

Report of the LBJ School's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee 2019-20

Chair: Michele Deitch

Faculty Members: Gordon Abner, Jacqui Angel, Victoria DeFrancesco Soto, Ed Dorn, Jamie Galbraith, Peniel Joseph, Kate Weaver

Student Members: Barbara Kufiadan, Elisa Santana, Jade Vasquez

Charge to the Committee

Dean Evans charged our Committee with following up on recommendations made in the LBJ School's Diversity & Inclusion (D&I) Strategic Action Plan (2017) to help make sure progress is being made towards implementation of these recommendations.

D&I Strategic Action Plan

The D&I Strategic Action Plan is a work in progress. Originally prepared for the Provost's Office in 2017, it includes goals and detailed action steps in four priority areas: (1) student recruitment; (2) faculty recruitment; (3) curriculum, pedagogy, and research; and (4) inclusive environment.

Meetings, Events, and Activities

Our Committee—renamed the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Committee in 2019—met four times over the course of the year (more meetings had been planned but were derailed by the pandemic), and we had lively and thoughtful discussions during each meeting.

In addition to these “official” Committee meetings, the faculty members of the Committee (plus others) also met five times during the fall semester as part of a “Learning Community on Diversifying Teaching and Pedagogy,” organized by Prof. Peniel Joseph and professionally facilitated by Dr. Keffrelyn Brown.

There were also a number of related events and activities, which were not formally sponsored by the DEI Committee, but were opportunities for students to share their perspectives about DEI issues at the LBJ School, including a student town hall-style discussion about school climate issues. Our student Committee members reported back to the full Committee about the views expressed during these gatherings. Also, OSAA-sponsored events offered additional opportunities for DEI programming at the LBJ School, including ally trainings, workshops, and speaker events.

Priority Issues: Progress and Areas for Improvement

In **2018-19**, our Committee, composed largely of the same faculty members and one overlapping student member, prioritized issues related to student recruitment and inclusive environment. A great deal of progress was made in each area, primarily due to the Dean's appointment of Kate Weaver as Associate Dean of Student Affairs and of Victoria DeFrancesco Soto as Director of Civic Engagement (and later, as Assistant Dean for Civic Engagement and External Affairs). Those appointments allowed for a revamped approach to student recruitment and admissions, including efforts to recruit a more diverse student body. Also, there was a greater emphasis on programming at the School with more DEI content and a greater diversity of speakers. Student feedback was very positive. As we tracked the School's implementation of DEI recommendations, we also saw welcome changes in faculty recruitment, with the appointment of four new faculty members who come from diverse backgrounds. We saw less progress when it came to diversifying the curriculum and creating more inclusive classrooms, however. This led the Committee to support a proposal for the development of a new core course called "Values, Rights, and Critical Issues." Ultimately, instead of opting for this new course, the GSC elected to redesign the Policy Development core course in a way that allowed for incorporation of similar content to that of our proposed course. Our Committee also submitted a proposal to the Tower for an interdisciplinary cluster hire in "Civil/Human Rights, Immigration, and Criminal Justice." That proposal, unfortunately, was unsuccessful.

For **2019-20**, we began our work focused primarily on the subject of "curriculum, pedagogy, and research" (the third priority area in the D&I Strategic Action Plan), since that area had seen the least progress the previous year. First, as noted above, Prof. Peniel Joseph organized a learning community in which roughly 10 faculty members engaged in a series of lunchtime discussions of two books on pedagogy from a DEI perspective and also work-shopped their syllabi with an eye towards incorporating more DEI content. Second, we met with Victoria Rodriguez in her capacity as co-chair of the LBJ School's GSC subcommittee tasked with redesigning the Policy Development course to learn more about how this revamped course would include the DEI content we believe to be so vital to students' education. While this course is still in the planning process, we were able to share ideas with Prof. Rodriguez's committee about ways to strengthen the course design to make it even more responsive to DEI considerations. We are excited about the potential this course holds for addressing DEI issues. Third, we began discussing ways we could solicit faculty suggestions for enhancing DEI content in the curriculum, with the goal of producing a document with concrete ideas for faculty. That project has not yet begun but we hope to get it underway this summer, which would be especially timely as many faculty may be rethinking their syllabi in light of current events.

Our Committee also received regular reports from Associate Dean Weaver and Assistant Dean DeFrancesco Soto about their efforts with regard to student recruitment and admissions and to DEI-related programming at the School. We have found their efforts

on both fronts to be sustained, thoughtful, and committed to the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Of course, we would all like to see even faster progress with regard to increasing the diversity of the student body, but we believe the fruits of their efforts will be more abundant over time.

With regard to faculty recruitment, little progress was made this year on increasing diversity. There were two faculty hires, and although both new colleagues are superb, neither is a person of color. Prof. Jacqui Angel, our Committee member who also serves on the Provost's Council for Racial and Ethnic Equity and Diversity (CREED), brought the following data from the [CREED dashboard](#) to our attention. Among tenured/tenure-track faculty at the LBJ School, faculty identify their race/ethnicity as follows:¹

White (25):	71.4%
Black/African-American (3):	8.6%
Asian/Asian-American (3):	8.6%
Hispanic/Latinx (1):	2.9%
Unknown/Blank (1):	2.9%
American Indian/ Alaskan Native (0):	0.0%
Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander (0):	0.0%

With the ongoing hiring freeze for new faculty, there is little likelihood for change on this front in the coming year, unfortunately, but recruiting a more diverse faculty needs to be a high priority for the LBJ School in the years to come.

