

## Report II

### Faculty Senate Task Force for Excellence in Equity, Inclusion, and Citizenship

#### **BUILDING ON STRENGTHS AND CAPITALIZING ON NEW OPPORTUNITIES TO REALIZE OUR FULL POTENTIAL FOR EQUITY, INCLUSIVITY, AND MULTICULTURAL RICHNESS**

Our charge and the events bringing national media attention to UA during Fall 2013 encouraged our Task Force to investigate the broader climate and accomplishments related to diversity and multiculturalism on our campus. We discovered an enormous array of organizations, programs, functions, and activities outreaching to diverse groups, advocating for marginalized individuals, protecting the vulnerable, and sharing our rich cultural differences. Moreover, the administrators, staff, students, and faculty in charge of these organizations and programs demonstrate a commitment to and love for social justice, diversity, and multiculturalism that is truly inspiring, as well as instrumental to the formulation of the recommendations that follow. We especially appreciate the insights and perspectives shared with our Task Force by Carl Bacon, Scott Bridges, Hank Lazer, Lane McLelland, Mark Nelson, Josephine Pryce, Sue Rankin, Elle Shaaban-Magana, Cassandra Simon, Jennifer Stollman, Kirk Walter, Allison Subasic, and Jovanda Williams.

Although the University is doing much already, we believe that there are pockets of opportunity that would allow our campus to shine even more brightly with respect to realizing its full potential to become a sanctuary for the marginalized, a vehicle for social justice, and an environment where people from all backgrounds and cultures are welcomed, respected, and celebrated. In contrast to reflecting an order of priorities, the following recommendations are ordered according to logical sequence and feasibility.

- A. **Conduct a Campus Climate Study by External Experts.** To better understand the strength and weaknesses of our campus culture and to help identify optimal strategies for becoming a paragon of excellence with respect to campus equity and inclusivity, we recommend a campus climate study. We further recommend that this study be conducted by *external* experts in substantial collaboration with Institutional Research and the significant intercultural voices on campus.
  
- B. **Conduct an Architectural Inventory of Existing Programs and Structures Addressing Diversity and Multiculturalism.** Many offices and organizations are already engaged in diversity and multicultural activities. Determining where and how to move forward as a University is contingent upon knowing where we currently stand. We recommend that a task force of representatives across University divisions conduct an inventory of what the University is currently doing with respect to diversity and multiculturalism. Given the significance of the internet in telling the story of the University, *we further recommend that the inventory include an assessment of how we present our diversity and multicultural activities on the internet.*

**C. Across Significant Student Socialization Activities, Present a Unified Message Reinforcing the University's Commitment to Diversity and Inclusivity.** We recommend reinforcing the value of diversity and inclusivity beginning with student recruitment and carry through Bama Bound (orientation), new student housing orientation, the Frist-Year Experience, Freshman Forum, First-year Council, and other important socialization activities for freshmen. Beyond learning about the organizations and programs for diverse students, recruits and new students should hear a unified and repeated message—that the University values diversity and that we expect our students to be respectful, inclusive, and welcoming of our diverse students.

**D. Modify the Capstone Creed to Include Respect for People from All Backgrounds and Cultures.** Suggested by the Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation at the University of Mississippi, this recommendation would provide broad, repeated exposure to the University's commitment to diversity and multiculturalism. The Creed would read as follows (additions in italics):

As a member of The University of Alabama community, I will pursue knowledge; act with fairness, honesty, and respect *for people from all backgrounds and cultures*; foster individual and civic responsibility; and strive for excellence.

**E. Add Gender Identity to the University Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Statement.** The Office of Civil Rights (OCR) of the Department of Education recently acknowledged the disproportionate effects of harassment and violence on LGBT students and affirmed the obligation of educational institutions to respond to harassment and violence based on sexual orientation and gender identity and expression. In doing so, the Office clarified that Title IX of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 includes protections against discrimination based on gender identity and expression. Consistent with the actions of the Office of Civil Rights and the EEO statements of 730 colleges and Universities in the United States, including Auburn University and the University of Alabama, Birmingham, we recommend that gender identity be added to UA's EEO statement as a protected class. Beyond protecting UA students and employees, an EEO statement that includes gender identity allows UA to qualify for increasing numbers of grants for social justice research (e.g., the ARCUS Foundation, Gill Foundation) and scholarships for diverse students (e.g., the Point Foundation) for which UA is currently ineligible.

**F. Re-apply for the McNair Scholarship Grants and Search for Additional Funding for Minority Scholarships.** The McNair Scholarship program funds doctoral-level education for students from underrepresented groups. Although UA is not receiving McNair funding for their current five-year cycle, we recommend applying for McNair funding two years from now for the five-year cycle beginning in 2017. Re-landing this funding and securing additional funding for underrepresented groups will help diversify our student body.

- G. Include Coursework Addressing Multiculturalism, Diversity, and Inclusion as a Part of the Core Curriculum.** Academic training to prepare UA students to function effectively in increasingly multicultural communities, campuses, and businesses is essential. Such training is also essential for developing healthy respects, understandings, and appreciations for different cultures and people. While diversity programs and multicultural activities often preach to the choir and affect a couple of hundred students at best, core curricular requirements affect thousands of students and prepare our students for the 21<sup>st</sup> century richly diverse and multicultural world that they are about to enter. Of the twelve other major institutions of higher education in the SEC, only Ole Miss, the University of Arkansas, and Mississippi State fail to require coursework related to multiculturalism, diversity, or citizenship and culture.
- H. Consolidate and Elevate Diversity and Multicultural Programs into an Office headed by an Executive-Level Administrator.** To achieve excellence in equity and inclusivity, it is essential that the programs and personnel leading them have an elevated status in the University hierarchy. We recommend that the University conduct a nationwide search for a Director of an office addressing diversity and multiculturalism who is either directly accountable to the University President or should serve as an Associate Vice President directly accountable to the Provost. *For this office to have the power to affect change, we also recommend that it be properly funded and staffed.*
- I. The Dream: A Center for Diversity and Inclusivity.** To realize the dream of becoming a model university with respect to equity, inclusivity, and multiculturalism, we recommend the construction of a Center for Diversity and Inclusivity. Such a center would house multicultural events and diverse organizations, programs, and activities. Such a facility would also provide needed common space where diverse students could gather in an environment where they feel safe, accepted, and nurtured. Ultimately, we would hope that such a facility would afford otherwise marginalized students special experiences leading to a lifetime of meaningful memories and a true sense of belonging to The University of Alabama.