Empowering Age Inclusivity

Strategies to Support Faculty from Underrepresented groups.

Economics Department wins DEI Award
Officially inaugurated in Spring 2023, the Faculty Success Center (FCC) represents the university’s continuous commitment to support and empower its faculty. In the face of the challenges that surfaced during the wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, higher education establishments have continually sought innovative ways to support faculty members in their professional growth and collaboration. Embracing this climate of change, UMass Lowell’s Faculty Success Center emerged as a beacon of connectivity and knowledge exchange.

The Faculty Success Center is centrally situated on the first floor of University Crossing Building B (UC-140). This physical space offers a tangible hub for faculty members to convene, exchange ideas, and embark on collective learning journeys. The center incorporates versatile spaces tailored for meetings, workshops, and interactive sessions. It is a space where educators from all disciplines can meet to explore innovative pedagogical approaches and share best practices.

The space is open weekdays during business hours. The ADVANCE Office for Faculty Equity & Resilience is located within the FCC. We look forward to seeing you engage with the center and contribute to our vibrant academic community!
Amidst the evolving demographics of the United States, where the population is rapidly aging, institutions of higher education are increasingly recognizing the importance of age diversity within their campuses. To embrace this change universities worldwide are uniting behind initiatives such as the Age-Friendly University (AFU) movement, aimed at creating inclusive learning environments for all individuals regardless of age.

UMASS LOWELL’S VISIONARY APPROACH: EMPOWERING AGE INCLUSIVITY

The movement originated at Dublin City University in 2013 and has garnered momentum by advocating for lifelong learning opportunities. The University of Massachusetts (UMass) system made history in a groundbreaking move in 2019 by becoming the first university system to endorse the 10 principles of the AFU initiative, signaling a commitment to age-friendly practices. To build on these foundations UMass Lowell proudly launched its Age-Friendly Campus Initiative in 2022 with support from the Provost’s office and the ADVANCE Office for Faculty Equity.

This pivotal step marked the beginning of a concerted effort to promote age inclusivity across the university’s fabric. Leading this transformative journey is the AFU Collaborative Steering Committee led by Drs. Ramraj Gautam and Karen Devereaux Melillo. This committee consists of a diverse group of leaders including faculty (Drs. Lisa Abdallah, Andrew Hostetler, Pia Markkanen, & Jack Luskin), staff (Heather Makrez Allen & Lee Ann Alden), and community representatives (Nancy Pitkin from Learning in Retirement Association (LIRA), Graduate Student Association, and Student Government Association); and has been instrumental in devising a series of workshops tailored to address opportunities and challenges related to retirement.

A recent event held on March 14, 2024, titled “Thinking about Retirement: Where to Start?” attracted over 80 participants, including faculty, staff, and community members. During the session, Dr. Gautam discussed the results of the AFU Climate Survey conducted at UMass Lowell in 2020 and provided insights into the university’s journey toward becoming an AFU, shedding light on the university’s commitment to age-friendly principles. In addition, Nancy Pitkin, a longstanding member of the LIRA and the AFU Collaborative Steering Committee, highlighted LIRA’s role in providing college-level courses and field trips to retirees and community members at minimal cost. Kimberley Casey, Executive Director of Compensation & Benefits in the Office of Human Resources, offered valuable insights into retirement preparation, covering various retirement plans available to university personnel.
During this workshop, I enjoyed learning about LIRA, as well as the importance of financial planning for retirement. I’m hoping to use this experience as a part of my Honors Fellowship to promote awareness about the pre-retirement workshops offered by the UMass Lowell AFU Steering Committee.*

The success of the event underscores UMass Lowell’s commitment to fostering an age-inclusive campus environment. By spearheading initiatives such as the Age-Friendly Campus Initiative and organizing workshops on retirement planning, the university is poised to lead by example in promoting age inclusivity within higher education.

AFU STEERING COMMITTEE

The AFU Collaborative Steering Committee encourages you to participate in the Qualtrics evaluation survey to help the committee plan future content for upcoming sessions on pre- and near-retirement.

The UML AFU Steering Committee is forming two sub-committees; The Strategic Planning Sub-committee to brainstorm and come up with a strategic planning document led by Jack Luskin, and an Event Planning sub-committee. If you are interested in joining any of the two sub-committees, please contact Ramraj_Gautam@uml.edu or Karen_Melillo@uml.edu

> Karoline Evans and Daniel Arroyo-Rodríguez, leads of OFER’s initiatives addressing Workplace Norms, pilot their Service Equity roadmap.

