

Report of the President's Task Force on Inclusion
Submitted to the Office of the President by Inclusion Task Force Co-chairs.

Introduction

In October of the 2017-2018 academic year, President Jonathan R. Alger announced the establishment of four Inclusion Task Force Working Groups and charged the respective groups to research and report on issues relating to the institution's employee climate, classroom inclusivity, the JMU history and context, as well as student campus climate. The purpose of the task force was for the working groups to engage the university community in dialogue and to report on issues pertinent to the climate of the institution "in light of continuing national and local conversations about issues related to diversity, access and inclusion."

The assigned working groups are part of a continuing institutional commitment to diversity, access and inclusion. The first JMU presidential task force on diversity dates back to 2004 when committee recommendations led to the establishment of the Office of the Special Assistant to the President. It is from this office that diversity administration of access and inclusion within the Division of Access and Enrollment and more recently the Academic Affairs position of associate provost for diversity evolved.

Under the leadership of President Alger, diversity and inclusion initiatives are intentionally enhanced and woven into the university's strategic plans as core qualities. During the 2012/13 academic year, the president constituted his first Diversity Task Force Committees and charged the co-chairs (Dr. Robert Kolvoord, Dr. David Owusu-Ansah, Mr. Art Dean, Ms. Casey Carter and Mr. James Robinson) to conduct research and gather data to inform the university's ongoing inclusivity growth.

We continue to be guided by the recommendations of the 2013/14 Diversity Task Force Initiatives that resulted from the 2012 presidential directives. (see <https://www.jmu.edu/diversity/reports-and-publications/diversity-task-force.shtml>). Thus, while President Alger, in 2017, framed his charge to the Inclusion Task Force Working Groups "in light of national and local conversations" relating to diversity, access and inclusion, it is also clear that the findings/recommendations of the committees, are part of the continuing efforts of the university and its leadership to enhance and sustain its diverse working environment.

Members of Inclusion Task Force

Co-chairs Coordinating the President's Task Force on Inclusion

Jennifer Phillips, Associate Athletics Director for Compliance

Dr. David Owusu-Ansah (Associate Provost for Diversity & Executive Director for Faculty Access and Inclusion)

Task Force Working Groups

Co-chairs for Classroom Inclusivity

Dr. Kyle Gipson (Associate Professor of Engineering)

Dr. Cara Meixner (Executive Director of the Center for Faculty Innovations, CFI)

Co-chairs for Employee Climate

Dr. Andreas Broscheid (Professor of Political Science and Center for Faculty Innovation)

Kristin Gibson (Associate Director for UREC Services)

Co-chairs on History and Context

Dr. Eric Fife (Chair, Department of Communication Studies)

Dr. Steve Reich (Professor of History)

Co-chairs for Student Campus Climate

Delo Blough (Associate Executive Director for Center for Global Engagement)

Marsha Mays-Bernard (Associate Vice President for Wellness, Orientation, and Multicultural Engagement)

Inclusion Task Force Timeline

From the October 2017 commission date, the Inclusion Task Force commenced work diligently to deliberate and define the charge assigned to each working group. Members of the respective committees conducted research on past JMU diversity, access and inclusion accomplishments and challenges. For best practices and in the efforts to address inequities and inclusion challenges, committee members researched regional and national examples. Additionally, each of the committees explored avenues for on-campus to dialogue with the JMU community. Information about these on-campus dialogues and forums are detailed in reports below.

As part of the charge, President Alger asked the Inclusion Working Groups to bring to his attention important recommendations that needed immediate administrative considerations, if necessary, prior to the submission of the final report. It was for this reason that the Task Force co-chairs, in late February 2019, submitted to the President a recommendation for an externally conducted campus-wide climate study. Also, at the end of March 2019, a detailed interim report was tendered to the Office of the President.

Immediately below is a summary of the working groups' recommendations. Subsequent to this summary are the detailed final reports of the respective Inclusion Task Force Working Groups.

Summary Recommendations (with initiative leaders in purple)

History and Context Recommendation

1. **The committee affirms its support for an externally conducted climate study** as articulated in the interim report. (Heather Coltman/Donna Harper/Tim Miller)
2. **The university should increase educational activities related to its own history.** Minimally, the university should also provide additional efforts aimed to provide historical information about itself to larger groups of students, as students in dialogues consistently noted both their lack of understanding of JMU history and their interest in learning more. (Heather Coltman)
3. **The university should continue conversations regarding approaching future commemorative activities** (naming, statues, artwork with historical themes, and other activities) thoughtfully, transparently, and with opportunities for participation by any relevant stakeholders. (Nick Langridge)
4. **Create a standing committee designed to consider future commemorating requests,** with its charge including examining current building names. Specifically, the committee should, during its first month, consider ways to approach the current Jackson Hall as it undergoes year-long renovations. (Nick Langridge)

Classroom Inclusivity Working Group Recommendations

1. **The committee supports the most seminal recommendation--the pursuit of a university-wide climate study.**
The committee agrees with the view that the climate of an institution impacts its ability to excel. That the JMU climate study should include the entire JMU community, it should be tailored to the unique JMU context and it should be embedded into a 5-year strategic plan that reinforces longitudinal analysis. (Heather Coltman/Donna Harper/Tim Miller)
2. **Develop strategic plans for meso-level (dean and college level) interventions.** We recommend the development of concrete, tangible plans to enhance classroom inclusivity that exist and are reinforced by Academic Unit Heads and College Deans. (Heather Coltman)
3. **Amplify micro-level interventions through a central repository or clearinghouse.**

