August 1, 2018

MEMORANDUM

To: Dr. John Ettling, President, SUNY Plattsburgh
From: Maxine Perry & Jonathan R. Slater, Ph.D. (co-chairs)
on behalf of the Social Justice Task Force
Subject: Recommendations of the Social Justice Task Force

In March 2018, you constituted the Social Justice Task Force in order to help your office and “college leadership better understand matters of social justice, ensuring all voices are heard.” The creation of the Social Justice Task Force is one of the 10 steps you outlined in February 2018 to “address diversity and campus climate matters.” The work of the task force will “inform other action steps the college should undertake and/or what other factors should be considered.” This memorandum contains the task force’s complete and final recommendations.

Methodology and guiding principles
Social justice represents a continuous process that involves an entire institution – all of its stakeholders working together. Social justice is first and foremost a collective responsibility to protect those at a disadvantage and to help them flourish in tangible ways.

The task force recognizes that SUNY Plattsburgh already has in place substantial mechanisms for promoting and maintaining social justice on campus.

The task force further recognizes that SUNY Plattsburgh is a major economic force in the North Country and already enjoys consistent and productive relationships with the communities of the North Country. SUNY Plattsburgh therefore appears well positioned and committed to encourage and nurture courageous conversations – not only among members of the campus community, but also with our neighbors. The task force is fully cognizant that any recommendations we make may have a profound and enduring impact upon the surrounding communities.

As reported in the campus climate updates, the task force met and deliberated frequently since March 2018, gathering information, reviewing primary and secondary research, and holding conversations with a comprehensive range of campus and community constituents. The task force also requested briefings from members of our college community already engaged in providing and sustaining mechanisms of social justice at our institution.

Prior to the end of spring semester 2018, the task force assigned members to meet and speak with an array of campus and community stakeholders, in small groups and individually. The
The purpose of these conversations was to gain a sense of these stakeholders’ conceptualization of social justice. From these reports, the task force was able to distill several key precepts of social justice:

1. Every human being, regardless of social status, ethnic background, religion, national origin, gender, or sexual identity, has a right to flourish. A community must foster access to positive experiences and productive opportunities for all of its members.

2. A community must ensure the rights of all of its members. Marginalized groups are entitled to have their voices heard.

3. Wrongs and harm are to be righted in a way free of blame and judgement.

4. Members of a community must exhibit consistent recognition of the inherent worth, dignity, and contribution of each person in that community. Each person, regardless of background, possesses a unique set of experiences, perspectives, and opinions. Honoring the individual in the greater scheme of society means understanding and honoring the influence each of us has on society as a whole.

5. Members of a community are morally bound to keep those forces in check that would work against justice, equality, and self-determination.

6. The communication by and within a community should be inclusive, not divisive, and used in a manner that nurtures the positive development of its members. Members of a community should promote understanding of the sensitivities and experiences of others, avoid generalizing about groups and individuals within that community, and communicate with civility.

7. Fair and equitable administration of rules and laws in our society is fundamental to the equal treatment of all of its members. A community therefore is obligated to recognize bias and to responsibly, fairly, and productively address the ways privilege can undermine equitable treatment of its members.

It is important to note that the above precepts are in keeping with the spirit of the “Guiding Principles” outlined in SUNY’s policy on “Diversity, Equity and Inclusion”:

- Diversity and inclusiveness are integral components of the highest quality academic programs and the strongest campus climate. Diversity is essential to excellence in the university setting.

- SUNY’s statutory mission makes clear its responsibility to provide the broadest possible access, fully representative of all segments of the population of New York State.

- As detailed in the Data Brief, SUNY has made important strides at System Administration and on its campuses to increase diversity and strengthen inclusiveness; however, challenges remain.
• This is the right time for a system-wide effort to address challenges, particularly in light of projected increases in the diversity of New York's high school population and the expected increases in the number of new hires across SUNY due to a growing number of retirements.
• A multi-pronged approach to strengthening diversity and inclusion is essential for a system of SUNY's stature. SUNY's approach must employ best practices to attract diverse students, faculty, staff and administrative leaders, including efforts to strengthen the pipeline of diverse individuals with advanced credentials; ensure that services are in place to support retention (of faculty and students) and foster student completion at a rate that closes existing achievement gaps; and implement programs and strategies to establish a welcoming environment for all.

Purpose and objectives
The task force finds Howard Ross’s book, Reinventing Diversity, useful in framing our purpose and objectives. In particular, chapter 12, “Creating Cultures that Work,” outlines principles that the college should adopt in its plan to promote and sustain mechanisms of diversity and social justice. Ross argues that in order to create the type of change SUNY Plattsburgh desires regarding diversity and social justice, the college must transform its cultural mindset. Ross explains that in many cases an old mindset reifies and manifests itself in various obstructive behaviors within an organization.

Such an understanding leads us to propose that our efforts must be directed toward transforming the current organizational culture into one that works better in the context of the changing demographics and social dynamics of the college. The task force realizes that the college, as an organization composed of all of its stakeholders, must set the groundwork that will nourish a climate and culture more conducive to diversity and social justice. We celebrate the fact that our future student population will be increasingly diverse. Thus cultivating a new mindset and culture throughout our institution takes on a compelling urgency.

With that in mind, the task force sees as its primary goal the formulation of recommendations that:

(1) Establish a framework and foundation for engaging the college community with social justice issues affecting the college, region, state, and nation.
(2) Support the primary institutional services and programs actively involved in developing, promoting, and sustaining the mechanisms of social justice on campus.
(3) Identify, integrate, and allocate new and existing resources to promote and sustain the mechanisms of social justice on campus.
Recommendations
Keeping the above principles in mind, the task force methodically identified emergent themes in its investigation and developed recommendations the college administration should be able to review and act upon within a relatively short timeline. The task force has organized these recommendations into four categories: human resources; education and professional development; student-based initiatives; and other diversity, equity and inclusion efforts.

