, listing our names and email addresses and inviting people to contact us directly. Information gathered through all these channels helped shape our recommendations.

We are aware that many comparable efforts on campuses across the country have failed<sup>1</sup>. Those efforts typically did not take into account broader societal issues like the profound effects of implicit bias. We have, therefore, aimed our recommendations at addressing systemic issues in higher education, as well as those specific to our campus. To make our university a place in which all members feel welcome and find a sense of safety and "unity in our diversity," we need to rethink the ways we interact, remove structural barriers to full participation in the life of our community, and build intercultural competencies.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

We've organized our recommendations into three main categories—however, many could fit easily into multiple categories. This speaks to the intersectionalities at the heart of issues of diversity and inclusion. Within each category, we've indicated short-term and long-term recommendations.

### **Institutional Commitment**

Under this category, we address structural and policy issues at the university that can

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16. Enhance orientation and onboarding for international students, faculty, and staff, so they are aware of the full range of programs, services, and resources available to them.

17. Improve New Student Orientation to deepen understandings and forge relationships across racial, ethnic, religious, and other lines. Create a Syracuse Reads Program and consider the selection of books, such as Ta-Nehisi Coates' *Between the World and Me*, that foster a sense of understanding and inclusion. Follow such readings with small group meetings facilitated by diversity educators.

Long-term (to be addressed within the next two to three years):

18. Create and require ongoing faculty and staff development on issues of race, class, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability, sexual harassment, and religion. Opportunities for such development could include the recruitment process, enhanced onboarding and orientation, workshops, and campus conferences. For example, require the Safer People/Safer Spaces program for all faculty and staff.

19. Develop and require a first-year forum or course in diversity and inclusion for



32. Expand the university's Preferred Name/MySlice process for choice of gender pronouns, email display names, ID cards, and issues related to Blackboard and other relevant platforms.

33. Re-examine current university policies around religious observance, which place the burden of observance on students. Ensure that important university events (e.g., Commencement, convocations, graduation, finals) are not scheduled on major religious holidays (e.g., Yom Kippur, Eid al-Fitr, Diwali).

## **CONCLUSION**

Syracuse University has historically been committed to principles of diversity and inclusion. These recommendations extend that commitment, strengthening the university's visible position as an institution that prepares global citizens.

We want to make clear, however, that they are more than just a collection of activities and initiatives. To be truly effective, these proactive measures—each representing a substantive marker of demonstrative change—must build upon one another to create a welcoming and enriching community that seeks to promote the inclusion, engagement, and success of all its members.

In addition to accomplishing the short- and long-term goals outlined here, it is vital that the university vigorously and publicly promote a unified vision that fosters diversity and the inclusion of all its members. Our individual and collective efforts will be more visible, and will affect the institutional culture more deeply, if we recognize that these are ongoing processes designed to change the deep structures of our university and its institutional climate.

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Special thanks to Megan Travis and Gretchen Goldstein, who helped organize the Workgroup.