The workshop created by Evans, Arroyo-Rodríguez, Teresa Lee, and Rocío Rosales highlighted feedback from various departments and programs at UMass Lowell during the 2022-23 academic year, along with the latest research in the field of service equity.

The Service Equity initiative aims to facilitate discussions around the equitable distribution of service work among faculty members, particularly focusing on how such responsibilities may disproportionately impact certain groups. The workshop provides a framework for departments to identify priorities and develop action plans to address potential imbalances in service workloads.

The Service Equity initiative is part of OFER’s ongoing efforts to cultivate a diverse, equitable, and supportive campus community for everyone. By raising awareness and implementing research-driven strategies, the goal is to promote a fair and inclusive environment where service responsibilities are distributed equitably among all faculty members.

OFR looks forward to expanding these important discussions across the university. If you or your department would be interested in starting a service equity journey, please reach out so we can discuss the different support options OFER can provide.
Faculty diversity is essential for cultivating a dynamic and vibrant exchange of ideas in academia, thereby propelling the growth of all participants. Yet, in leading public research universities in the U.S., the representation of BIPOC faculty lags significantly behind student demographics, highlighting a profound disparity.

UMass Lowell echoes this prevailing trend. Data reveals that in 2022, while the recruitment of White faculty increased from 68.56% in 2018 to 70.4%, there was minimal growth in the recruitment of underrepresented faculty. In fact, there was a decline in the representation of Hispanic faculty (from 3.85% to 3.4%) and Black faculty (from 2.31% to 2.12%) during the same period. Moreover, data from each of the colleges highlights a significant incongruity between faculty and student demographics. For instance, despite a 40% increase in Black or African-American students enrolled in the Colleges of Science and Engineering, both colleges have limited representation of Black or African-American faculty.

Addressing the disparity in faculty diversity is imperative for ensuring an inclusive and equitable academic environment that nurtures the potential of all individuals. On March 19, 2024, the ADVANCE Office for Faculty Equity (OFER) Personal Practice Committee facilitated a planning summit for key collaborators to discuss ways to improve the recruitment and retention of faculty from underrepresented groups, particularly Black and Hispanic faculty. The summit’s organizing committee, chaired by Dr. Mike Beers, included Drs. Brita Dean, Mahdi Garelnabi, and Sumudu Lewis, brought together deans, associate deans, some department chairs, representatives from legal and human resources departments, as well as guests and experts for a full day of discussions and planning.

The summit commenced with opening statements from the Chancellor, Provost, and Vice Provost expressing strong support for the efforts of ADVANCE Office equity leaders in orchestrating this important event. Following this, the Asso-
Associate Dean of Engineering, Dr. Kavitha Chandra, led the Deans Panel with representation from the Manning School of Business, Zuckerberg College of Health Sciences, Kennedy College of Sciences, Francis College of Engineering, and Fine Arts Humanities & Social Sciences. The panel deliberated the current recruitment and retention strategies at the departmental level and identified successful approaches for recruiting underrepresented faculty while acknowledging the obstacles. Subsequently, the Chairs’ panel, facilitated by Dr. Anthony Szczesiul, continued the discussion, sharing both successes and ongoing challenges. The morning sessions concluded with HR and legal representatives clarifying compliance with equal employment laws and policies, ensuring adherence to legal hiring procedures.

The afternoon sessions opened with a presentation of campus climate survey data by Dean of Equity and Inclusion, Leslie Wong and Dean of Student Affairs and Experiential Learning, Dr. James Kohl. Following this insightful presentation, invited experts David Gordon MD, from the University of Michigan-Flint, and Dr. Joya Misra, from UMass Amherst, shared their expertise, offering valuable insights into recruiting and retaining underrepresented faculty members. Their contributions enriched the discussion, providing attendees with actionable strategies and a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities in this critical area of faculty diversity and inclusion.

The summit concluded with breakout sessions, led by Dr. Geillan Aly, a DEI Consultant, who provided a platform for participants to delve deeper into actionable strategies. These sessions focused on the roles of deans, chairs, search committees, and the university support agencies in advancing faculty diversity and retention. This holistic approach aimed to identify comprehensive solutions that encompass both recruitment and retention strategies, ensuring sustained progress toward a more inclusive and diverse faculty body.

