



Students of Color & International Students (SOCIS) Sub-Committee

RECOMMENDATIONS: Advancing Equity & Inclusion
November 15, 2019



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INTRODUCTION

Convened Fall 2018, the Students of Color & International Students (SOCIS) subcommittee, nested under the Student Success Pillar Committee, was charged to understand more fully the challenges faced by some of UMass Lowell's most under-represented and marginalized student populations. Not surprisingly, common themes that surfaced included mounting student debt, need for greater financial awareness & resiliency, lack of awareness about accessing resources, stereotype threat, and overall challenges in navigating complex and unwieldy University operations/functions, particularly from an underrepresented identity standpoint. Students of color evince issues similar to first generation and commuter populations – and indeed overlap in many ways – while also demonstrating distinct needs; in the current political climate, international students face a number of unique challenges.

Reports and recommendations in many areas were reviewed and discussed, including aspects of support services, outreach and awareness, persistence and retention, hiring and training, curriculum, personnel, and visioning and leadership.

Committee Structure:

Student Success Tri-Chairs: Nicky Champagne, Kerry Donohoe, Larry Siegel

SOCIS Sub-Committee Co-Chairs: Sue Kim, Leslie Wong

Sub-Committees:

1. Persistence & Retention:

- Boldt, Gerrit
- Buckley, Jen
- Coston, Francine
- Humphrey-Johnson, Karen
- Hurwitz, Matt
- Praileau, Shontae
- Quandt-Westgate, Alison
- Roeung-Meas, Reaksmeay

2. Environment & Culture:

- Belcher, Michael
- Campbell-Paris, Rachel
- Carnevale, Ruby
- Ciaraldi, Annie
- Okey-Ewurum, Vilma
- Reddie, Khalilah
- Trapasso, Lauren

3. Competencies/Education & Awareness:

- Barrington, Linda (also Int'l Committee)
- Block, Stephanie
- Duong, Dara
- Herbin-Triant, Betsy
- Kelly, Felina
- Otero, Elsie
- Peters, Anya

4. Structural & Institutional Barriers:

- Gitschier, Angela
- McCarthy-Latimer, Joel
- Mendoza, Jose
- Shield, Maura
- Sladkova, Jana
- Uy, Phitsamay
- Whitaker, Jim

5. International Student Experience:

- Acha, Christopher
- Barrington, Linda
- Chadwick, Stacey
- Conley, Maria
- Connelly, Mary
- Dequevedo, Cassandra
- Keene-Crouse, Erin
- Lagan, Patrick
- Lynch, Allyson
- Ragab, Shaima
- Ramachandran, Sushmita
- Walker-Moyer, Diana
- White, Deb

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Students of Color & International Students (SOCIS) subcommittee was charged with identifying challenges and barriers for students of color and international students, and making recommendations to make the University of Massachusetts Lowell a model of diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education. In the context of an overall decrease in the number of college-aged students, UMass Lowell has the opportunity to position itself as a leader in recruiting and retaining students of color, who will soon constitute the majority of college-aged students in the US, and international students.

Students of color and international students face unique challenges in navigating higher education, including lack of financial resources as well as lack of cultural capital/knowledge about how to navigate higher education. Other challenges include the uneven cultural competency of stakeholders (faculty, staff, administrators, other students).

True institutional transformation means moving beyond a deficit model to focus on how we can make UMass Lowell a place where all students can succeed; effective strategies must be top-down and University-wide, engaging all stakeholders of the University community: students (undergraduate, graduate, transfer, online) and employees (full-time and part-time faculty and staff). A “one size fits all” approach cannot work and, indeed, is antithetical to the very notion of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Recommendation:

An aligned DE&I strategy is necessary in UMass Lowell’s next step towards full campus inclusion. To achieve this, a campus-wide diversity action plan would provide the DE&I “compass” with accompanying action steps.