With respect to workshops, institutes, roundtables, and scholarly talks surrounding Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) issues, especially classroom inclusivity, an internal scan revealed dozens of faculty development opportunities in any given month of the year. What JMU lacks is a centralized repository or calendar, with intended learning outcomes for participants, of such professional development activities. We strongly recommend that the Office of Access and Inclusion be provided with the resources and accountability structure necessary to serve as not only a clearinghouse of micro-level interventions, but also as a resource for individual faculty, unit heads, and Deans to navigate opportunities across campus. (Donna Harper)

4. **Allow students to determine the pronoun used for them in their personal Canvas profile.**

Canvas, the Learning Management system used campus-wide, has a built-in permission for users to change their display names. That feature is currently disabled at the administrative level. Based on student feedback in the Collaboratory, we recommend that JMU enable the permission function and thereby make it easier for students to change their student profile in the Canvas roster to a student's 'preferred name.' (Heather Coltman)

5. **Provide support and resources for *The Gray Area: Where Controversy can Roam Free*, a faculty-student inclusion partnership:**

Department head of Chemistry & Biochemistry piloted an innovative undertaking that has spurred interest within the entire CSM as well as the Department of Engineering. For the pilot undertaking, the Chemistry department hosted a student-led inclusion event; student facilitators trained by Dion and Mecca [Classroom Inclusivity student committee members] held conversations with all Chemistry majors, with no faculty present, about departmental climate. These data were later shared with Chemistry faculty, stimulating conversations within the department on opportunities for change and development. We recommend formalizing this department-embedded activity with the Office of Access and Inclusion. (Heather Coltman/Donna Harper)

6. **Encourage micro-level efforts regarding class climate:**

In tandem with the university-wide climate study, we suggest another, micro-level climate assessment tool. As a result of the work of the JMU Student Evaluations of Teaching Task Force, JMU will be adopting the campus-wide online evaluation system "Blue" by the fall of 2020. We recommend building on one of the central features of Blue which is that it enables faculty to include individualized, open-ended questions ("Add your own question" functionality). Specifically, we recommend the provision of questions targeting students' experiences of classroom inclusivity at the end of each class. This suggestion is in line with three recognized benefits of the Blue evaluation systems in that (1) instructors would receive feedback regarding classroom climate more quickly, (2) students would potentially have the option of doing evaluations outside of class and (3) of giving longer, more detailed responses. (Heather Coltman)

Working Group on Climate/Employment Context Recommendations

- 1. Approve the recommendation for the external, comprehensive, mixed-methods climate study, and utilize the results to drive the formation of any future new inclusion volunteer committees and groups.** (Heather Coltman/Donna Harper/Tim Miller)
- 2. Invest in the enhancement of supervisor training to include sustained and effective education on diversity/inclusion-related issues, such as micro-aggressions, gender and inclusion, bystander intervention, and so on.** (Charlie King)
- 3. Offer regular dialogue opportunities for staff and faculty on complex topics related to diversity and inclusion at JMU, in a variety of venues: Talent development, CFI, President's Office, individual units, etc.** (Charlie King)

Student Campus Climate Working Group

- 1. Increase funding for the recruitment of faculty, staff, and students from diverse backgrounds.** Strides have been made towards recruitment and retention efforts for increasing diversity in faculty hires. However, if the University truly wishes to see a significant change in population of both students and faculty, the institution must be strategic. Simply, more resources have to be committed. (Heather Coltman/Donna Harper)
- 2. Creation of a structured system for reporting incidences of bias/harassment/hate.** This could be modeled after JMU's sexual assault reporting system, with flyers in public places and a concerted effort to educate the entire campus community. (Donna Harper/Tim Miller)
- 3. Provide diversity/inclusion/bias training to all faculty, staff, and students.** Perhaps a committee could be formed including representatives from HR's Training Development, the Center for Faculty Innovation, and Student Affairs to develop appropriate trainings for all constituents. And perhaps a faculty toolkit could be developed, with information about inclusion and universal design. This might be made a part of the Onboard or Faculty Orientation process. Another idea would be to make it a requirement for all current faculty (similar to Title 9 training.) (Heather Coltman/Donna Harper/Tim Miller/Charlie King/Nick Langridge)
- 4. Encourage departments to conduct an audit of all websites/printed material/forms/etc. and utilize Universal Design Techniques to limit the exclusion of students.** Our recommendation is to encourage all departments around campus, in their websites/printed materials/forms, etc., to be inclusive by reviewing their use of jargon, define and reduce jargon. In addition to jargon, we would encourage departments to

utilize universal design techniques (use of subtitles in videos, use of text-to-speech software, etc.). Another suggestion is that the university creates an icon or image (similar to Safe Space), which departments could post to indicate their commitment to inclusion, and their willingness to identify staff members to serve as ombudspeople or support people for students who have concerns, questions, or complaints. (Tim Miller/Charlie King/Nick Langridge/Heather Coltman)

- 5. Continue the commitment to make all buildings accessible and correct issues where they are found.** Our recommendation is for any new building “build beyond code” and build with inclusive design. Current buildings should be audited annually to conduct an inventory on structural features, and any accessibility issues that exist should be fixed with a universal design approach. Any structural updates to current buildings that align with universal design should be noted and added to the Facilities Management Master schedule available at <http://www.jmu.edu/facmgt/scheduling.shtml> (Charlie King)