The Social Justice Task Force therefore recommends that:

**Human Resources**
- The college invest in a culture of social justice by hiring a chief diversity officer who is strictly committed to that one role and the administrative functions of promoting and sustaining diversity on campus.

  The college should follow the "Standards of Professional Practice for Chief Diversity Officers," approved by the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education (NADOHE) in conceptualizing the position and delineating its duties and responsibilities.

- The college allocate resources to transition the affirmative action officer position into a full-time position.

- The college invest in additional support for the investigative arm of the Title IX office.

- The college formulate and approve a long-term strategic plan, with measurable goals to recruit, hire, and retain more faculty from underrepresented groups.

  The college will devote more effort and resources to actively and aggressively recruit and retain the number of diverse employees on campus, especially in the ranks of faculty. A full-time recruiter would greatly enhance the college's efforts to increase faculty diversity.

**Education and Professional Development**
- The college develop and disseminate to administration, faculty, and staff its own employee conduct manual, complete with a statement of values. The college will incorporate that manual into the hiring practices of the campus and employ it as part of a comprehensive and compulsory social justice training program for employees and service personnel.

  This training will guide every administrative office, academic department, and campus service in order to create and implement plans that increase awareness of diversity, inclusion, and social justice.
• The college research and elaborate a set of best practices in social justice to be periodically revised. The best practices will be employed as a benchmark designed to continuously assess and improve areas of campus climate specifically related to concerns of social justice.

• First-year and transfer orientations include a detailed and comprehensive segment on social justice, diversity, inclusion, and equity. Include in orientation information regarding First Amendment principles and ways they apply to discourse, dialogue, debate, and behavior in a college setting.

• The college organize and promote, across disciplines, yearly campus learning activities and events emphasizing diversity and social justice issues.

These types of activities and events are consistent with standard 6 (NADOHE) of the “Standards of Professional Practice for Chief Diversity Officers.”

• Wherever and whenever possible, highlight the diverse history of the college and the region.

Examples can include the region’s historical connection to the Underground Railroad, John Brown’s farm, or the Native American tribes in the area. Integrate notable alumni from underrepresented groups into the cultural fabric of the college.

Student-based Initiatives

• The SUNY Plattsburgh administration actively and visibly encourage faculty-mentored, student-led initiatives that promote ideals and behaviors of inclusion and social justice (e.g., I am An Ally, RADIUS, etc.) and purposefully engage and educate members of the college and community about such ideals.

Actively and visibly means promoting and sustaining such initiatives through the allocation of resources and continued public acknowledgement of the crucial nature and importance of those initiatives. Engage and educate means supporting student outreach to community organizations and members and furthering on-campus collaborative efforts and peer-to-peer education.

• The college expedite the completion of the “Bias Act and Hate Crime Response Policy.” The college will implement a comprehensive plan to effectively disseminate the policy campus wide.
Every academic year, the college will conduct freshman intake perception surveys and senior exit surveys measuring student impressions of issues related to social justice and campus climate.

Other Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Efforts

- The SUNY Plattsburgh administration incorporate specific references to mechanisms of diversity and social justice as part of the college’s vision, mission, values, and strategic plan.

- The college join the more than 40 academic institutions that have signed the CEO Action for Diversity & Inclusion™ pledge.

“The CEO Action for Diversity & Inclusion™ aims to rally the business community to advance diversity and inclusion within the workplace by working collectively across organizations and sectors. It outlines a specific set of actions the undersigned companies will take to cultivate a trusting environment where all ideas are welcomed and employees feel comfortable and empowered to discuss diversity and inclusion.”

- The SUNY Plattsburgh administration create an independent, permanent social justice advisory group that will identify and monitor crucial social justice issues on campus and work cooperatively with administration, faculty, staff, students, alumni, and community to cultivate among stakeholders frequent, open, and productive communication with the purpose of upholding the values of social justice and engendering an inclusive and respectful campus climate.

  Communication means a visible and transparent process to stimulate dialogue and interaction among campus and community constituents.

  As part of its work, the advisory group – in cooperation with both the Office of Sponsored Research and Institutional Advancement – will monitor and identify funding opportunities related to social justice issues.

- The college continue and expand fundraising efforts for mechanisms promoting and sustaining diversity, inclusion, and social justice on campus.

- The college devise and establish an efficient network for compiling and archiving data and metrics on campus diversity and make such data readily accessible to all stakeholders.
• The college add a campus climate questionnaire to the Course Opinion Survey. The results will be shared among administration, faculty, staff, students, alumni, and community, for the purpose of identifying emerging concerns and acting to address those concerns.

_The added questions should be basic and concise. It should be made clear to students that this additional section has nothing to do with the class assessment itself._

_The college will allocate resources to ensure the timely aggregation, analysis, and dissemination of this data._

• The college collaborate with other institutions in the region in order to form a coalition to promote and sustain the study and awareness of social justice issues, especially as they relate to the North Country. The coalition will sponsor a yearly symposium on social justice.

_The main objective of the symposium is to foment dialog about social justice among the participating colleges and the communities they serve with an eye toward improving relations between institutions and communities._

• The college design and implement an effective mechanism for disseminating and communicating information pertinent to diversity, inclusion, and social justice.

_The college may want to consider bringing together various entities related to these concerns – and which currently are functioning as silos or islands – under one umbrella in order to foster more effective communication._

The Social Justice Task Force looks forward to your sharing the above recommendations with our campus community and providing the college with a timeline for implementation and assessment of the approved recommendations.

**Works consulted**


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