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NAVIGATING MICROAGGRESSIONS:
ESTABLISHING WELCOMING + SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES ON CAMPUS

Microaggressions are unintentional slights or insults directed towards marginalized groups, that permeate various social interactions, workplaces, and academic settings in our present society. Despite their seemingly innocuous nature, microaggressions can have profound psychological and emotional effects on individuals, contributing to feelings of invalidation and marginalization.

As awareness of microaggressions has grown in recent years, so has the urgency to address and dismantle these pervasive behaviors. At UMass Lowell, this initiative has remained a priority for several years through the evidence-based bystander training program that emerged as a proactive approach to combat microaggressions. This training aims to equip individuals with the tools to recognize, intervene, and effectively address microaggressive behaviors with a goal of fostering inclusive communities. By empowering witnesses to speak up and challenge instances of bias or discrimination, bystander training not only disrupts the perpetuation of microaggressions but also cultivates a culture of accountability and allyship. Through simulated scenarios and interactive workshops, participants learn how to navigate delicate situations with empathy and assertiveness, ultimately contributing to the creation of safer and more respectful spaces for all individuals.

On March 1, 2024, ADVANCE OFER faculty equity leaders, Drs. Mike Beers and Meg Sobkowicz Kline, facilitated a two-hour interactive workshop with UMass Lowell faculty from all ranks and representing various departments on campus. While the current version of bystander training addresses microaggressions based on intersecting marginalized statuses, the training provided by the equity leaders focused on equipping participants with skills to identify and interrupt microaggressions. Through ongoing initiatives like these, UMass Lowell continues its commitment to fostering an inclusive environment where all members of the community feel valued and respected.
UMASS LOWELL’S ECONOMICS DEPARTMENT
LEADING THE WAY IN DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

> In a landmark achievement, the Department of Economics has clinched the esteemed 2023 American Economic Association (AEA) Award for Outstanding Achievement in Diversity and Inclusion, sharing the spotlight with UC Berkeley.

This prestigious award stands as a testament to the relentless dedication and hard work put forth by the members of the Economics department in recent years, solidifying their position as leaders in recognizing and meeting the needs of their diverse pool of students.

Presented during the AEA annual meeting in January in San Antonio, Texas, the award highlights the pivotal role played by the Department of Economics at UMass Lowell in championing diversity and inclusion. Led by Professor Monica Galizzi, the department has been at the forefront of initiatives aimed at establishing inclusive environments, introducing innovative programs, and amplifying the participation of underrepresented groups from classrooms to the profession. The Department of Economics’ commitment to diversity and inclusion is deeply ingrained in their revamped mission statement that emphasizes the critical importance of embracing faculty and students’ diverse backgrounds and perspectives. The department’s mission resonates with the university’s continuous commitment and dedication to nurturing a vibrant academic community that values inclusivity.

The department’s efforts have yielded tangible results, with a notable surge in enrollment and remarkable changes in the ethnic composition of its student body. Over the years, the proportion of non-White students has seen a significant rise, surpassing the university’s average.

Moreover, the department has prioritized the recruitment of minority candidates in recent faculty searches, despite salary constraints imposed upon public universities. Recognizing that recruitment alone is not sufficient, the department has focused on retention strategies, fostering a close-knit community to pair senior mentors in the department with junior faculty to provide ongoing support and guidance that is conducive to professional growth. This includes opportunities for collaboration, research discussions, and networking. UMass Lowell’s Economics Department’s recognition with the AEA Award highlights its immutable commitment to diversity, inclusion, and excellence in academia, setting a shining example for institutions nationwide. Through their dedication and perseverance, they continue to shape a brighter and more inclusive future for the economics profession and beyond.
APPLY FOR DEIB AWARDS:

EXCELLENCE IN DIVERSITY, INCLUSION + BELONGING

Starting on December 2024

> ADVANCE OFER is thrilled to announce the introduction of two new Awards to celebrate UMass Lowell Colleges and Departments’ Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB) efforts. These awards will honor colleges and departments who have demonstrated outstanding commitment and leadership in advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion within our institution. ADVANCE OFER is delighted and grateful to the Provost office for collaborating with us to release these awards.

Through this mechanism our colleges and departments can also apply to similar national DEIB awards, having won our campus award and eventually our campus can also compete for such awards given away by national bodies.

As we celebrate these achievements, we also reaffirm our commitment to fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion in everything we do. Together, we can continue to build a culture where everyone feels valued, respected, and empowered, and our institution continue to succeed.

The awards criteria and submission deadline was shared with colleges Deans and Departments’ Chairs.

Please do not hesitate to contact ADVANCE OFER for any questions.