

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION REPORT

WMU Office for Sustainability

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Introduction

Since its founding in 2010, the mission of Western Michigan University's (WMU) Office for Sustainability (OfS) has been centered around "building a diverse and flourishing learning community around sustainability... [to] improve quality of life for all." A myriad of OfS jobs, internships, research projects, and initiatives provide opportunities for students, faculty, staff, and volunteers to explore this commitment in meaningful and impactful ways.

The OfS has developed a Diversity & Inclusion (D & I) initiative to strengthen these core commitments. Throughout this process we have been exploring ways to focus on the inclusivity, equity, and diversity of our office environment, and how essential a dedication to these values is in successfully pursuing a sustainable future. By developing new connections among community, education, social systems, and quality of life, the OfS will advance its efforts to create a workplace culture that is safe, accessible, and inclusive. We have made it a priority to restructure internal and external communications that foster collaboration among a diverse group of students, employees, volunteers, and community partners. We have also developed aspects of our work to expand our office's capacity for cross-cultural understanding and inclusive practices that support all our employees fully. Through ongoing assessment, reflection, and refinement processes, we are working to increase awareness and action around the role of D & I in meeting our collective sustainability goals. This Report provides an overview of the preliminary processes we have implemented so far and an outline of our vision for continuing this work in the future. This D & I Report, coupled with our 2018-2019 D & I Action Plan, will serve as living documents to be reviewed and edited as necessary moving forward.

Framework Development

During the summer of 2016, a D & I team was formed to conduct research on D & I in institutional contexts. This research, led by Internship Coordinator Laura Donders, focused on examining strategies similar institutions and other campus organizations have used to improve workplace accessibility and reduce workplace barriers. This foundational D & I literature includes the WMU Diversity & Multicultural Plan (2006), Portland State's Diversity Action Plan (2012), Virginia Tech's Diversity Strategic Plan (2013), Dr. Dorceta E. Taylor's State of Diversity in Environmental Organizations Report (2014), and the University of Oregon's Diversity Framework (2016). These documents provided a significant base of recommendations and strategies to inform our effort to advance D & I in the workplace.

With the intention of developing a common understanding of D & I terms, commitments, and practices at WMU and other local institutions, Donders also interviewed eight different community partners engaged and experienced in established D & I work. These community partners included directors and coordinators of WMU LGBT Student Services, Urban Outreach at the Kalamazoo Nature Center, WMU First-Year Experience Programs, Diversity & Inclusion at Bronson Hospital, Community Relations with the Kalamazoo Promise, the Kalamazoo Community Foundation, the Kalamazoo College Arcus Center for Social Justice, and the Mayor

of Kalamazoo. Community partners were asked a series of interview questions to provide a basic conceptual understanding of how D & I are perceived and addressed in different workplace settings. They were asked about successful examples, misconceptions, challenges, and measurement to inform and ensure the effectiveness of the OfS's D & I plans going forward. Although these interviews were structured around specific questions, they typically expanded into larger conversations about the inner-workings of D & I and potential opportunities for collaboration around the intersections of our work.

A set of key themes and findings were collected from both the community partner interviews and literature review:

Community Partner Themes

- Diversity is a core indicator of successful and effective organizations.
- Recognizing and honoring difference is integral to developing effective communication.
- D & I are separate yet intertwined concepts.
- D & I progress rests on developing a common language and defining terms.
- Effective approaches to D & I incorporate meaningful, long-term commitments, which are directed at shifting cultures and mindsets, instead of producing short-term diversity statistics.
- University settings serve as a hub and catalyst for advancing D & I.

Literature Review Themes

- “Diversity statements without a plan and rigorous data collection are just words on paper” (Dorceta E. Taylor).
- College campuses have a unique opportunity and responsibility to prioritize and advance D & I.
- Every level of communication should be reviewed to identify and address implicit bias and exclusionary practices.
- D & I efforts should be collaborative, ongoing, and integrated into existing activities and responsibilities.
- D & I must be foregrounded in all recruitment, hiring, and retention procedures.

Based on these key themes, we found it necessary to process these topics with all of the OfS staff before launching into large-scale action. Coming to a collective understanding of D & I was central to our framework development process at the OfS. Much of the D & I literature and many of the community partners interviewed suggested that defining D & I should be a fundamental component of our initiative. Through our framework development process, we have come to recognize D & I as separate but intertwined concepts that have different contextual relevance from setting to setting. With this in mind, we decided that it was best to define D & I collaboratively as an office so that everyone had the opportunity to help clarify these terms and what they mean to us. Recognizing that the prioritization of D & I pursuits is a continual practice and that these definitions have the potential to improve in the future, we decided to treat them as “working” definitions that can be revised over time.

At an all-staff meeting, employees and interns participated in a twenty-minute workshop where Donders presented the key framework development findings, facilitated discussion about the

significance of the OfS mission statement in our jobs, and prompted staff members to interpret what they felt the two terms meant in small group discussions. At the end of this twenty-minute session, the group reconvened and the small groups delivered the core concepts of their definitions to Donders who subsequently synthesized them into the first draft of our working D & I definitions.