It is also worth noting that there are a number of [important initiatives](#) taking place at the University level with respect to faculty equity issues. (While these initiatives did not originate at the LBJ School, our Committee had input into this work through Prof. Angel, through her work on CREED, and these initiatives will have an impact on our School.) In addition to the creation of the diversity dashboard mentioned above, which allows for more transparency around faculty diversity at each unit on campus, there has been increasing attention paid to equity concerns of Latinx faculty members, following an [independent report](#) issued last fall that highlighted these issues. And a campus-wide survey of faculty members regarding job satisfaction conducted in Spring 2020 (the COACHE survey) will provide insight into faculty climate issues that need to be addressed at both the university and unit levels. Further, the Provost's office is currently engaged in an analysis of salary equity issues, and is providing mandatory training on implicit bias for faculty search committees. The DEI Committee welcomes these initiatives, especially since many of them support the LBJ School's D&I Strategic Action Plan.

¹ The data may be found at: <https://provost.utexas.edu/data/college-school-diversity>. It is unclear why the figures do not add up to 100%.

The final priority area for our Committee has to do with the inclusive environment/climate at the LBJ School. Our student members brought several issues of concern to the table and we discussed them at length during our meetings. In particular, students have raised the following concerns and priorities, of behalf of themselves and various student organizations at the LBJ School:

- The need for additional fellowship funding for admitted students and more transparency in the process of how fellowships are allocated;
- The need for more competitive wages paid to student workers at the LBJ School, especially for TAs;
- Worries that the number of hours for TAs will be reduced below 20 hours, which impacts health care benefits and the cost of tuition;
- The need for more attention to DEI issues during the student orientation process, and a perception that this subject was not a high priority for organizers during this year's orientation;
- A desire for an "alumni of color" network to mentor current students of color;
- Continuing reports by students of color that they often experience micro-aggressions in the classroom and in the larger LBJ School community by faculty and other students, and that they sense a lack of belonging and inclusion at the LBJ School; and
- A desire for more DEI content in the curriculum, and a sense that many faculty do not prioritize such content.

The DEI Committee was grateful to our student members for raising these very important concerns with us, for detailing these issues in writing, and for bringing the perspectives of their classmates to our discussions. We asked Associate Dean Weaver and Assistant Dean DeFrancesco Soto to respond to most of these issues, since addressing the problems requires the involvement of OSAA. Further discussion made clear that some of these issues are especially complex because of budgetary considerations (in the case of fellowships and wages). However, it is also clear that OSAA and the school's leadership are taking these concerns seriously and are seeking ways to address the students' objectives.

Our Committee does not have the authority to take any actions except through established administrative channels at the LBJ School. However, we do want to state our support for the students who have raised what we believe to be important factors in how students of color experience their time at the School. We recognize that the financial constraints posed by limited fellowship funds and wages that are less than the prevailing wages across other units at UT pose ongoing and serious problems that will disproportionately affect students of color and those with more limited financial means. To the extent possible, it should be a priority at the LBJ School to raise additional funds for these purposes. We would also like to see OSAA examine more fully the significant disparity in pay between masters and doctoral students, as well as the shrinking pool of positions available for TAs and GRAs.

We also are deeply concerned about the climate issues presented by the students: every student at the LBJ School belongs here and should feel that they are a part of an inclusive community. While we do not know how widespread these climate concerns are on the part of students, more can and should be done to educate faculty and students about ways that their language and behavior can impact the emotional wellbeing of others in the community. We expect and hope that additional programming will be planned during orientation and throughout the next academic year that will help improve this situation.

As for the students' request for increased DEI content in the curriculum, we continue to emphasize the need for both substantive classes focused on race and social justice issues as well as routine inclusion of DEI-relevant topics and a diverse set of authors in other courses. The redesign of the Policy Development course and the new Communications course offer opportunities to expand our focus on DEI issues in the core curriculum. We also note that there likely will be an increase in student demand for courses focused on racial equity issues given current events and the groundswell of public attention to these critical matters. We would support adding courses at the intersection of race and public policy to the core requirements, given that this may be the only opportunity for some students to be exposed to this critically important material. There is additional potential for substantive DEI offerings in the form of short courses, policy lectures by faculty, policy programs for admitted students, community book group discussions, and relevant LBJ In the Arena programs.

Priorities for Next Academic Year

This Committee will continue to track developments in all four areas of the D&I Strategic Action Plan, and we believe the following should be especially high priorities for the LBJ School in the coming year:

- make efforts to improve the school climate with respect to DEI issues and to create a more inclusive environment for students of color, LGBTQIA+ students, and students with disabilities;
- find ways to increase DEI content in the curriculum and to encourage faculty to make relevant changes in their syllabi;
- consider with renewed urgency the possibility of adding existing courses at the intersection of race and public policy to the core (above and beyond plans to implement the new Policy Development course);
- address the striking disparities in the number of tenured/tenure-track faculty of color at the LBJ School, once there is again flexibility to initiate faculty searches;
- continue efforts to recruit and admit a more diverse student body;
- ensure financial support is available for students in the form of livable wages, fellowships, and emergency support;

- build on this year's LBJ In the Arena series to foster a strong schoolwide community of discussion and debate on the most pressing current social issues, with particular focus on issues related to racial justice; and
- ensure that the next Dean brings a strong commitment to further progress on DEI issues.

These issues take on even greater urgency—and demand greater creativity on the part of the School's leadership—at a time when the School will be operating at least partly in a remote environment, during an economic recession, and while racial justice concerns are front and center in the public's consciousness. Now more than ever, it is incumbent on us as a community—especially as one that teaches and contributes to public policy—to reaffirm and strengthen our commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusiveness and to combat all forms of intolerance and indifference to these issues.

All of these issues and concerns should also remain at the fore as the LBJ School begins its search for a new Dean.