As recommended by the SOCIS subcommittee, the UMass Lowell Campus Diversity Action Plan would include the following priorities, but not limited to:

1. Climate assessment
2. Diversity advocates in each unit
3. All campus stakeholder involvement
4. On-boarding and exit processes for students and employees
5. Inclusive curriculum
6. Training & competencies
7. Articulation & communication plan
8. Disaggregated data report with benchmarks
9. Chief Diversity Officer / Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Commission

2. COMMITTEE CHARGE

SOCIS Mission:

- To focus our efforts on the systemic/structural challenges that persist and may impede student success for students of color and international students
 - Constant consideration to **intersectionality**^{*}, which it cannot be separated from current work & dialogue
 - Individual cases make up the larger picture, but focus on systemic/institutional changes
- To capture & convey an accurate, nuanced picture
 - changing demographical landscape of Higher Ed
 - quantitative and qualitative data about UMass Lowell

Objectives:

- ▶ To proceed efficiently and with a sense of urgency
- ▶ To obtain input from across University
- ▶ To identify the blockages, bottlenecks, and barriers that pose greatest challenges for students of color and international students
- ▶ By August 2019, to make 4-5 concrete, immediate recommendations for institutional & cultural change
- ▶ To work towards short-term and long-term plans for sustainable institutional transformation
- ▶ To develop meaningful measures & assessments

^{*}**Intersectionality** asserts that people are often disadvantaged by multiple sources of oppression: their race, class, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, and other identity markers. Intersectionality recognizes that identity markers (e.g. “female” and “black”) do not exist independently of each other, and that each informs the others, often creating a complex convergence of oppression.

3. WORKING DEFINITIONS

STUDENTS of COLOR:

- ▶ Historically underrepresented groups in the U.S. socio-political & economic landscape:
 - ▶ “[T]o intentionally include students who may identify as Black, African-American, Asian, South Asian, Middle Eastern, Pacific Islander, Latinx, Chicanx, Native American, and multiracial.” (*U Wisconsin-Madison Multicultural Student Center*)
- ▶ University of Massachusetts Lowell Demographics (Fall 2018-excludes online)
 - 3,812 UGRD-SOC (36%); 11,468 total undergrad day enrollment
 - ▶ 1,393 Asian students (12.1%)
 - ▶ 710 Black/African-American/Cape Verdean (6.1%)
 - ▶ 1,339 Hispanic/Latino (11.7%)
 - ▶ 6,772 White (59.1%)
 - 782 GRD-SOC (25.1%); 4239 total graduate day enrollment

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS:

- ▶ International students are defined as "non-immigrant" visitors who come to the United States temporarily to take classes. A non-immigrant is someone who:
 - intends to stay in the US temporarily
 - does not have US citizenship or legal permanent resident status (a "green card")
 - applies for a visa to be allowed entry into the US
- ▶ University of Massachusetts Lowell Demographics (Fall 2018-excludes online)
 - 15,707 total grad & undergrad day enrollment
 - ▶ 1,158 international students (7.4%)
 - ▶ 471 UGRD (4.1%)
 - ▶ 687 GRD (16.2%)

FIRST GENERATION STUDENTS:

- ▶ Numerous definitions
- ▶ "Ultimately, the term 'first-generation' implies the possibility that a student may lack the critical cultural capital necessary for college success because their parents did not attend college."
(Center for First-Generation Student Success)
- ▶ "If neither of your parents received a 4-year college degree, that is the simplest definition, but we do not want to limit the definition... Bottom line - this is about celebrating the resilience of our students, faculty, and staff - don't worry about the details (i.e. step-parents vs. biological parents, 2-year-degrees, parents who received degrees later in life)." *(Julie Nash, Vice Provost for Student Success, re: First-Gen College Student Day)*

4. DATA COLLECTION & SUB-COMMITTEES

The SOCIS committee reviewed several recent campus instruments and reports:

- ▶ 2017 Culturally Engaging Campus Environments (CECE) student survey
 - to assess and understand campus environments and to maximize success among diverse students
 - Rather than focusing on challenges and deficits, CECE focuses on the types of environments that successfully engage and support college students from all backgrounds
- ▶ Fall 2017 SGA Student Affairs Student Success Survey
- ▶ 2015 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) Survey
- ▶ Office of Strategic Analysis and Data Management institutional reports
 - ▶ Retention data
 - ▶ Students in Academic Distress (SP18, FA18, SP19)
 - ▶ Program data (RHSA, CLASS, OMA)
 - ▶ 2018 Focus Group of Women in STEM (URelations)

Working Groups of SOCIS:

Following an initial review of committee charge, scope, and available data, it was determined that further breakout groups structured around 5 critical areas were necessary to move forward productively. Five additional sub-teams were organized around the following thematic areas and focused work:

1. **Environment & Culture:** Address “look & feel,” including message/communication and its’ impact on student experiences (Q. beyond marketing, how do we change culture?)
 - a. What do students say about their experience on campus? Do they identify with/relate to and own their university student experience?
 - b. How do these factors contribute to student self-efficacy while reducing elements such as **stereotype threat**[†] & acts of bias/discrimination?

[†] **Stereotype threat** refers to the risk of confirming negative stereotypes about an individual’s racial, ethnic, gender, or cultural group; it is believed to race- and gender-based achievement gaps.

- c. How do we generate greater student awareness of resources for bias reporting, emotional and financial support, and other supports?
2. **Competencies / Education & Awareness:** *Address the ever-changing needs of student demographics & inform culturally responsive strategies (Q. beyond goodwill & good intent, what results in proficiency?)*
 - a. Identify what is working & what can be improved in order to provide greater skills & knowledge in working with diverse populations
 - b. Identify and strengthen best practices
 - c. Identify emerging strategies in student success and support of underrepresented students
 - d. Curriculum revision and innovation across disciplines
 - e. Research/compile recommendations on competencies & standards
3. **Structural & Institutional:** *Identification of systemic/institutional barriers that hinder/prevent full access, equitable resources and knowledge transfer, etc.*
 - a. Compare national data & trends about student diversity and student challenges (affordability, student debt, etc.)
 - b. Identify effective research frameworks and models
 - c. Bring together UML data into “big picture”
 - d. Identify broader thematic and institutional areas constituting greatest blockages, bottlenecks and barriers
4. **Retention & Persistence:** *Collect & Analyze evidence to direct strategies for improvement*
 - a. Disaggregate data to understand more fully attainment profile, persistence trends and retention concerns
 - b. Identify blockages, bottlenecks and barriers that impede daily routinized functions
 - i.e. where *specifically* are students struggling most often?
 - c. Deeper dives into specific areas, offices, programs, units
 - e.g. Financial Aid/Solution Center, RHSA, OMA, Counseling
5. **International Students:** *Address unique needs of international students in current climate*
 - a. Where do we excel, & where do we fall short?
 - b. How do we exemplify international student service & support and become a national model?
 - c. Areas of concern
 - Pre-Arrival and Onboarding
 - Immigration and Compliance
 - Intercultural Engagement

5. RECURRING THEMES

Tier I:

- ▶ More Cohesive Approaches - connect, innovate, articulate, communicate
 - Better Coordinated Student Support Teams (SST): streamlined team of specialists across multiple areas (e.g. academic, financial, student life)
 - Culture Shift: shared & clear understanding of equity & inclusion mission & value across campus

- ▶ Affordability & Accessibility in Navigating Resources - higher education navigator
 - Unblock/clear confusing campus processes for students
 - Accessing vital information can be complicated by many issues
 - Needs for continuous assessment in improvements

- ▶ Faculty/Staff Competencies – lifelong learning model
 - Improve understanding of how underrepresented students may experience the University
 - Move away from deficit lens (e.g. not retained optimally vs. at-risk)

Tier II:

- ▶ Culture & Environment:
 - Stronger messaging (leadership & across all positions)
 - Central, visible physical spaces

- ▶ Workforce diversity
 - Hiring & Retention
 - Training (lifelong learning)

- ▶ DE&I Resourcing
 - Investment of resources
 - Nationwide, student body in Higher Education is increasingly diverse. What can we do to invest in serving all identities in best way possible?