After the definition workshop, a D & I subcommittee was formed consisting of about fifteen OfS employees in student research, leadership, and internship positions. The subcommittee met three times to improve the D & I working definitions and discuss next steps in our process. After three iterations, the subcommittee felt that they successfully reflected participants' contributions and the OfS mission:

Diversity: *the presence of a wide range of individual & group differences (i.e. race; sex; gender identity; ethnicity; socioeconomic status; physical & mental condition; personality traits; age; experience; perspective; educational background; nationality; sexual orientation; and religious, political, or other sociocultural affiliations) and the intersections of these differences that contribute towards improving quality of life for all.*

Inclusion: *actively working to create a learning community in which equity is cultivated, everyone feels represented and upheld, and diversity flourishes.*

Action Plan

Given our research findings, community partner themes, and other Framework Development materials, we developed a D & I Action Plan for the 2018-2019 academic year that outlines specific goals and actions. This plan is separated into three primary goals, each containing their own set of action items. These include:

1. Deepen understanding of D & I throughout the OfS and build it into regular office operations.

- 1.1 Make D & I materials (definitions, foundational materials, Report, and Action Plan) accessible to all staff members and promote internally.
- 1.2 Make the D & I initiative materials externally accessible on the OfS website.
- 1.3 Formalize a position within the OfS for D & I work. This person will be responsible for overseeing the success of the D & I initiative.
- 1.4 Work with WMU University Relations to better align all web content with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG).
- 1.5 Annually check WCAG to keep content up to standard.
- 1.6 Complete an all-staff diversity education workshop early in the 2018-19 academic year to build office-wide aptitude in institutional D & I practices. This workshop will serve as a foundation to be built upon every following year through participating in other diversity workshops about specific topics and issues. All new hires will be required to take an introductory diversity education workshop upon onboarding.
- 1.7 Build budget and time for an annual training or workshop to address specific D & I topics, concerns, barriers, or challenges (ex. implicit bias, antiracism, LGBT inclusivity, microaggressions, decolonization, accessibility for persons with disabilities, etc.).
- 1.8 Require supervisors to discuss the role of D & I with their team members at the beginning of each school year during training or the onboarding process.
- 1.9 Devote time at the first and last all-staff meeting of each fall and spring semester every year to review D & I topics and the Action Plan items. As a group, employees will review the D & I definitions, the most recent annual Action Plan, and other related materials to identify specific

ways these subjects are important to their work and how they plan to successfully integrate these responsibilities into their sustainability vision.

1.10 Create a discussion guide with noteworthy questions, topics, and information for supervisors and project members to reference during D & I conversations. These conversations will be facilitated at the designated all-staff meetings as mentioned above, although one-on-one conversations around D & I are encouraged to take place at any point in time.

2. Review internal and external OfS communication policies and practices related to recruitment, hiring, and collaboration.

2.1 Offer an office-wide implicit bias test every year. Employees involved in recruitment and hiring processes will be required to take the test and review their results before engaging in recruitment and hiring activities.

2.2 Compile a list of recruitment and hiring guidelines based on well-researched and accredited resources to improve our current practices.

2.3 Review current recruitment and hiring policies and procedures to align them with the guidelines document. Job descriptions and all other recruitment and outreach materials will be reviewed and re-written as necessary to reflect the OfS's commitment to creating a more diverse and inclusive workplace.

2.4 Apply the same approach used to revise recruitment and hiring practices to review and revise job orientation and training materials.

2.5 Account for past and present target outreach patterns and identify institutions, populations, and organizations that have been overlooked in the past. Continually work toward building new relationships with these entities appropriately. Implement this process as an ongoing strategy.

3. Create an accountability framework to document and promote healthy communication, shared responsibility, and progress around D & I.

3.1 D & I team members will create an annual D & I update and Action Plan to post on the OfS website and distribute to all staff members by the end of August each year.

3.2 Create an assessment to measure perceived levels of success pertaining to each Action Plan item. The assessment will be delivered to all OfS staff members at the end of each school year.

3.3 Build implementation and oversight of annual D & I Action Plan and assessment review into regular Leadership Team meeting agendas.

3.4 Devote the agendas of the first all-staff meetings in December and April to open discussion and reflection on the past semester's operations at the OfS. This open discussion time is intended for staff members at all levels to share opinions on general office workings, successes, and areas for improvement. These may or may not be specifically related to D & I topics but is intended to create an avenue for open communication, transparency, and multi-level accountability.

3.5 Create a new section within onboarding materials notifying employees of existing WMU policies for external support, safety, and problem-solving resources should any conflicts, issues, or concerns escalate beyond the capacity of internal assistance.

3.6 Appoint a staff member to request to join the WMU University-wide Diversity Council each year. This staff member will act as a liaison between university-wide diversity initiatives and that of the OfS.

3.7 Appoint a Leadership Team member or Graduate Assistant to apply to the WMU Diversity Learning Communities each year. This staff member will participate in these targeted diversity learning opportunities and work with the rest of leadership to inform OfS D & I Action Plan progress.

The OfS D & I Action Plan will be shared with office members at an all-staff meeting of the fall semester. This will give all OfS employees the opportunity to review and discuss the OfS's D & I goals for the upcoming year and our roles in meeting these objectives. D & I is a shared responsibility. Through effective implementation of the Action Plan, modeling of our collective D

& I commitments, and reporting on our progress transparently, all employees will incorporate D & I into their daily work and responsibilities.

Conclusion

Working in a supportive environment where difference is celebrated is a form of empowerment. Creating such an environment is crucial to both carrying out our mission and creating a healthy and productive work environment that fosters the development of sustainability leaders. D & I should intersect every level of the work we do, be it recruitment, conducting research, or collaborating with the community. Through this D & I initiative, the OfS hopes to empower its employees to build more resilient and productive relationships both internally and externally. We recognize that D & I work — like our broader sustainability mission — is both ongoing and likely has no ending point. Through our Action Plan, we are committing ourselves to this long-term work in an effort to advance our mission to improve quality of life for all in a more intentional and impactful way.

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