



# MINUTES

## Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Leadership Team

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7/27/2021 8:00 AM | *Meeting called to order by* Ms. Sheila Hudson

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### In Attendance

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Chair Connie Cooper, Dr. Paul Coreil, Dr. John Rowan, Deron Thaxton, Dr. Abbey Bain, Dr. Haywood Joiner, Dr. Shonu Nangia, Dr. Jessica Ringo, Dr. Cynthia Thomas, Daniel Manuel, Monica Aguilera, Destiny Harrison, Bryan Jackson, Chancey Slider

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### The meeting was called to order at 8:00 AM

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#### **Welcome and Introduction: Director of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion**

- Dr. Coreil made opening remarks and thanked Dr. Cynthia Thomas and Shelia Hudson for co-chairing the committee until the new Director for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, Connie Cooper, joined the team. He also thanked the entire committee for working diligently on expanding our vision for diversity, equity and inclusion. Connie will be chairing the committee moving forward and has full discretion to make changes to the committee and meeting arrangements as she sees fit. Dr. Coreil welcomed Connie and asked her to make some remarks.
- Connie introduced herself as the new full time Director for DEI and echoed Dr. Coreil's thanks to Dr. Thomas, Shelia, and the committee for the work done so far. She discussed her plans to move our campus forward in regards to diversity, equity and inclusion efforts and initiatives. She also thanked Dr. Coreil and the Senior Leadership Team for their support and for making this a reality for campus. She expressed appreciation for all of the support so far and discussed some of the primary goals and efforts that she plans to address. One of the most important pieces in the beginning will be to address internal assessments in order to gauge where we have been and are in order to see where we need to go with DEI efforts. We will use survey information to get real data and marry it with the strategic plan so that we can create an accurate and feasible roadmap. The roadmap must be deliberate and well thought out. She envisions the Office of DEI to be collaborative and inclusive of leadership on campus and in the community in order to hit all areas of cultural competency, climate, trainings and many other components. She is working on defining an assessment tool and will be getting data from Deron, Scott Colley and several other members of campus. The top two priorities right now are data collection and developing a roadmap. Students are always first and will be included in our processes. Connie discussed her plans to collaborate with LSU System Chief Diversity Officers and the work that they plan to do regarding a traveling digital education series and digital resource sharing space. She is looking forward to what we can all accomplish together and encourages members of campus to reach out with ideas or information. Her office is 326 in Mulder Hall.

### **Past Accomplishments of the Committee**

- The committee discussed past accomplishments such as the creation of the strategic mission for the committee and the assessment survey for faculty, staff and students that gave us an idea of where we are and insight for moving forward with initiatives. Dr. Thomas noted that the survey response rate from students was not as high as hoped for, but we did obtain some information to help us move forward with confidence. Connie noted that she is glad that we sent the survey out to give everyone on campus an opportunity to share their experiences. We need to think about what we can do for the faculty, staff and students who did not feel comfortable completing the survey or speaking out about their interactions. We want to move forward with getting this data and the best way may be to have some campus conversations. Some face-to-face small group conversations could help us to get more information and give members of campus an opportunity to express themselves in a safe space.
- Shelia noted that the committee did a lot over the past semester to let campus know that we are here and passionate about DEI. We held events and programs that centered around making people feel inclusive such as the Juneteenth Celebration, Women's History Month and Black History Month. We are very proud of the work that we did to raise awareness for different demographics, cultures, and backgrounds.
- Daniel noted that we now have a process in place for students to change their names to preferred names in our system. A form will be listed on Registrar's Office and Title IX webpages. The completed forms will route to Daniel and he will then send instructions to the students regarding how to update their profiles if the request is approved. Please reach out if you to Daniel if anyone has questions.

### **Current Objectives**

- We want to develop a roadmap that is something like LSU's, but unique to our university. Connie has been diving into the LSU Roadmap to determine how we should move forward with ours. One of the most important components right now is the data that we collect and how it will best serve us in terms of creating cultural competency and help us to develop training and education opportunities for faculty, staff and students. A huge part of improving culture and climate on our campus is training and education. We hope to have a draft roadmap by October and a timeline will be put into place in the near future so that we can get data and get on track to have a final draft by spring after reviews of soft drafts.
- Another objective is to provide safe spaces and form groups to promote senses of comfort and identity with likeminded students and activities that speak to different cultures on campus.
- We also need to examine our current practices and policies to identify gaps and needs that are not being addressed.
- Dr. Coreil mentioned the need to look at how we advertise positions and hire faculty and staff to maximize diversity of applicants and employees. Dr. Rowan commented on the need to maximize the backgrounds of our applicant pools for recruiting, but also focus on retention of minority faculty staff. We want to make changes to ensure that

people feel comfortable during the application and hiring process as well as throughout their careers. We plan to make Connie a part of every search committee to ensure that we have consistent approach in regards to DEI recruiting and retention efforts.