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

We have an institutional imperative to help our underrepresented students succeed by addressing areas that impede student success. Vigorous measures in the following areas have been prioritized:

- adopt an equity framework/model that aligns all components of campus so that UML becomes an institution of choice for DE&I
- advance an inclusive campus environment and culture
- deepen cultural competencies for all campus members
- position students for academic attainment, career readiness & an empowered experience

Even extremely qualified students fail due to systemic issues that plague their pathway to degree attainment. Topping the list are financial factors we see too often: mounting debt, students juggling jobs, and high work hours that erode study time. Many are “doubly disadvantaged,” with little in their background to prepare them for higher education. They straddle culture shock, social isolation, and a deeper sense of disconnection with college classmates.

A tracking of 93 of 113 Boston’s top “best and brightest” students, all valedictorians, in the years of 2005-2007, highlighted these staggering statistics:

- ▶ 1 in 4 failed to gain a bachelor’s degree within 6 years
- ▶ 25% aspired to be doctors, but none earned a medical degree
- ▶ 40% make less than \$50,000
- ▶ 4 have been homeless

Comparatively, valedictorians from cities/towns neighboring Boston highlighted a vastly different picture:

- ▶ graduates earned an advanced degree two and a half times more often
- ▶ earned more than \$100,000 a year

**2019, The Valedictorians Project. Boston Globe*

RECOMMENDATIONS: ADVANCING EQUITY & INCLUSION AT UML

In advancing the current diversity, equity & inclusion (DE&I) work at UMass Lowell, a comprehensive and coordinated design is necessary to impact and transform all levels and facets of the campus experience. A well-developed diversity action plan aims to unify and align approaches to our institutional DE&I values, which in turn enacts a mission driven imperative and strategic focus.

Campus Diversity Action Plan

- Align campus-to-unit goals, strategies, outcomes, key performance indicators (KPI)
 - i. Focus on composition, engagement, inclusion, achievement
 - ii. Strengthen DE&I capacity: institutional & business priority
 1. Infuse & embed into central academic & administrative issues of UML
 2. DE&I strategy is deeply connected to campus business strategy
 - iii. Campus inventory/diversity mapping
- Baseline competencies for all employees (staff and faculty)
 - i. Beyond baseline: intermediate / advanced competencies
 - ii. All students (transfer, undergraduate, graduate, online, nontraditional)
- Centralize communication & method of delivery
 - i. Cohesive articulation: collaborative vision & priority of DE&I values
 - ii. Deepen awareness across all areas
- Examine best practices for **assessment** and **accountability**
- Create rewards/incentives for DE&I work (e.g. AQAD review, promotion/merit review)

Tasks:

- *Identify Diversity Action Plan co-chairs and sub-committees*
- *Establish intended outcomes & timeline*

The following section delineates the five subcommittee area recommendations that fall under the overarching Campus Diversity Action Plan. Highlighted priorities including *Tasks*, or short-term actionable items that build towards long-term goals are provided:

- I. Persistence & Retention
- II. Environment & Culture
- III. Competencies/Education & Awareness
- IV. International Students
- V. Structural/Institutional

I. Persistence & Retention:

Enabling SOCIS success requires intentional, thoughtful approaches to curriculum, support for students (particularly financial literacy and access to resources) as well as culturally skilled staff and faculty, and a campus climate & culture that is positioned to support the needs of all students. The goal is to develop a strong **sense of belonging** across the University community.

1. Increase Student/Faculty/Staff Sense of Belonging & Inclusion*:

- Train campus advocates in each division/area to familiarize, lead & implement strategic goals as part of equity framework
- Everyone is tasked as part of the solution (“we go the extra mile”)

Tasks:

- *Establish DE&I advocates as a priority item within campus Diversity Action Plan*
- *Utilize the Culturally Engaging Campus Environment (CECE) indicators for further strategic development for units/departments to integrate action items*

2. Connecting DE&I Directly to Student Learning Experiences

- Engage faculty in discipline-specific as well as university-wide DE&I curriculum review
- Examine co-curricular programs across programs with regard to DE&I
- Partner across campus to examine student experiences from a “bird’s-eye view” -- across curriculum, co-curricular, activities, residence life, etc.

Tasks:

- *Establish as a priority item within campus Diversity Action Plan*
- *Target courses with high DWF rates among SOCIS population*

3. Increase Student Awareness of Resources

Tasks:

- *New onboarding for targeted under-represented populations (in progress)*
- *Work with communications team for effective ways to share information (e.g. translations of more materials into Spanish or Khmer)*

4. Increase Underrepresented Student/Staff/Faculty Support

Tasks:

- *Academic Advising survey experience from students (particularly seniors)*
- *Cross-divisional **student support teams** for quicker/more efficient response (in progress)*
- *Student exit process (in progress)*
- *One-on-one mentoring for underrepresented students with faculty/staff (in progress)*

* **Inclusion** is the psychological dimension of the campus climate for diversity. It refers to how individuals **feel** about their campus experiences and encompasses students’ perceptions of the quality of their interactions with peers, faculty members and administrators, including their sense of the campus as a place where they belong and are treated with respect.

II. **Environment & Culture**

Supporting environmental change and staff development in inclusiveness, while connecting directly to the student learning process & experience.

1. **Alignment behind unifying vision of UML** (e.g., United UML, One UML, UML-Better Together)

- Drive a unified DE&I campus vision
- All members (1yr – 30yrs): deeply understand institutional value & commitment in achieving full, participatory inclusion
- Connect campus programs to Equity Framework & Diversity Action Plan

2. **Increase Campus Engagement* & Visibility on DE&I**

- Institutional values are deeply embedded, understood and practiced alongside daily work functions & interactions
- Messages tied to all aspects of campus functions & departments
- Value participation in DE&I as priority & continuous items for self & community growth

Tasks:

- *DE&I Communications Plan (with Communications Committee) for campus articulation*
- *Campus inventory & awareness of DE&I opportunities*

3. **Conduct a Campus Climate Assessment**

- Develop campus strategy on assessing campus climate continuously (culture, tone, markers, spaces & places, understood values, commitment, communication, etc.)

Tasks

- *Connect to campus Diversity Action Plan with actionable items, measurable outcomes recommendations, and timelines*

4. **Consistent data/analytics specialist to help drive E&I strategies**

- Enable clear, consistent reporting on DE&I issues for transparency
- Use data to drive DE&I strategies
- Disaggregate data: a fuller picture is needed (e.g. Southeast Asians disaggregated from Asians overall)
- Provide leadership on a comprehensive plan for collecting, interpreting, and rising strategic recommendations

Tasks:

- *Institute annual DE&I report disaggregated by unit (college, office) and ethnicity (including Southeast Asians disaggregated) – include information on academic and financial status (e.g. DWF, SAP, Financial Holds), undergraduate/graduate, domestic/international*

* **Engagement** is the behavioral dimension of the climate for diversity; referring to the form and extent of behaviors or interactions among individuals. In short, it is what individuals actually **do** on campus. For students, this includes their involvement in the academic, co-curricular, and extracurricular or social aspects of the UML campus experience, as well as behaviors and interactions more directly related to diversity.

III. **Competencies/Education & Awareness**

Our committee began by asking, what does it mean to be culturally competent? Basic competency should be the baseline; beyond that, who do we aspire to be? Thus, we recommend a model that emphasizes life-long learning; everyone – new students and employees as well as 30-year employees – has something to learn. Given the difficulty of these conversations, an ethic of willingness to listen, learn, and change has to be transmitted from the University’s top leadership as well as embedded into evaluations of and rewards for individuals and departments.