- Dr. Rowan noted that we also would like to see curricula components and to build interests for our students.
- Dr. Bain mentioned the need for more student organizations that promote different backgrounds of students to connect and find comfort. We hope to explore new student orgs and programming on campus. Destiny and Connie have done a great job putting together plans for the Black Girl Magic program that will aim to get students to connect with each other and members of the community. We want to explore more ways to connect with students, celebrate them, and make sure that they feel connected to each other and LSUA. We also hope to include pieces regarding mentorship for minority students and a black male leadership initiative. We also want to incorporate some retreats and high impact practices to change the lives of our students and shape them with hopes that one day they will continue to give back to those programs. We are so excited to partner with Connie and will offer support to her and our campus in any way possible regarding DEI efforts and initiatives.
- Shelia noted that we need to consider the community and how to encourage any negative opinions of our past diversity efforts and makeup to change. We need to communicate how excited we are about our new direction and the roadmap.
- Daniel mentioned the need to carefully plan for intersectionality of LGBTQ spaces since they can often be majority white and upper-class. We want all races and classes to be included and welcomed. Connie noted that we are new in establishing this and as we formulate things, we want to be sure that groups and spaces are as inclusive as possible. LSU has some separated groups, but we are not sure what we will see for our campus. She also noted that it is great that we are being sensitive to these ideas early on. Marketing and communications could play an important role in the process of developing these spaces and groups.
- Monica asked if new clubs and student orgs will have guiding or governing boards. Dr. Bain mentioned finding ways to build these groups and the possibility of scholarship incentives. Connie and Daniel will need a table at General's Expos and other events to advocate for their offices and communicate support and information to students and potential students. Daniel mentioned offering some at orientation. Connie noted that she is working with Strategic Communications to create a video for orientations and our website to communicate support and contact information.
- Monica also asked if the safe spaces on campus would just be the Office of DEI and Title IX or if they would expand to other spaces. Dr. Coreil referred to the ombudsman position at LSU and most other universities. The committee further discussed the need for outlets of communication and points of contact. Connie suggested a student map of safe places that could be handed out at orientation and put on our website and app so that students know where and who to go to when they need assistance. Chief noted that points of contact should be consistent and offer support 27/7. UPD will be happy to point students to these contacts if a need arises for support regarding DEI. Sheila mentioned that some universities and schools are handing out "in case of trouble" cards at orientations and events. They can have QR code on them that allows students to

instantly upload contacts to their phone so that students know who to contact if they need support and have the information at their fingertips.

- Destiny commented on the microaggressions that take place on our campus that may not come across as overt discrimination or racism and the importance of improving the campus cultural climate. She also mentioned the need for more student and personnel diversity training. She mentioned the need for training for our RA's and other student workers, tutors, assistant coaches, peer mentors, etc. because these individuals spend a lot of personal time with students. Connie thinks this is why small groups will serve us well and campus conversations will be a way to start to addressing some of these areas of need. She commented that Destiny made some very good points and education has to be a part of the roadmap that we address. Monica asked if the trainings and educational opportunities will be offered to employees and students separately or if they will be combined into mixed groups. Connie thinks that it is important to have mixtures of employees and students working together in these efforts in safe spaces because it will promote inclusiveness and "A-HA" moments.
- Destiny mentioned that students want to see more courses and electives to enhance the campus culture.

### **Meeting Conclusion**

- Dr. Nangia and Dr. Thomas were not able to hear the meeting via Zoom very well, but Chancey will share the minutes with them and Dr. Thomas will be meeting with Connie and Sheila for a post-meeting discussion.
- Many committee members expressed their sincere welcomes to Connie and excitement about having her on board.

Respectfully submitted by Chancey Slider

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The next meeting will take place on Tuesday, April 27<sup>th</sup>

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