1. **Increase Intersectionality Work & Competencies in Teaching & Serving**

- Establish use of a common language across student experiences
- Develop & deploy cultural competencies training initiative

Tasks:

- *Inclusive Curriculum - research and adopt best practices in campus Diversity Action Plan*

2. **Strengthen/support Workforce Competencies & Awareness**

- Create and provide a targeted, comprehensive, and ongoing staff & faculty development process focusing on **perspective-taking**^{*}, learning partnerships, and **self-authorship**[†]
- Stronger retention strategy plan for underrepresented faculty and staff
- Utilize multiple & varied communication strategies to ensure staff/faculty feel informed, educated, and appropriate to their roles in advancing DE&I
- Strengthen workforce retention programs
 - Underrepresented staff/faculty mentoring

Tasks:

- *Confer with similar committees (e.g. Sexual Harassment Taskforce) for possible dual delivery/communication plan*
- *Examine on-boarding for faculty and staff, including part-time faculty and graduate student instructors – priority for Diversity Action Plan*
- *Establish Search Committee Plan by college*

3. **Create E&I Champions/Advocates by College/Unit**

Tasks:

- *Establish as task under Diversity Action Plan*

^{*} *Perspective-taking* is the ability to engage and learn from perspectives and experiences different from one’s own and may occur in everyday conversations to structured experiences. Participants enhance their knowledge by engaging deeply in differing perspectives and develop respect and empathy for other’s views even in the face of disagreement. Learning that they can reconsider their own viewpoints, and that there is value in exploring other cultures is a critical component.

[†] *Self-Authorship* is the ability to “know yourself, know what you know, reflect upon it, and base judgments on it.” (D. Davidson, 2011) *Self-authorship* is a lifelong process that often begins in college.

IV. International Students

1. Onboarding & Orientation

- Greater visibility/awareness on resources for Internationals
- Expanded peer offerings

Tasks:

- *Launch new Int'l Student orientation & onboarding platform (in progress)*
- *Articulate cohesive messaging/communication (in progress)*

2. Employment Opportunities for International Students

Tasks:

- *Greater campus awareness*
 - *Students: connecting to dept. hiring opportunities (in progress)*
 - *Faculty/Staff: advocacy, hiring policy, legal considerations*

3. English Language Support

Tasks:

- *Launch English Conversation Group with English Dept. (in progress)*
- *Assessment of participants*

4. Campus wide: Cohesive approaches

Tasks:

- *Set as task in Diversity Action Plan*

V. Structural & Institutional:

1. Chief Diversity Officer & Corresponding Office

Consistent with national equity & inclusion best practices, a Chief Diversity Officer (CDO) and corresponding DE&I office should be established to provide leadership in advancing campus efforts. In the interim, a DE&I commission reporting to the Chancellor should be formed to:

- act as an exploratory group in the creation of a senior-level DE&I officer & office
- drive the recommendations put forth in this report, including a prioritization of a Campus Diversity Action Plan, which acts as a university beacon and guides all future efforts towards aligned vision & strategic goals

Tasks:

- *establish an intermediary Commission to advance SOCIS report goals/recommendations*
- *re-task current SOCIS group into the Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Commission; review of membership, roles, & committee structure*

2. Preventative & Empowering Campus Model

- Empower people with expertise and ability to lead deep, courageous & difficult conversations
- Health & well-being of students and employees rely on diversity, equity framework, & multicultural organizational development tenets

Services

SOCIS Summary Report

- Structural & Behavioral shifts
 - Faculty and staff assessment – where are we now, collectively?
 - Find effective systems in place – what works? – and infuse systematically

Tasks:

- *Recommend DE&I Commission continue to advocate & generate awareness on the benefits & opportunities for adopting a culturally engaging campus environment*
- *Identify equity champions & advocates who can facilitate/articulate the equity framework broadly*
- *Elevate policies designed to improve campus climate*