

Academic Affairs (AA) Racial Equities Task Force

Background, Vision Statement, and Recommendation of Actions

Background

President Tripathi's [Understanding and Responding to Racism and Systemic Inequality](#) address on June 17, 2020, underscored the need for the UB community to take action against injustice, racism and violence. Tripathi stated, "Across the country, protests have brought hundreds of thousands of people into the streets. They are demanding justice for George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade and many, many others." Tripathi also acknowledged "the centuries of intolerance, oppression and hatred against members of the American Black community" and concluded that "we [the University at Buffalo] must purposefully, thoughtfully and collectively move toward a just and equitable society for our Black students, faculty, staff, alumni, friends and neighbors near and far." As such, the Academic Affairs Racial Equities Task Force was charged with developing and recommending to the Academic Affairs Cabinet a vision statement that will guide efforts to achieve racial equity for Black and African American staff, faculty, and students across the offices that report to the Vice Provost for Academic Affairs. We believe our efforts to intentionally eradicate discriminatory practices against our Black peers and students will benefit all people who have been continuously subjected to racial biases at the university.

Vision Statement

Academic Affairs acknowledges our university's collective responsibility to combat all forms of racism, and to be an anti-racist* institution. We affirm the humanity of our Black and African American faculty and staff members and attend to their wholeness for the benefit of our students. Academic Affairs will recruit, retain, and engage Black and African American talent across all of its reporting areas. In doing so, our policies and practices will be informed by a racially equitable and diverse community, advancing academic excellence for all. We aim to create, implement, and maintain both short and long-term strategies and practices that affirm a culture of inclusion where our Black and African American faculty, staff, and students can reach their highest potential.

**Anti-racism is a multi-dimensional set of actions, values and beliefs. Being anti-racist is fighting against racism, resulting from a conscious decision to make frequent, consistent, equitable choices daily. As an institution, we expect excellence in academics, research and citizenship. We expect nothing less than excellence as we journey together in becoming an anti-racist community.*

Recommendation of Actions

1. Staff Recruitment, Hiring, and On-Boarding Practices

- a. Strategically advertise and promote job openings to the Black community, including:
 - o Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)
 - o The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education
 - o Black sororities and fraternities
 - o Other diverse organizations (refer to UB's Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) [Diversity Recruitment Resources](#) handout)
- b. Prioritize diversity on search committees, including at least one Black faculty or staff member either from within Academic Affairs or from another campus unit
- c. Require all members of search committees to complete the UB Edge diversity training
- d. Provide newly hired Black staff members with a Black mentor (1 year commitment), either from within Academic Affairs or from another campus unit
- e. Encourage SUNY to build and/or reestablish [PRODiG](#) to establish an employment pipeline for Black graduate students and postdoctoral scholars

2. Staff Retention and Inclusion Practices

- a. Appoint an AA Unit Diversity Officer (UDO) to help “foster inclusive excellence” within the unit and lead the efforts of the AA Racial Equities Task Force
 - The AA UDO will be a member of the [established group of campus UDOs](#)
- b. Review existing policies and procedures for implicit biases and adjust accordingly
- c. Establish a series of mini-retreats (on a quarterly basis) designated for Black staff to build a sense of community, discuss concerns in a safe and supportive environment, and generate ideas to share with the AA Racial Equities Task Force to further affect change within the unit
- d. Highlight the accomplishments and contributions of African Americans (year-round); not just during “Black History Month”
- e. Ensure that Black staff are part of the AA cabinet, are represented in other leadership roles, and are invited to serve on decision-making committees
- f. Support and promote the work and opportunities provided by the Minority Faculty and Staff Association (MFSA)
- g. Create a centralized repository of resources to include training opportunities, literature, and on-campus offices to assist Black faculty members on best practices to address and respond to bias and racism in their classrooms and departments
 - Resource: [Faculty Focus Special Report -- Diversity and Inclusion in the College Classroom](#)
- h. Institute a policy for all AA departments to conduct exit interviews for staff who voluntarily leave the unit; include a question regarding AA campus culture and share feedback with AA UDO

3. Professional Development/Workplace Culture

- a. Implement an annual (half or full day) division-wide retreat designed to increase (all) staff members’ awareness and knowledge of systemic racial and social injustices directed towards African Americans. Invite UB faculty and staff to serve as presenters and highlight their research and expertise; topics may include:
 - African and Black Diaspora
 - Implicit Bias
 - Micro-aggressions
 - Privilege
- b. Create and/or promote multicultural competencies and anti-racism trainings for staff to attend throughout the year (such as workshops and initiatives offered by the [Center of Diversity Innovation](#), the [Office of Inclusive Excellence](#), and [Organizational Development and Effectiveness](#))
- c. Update all Performance Programs (effective for the 2021/2022 Performance Review cycle), to include a Diversity/Inclusion competency, measured in part by participation in the above-recommended annual division wide retreat and other on-going anti-racism trainings
- d. Create an AA Commitment to Anti-Racism Statement (could be the final adopted version of our Vision Statement or a modified version of our Vision Statement)
 - Develop a *Commitment to Anti-Racism* statement for AA staff to reference/read during presentations, etc. (similarly to how we acknowledge UB is on Seneca nation land)
- e. On an annual basis, remind all AA staff of [UB’s Discrimination and Harassment Policy and Reporting Procedures](#)

4. Student Retention Practices for Undergraduate and Graduate Students

- a. Develop and fully support mentoring programs for Black students (at both the undergraduate and graduate level) by designing an effective system to pair mentors and mentees
 - Build upon and fund the existing undergraduate Tutoring and Academic Support Services (TASS) Peer Mentor Program with a subset to focus specifically on Black students (a group we struggle to retain and graduate)
 - Build upon existing mentoring programs for graduate students, such as [Network for Enriching Academic Relationship \(NEAR\)](#) and [Schomburg](#) mentoring
 - Create a Black Male Institute and a Black Female Institute and partner with appropriate university offices to proactively identify Black undergraduate students, graduate students, and postdoctoral scholars and inform them of the opportunity to opt-in to participate in the institutes/mentoring programs
- b. Provide funding to build upon the existing programs (ACE, Acker, CSTEP, EOP, McNair, and SSS) that currently provide resources, programming and staff to foster a sense of belonging and increase retention among Black students, as well as other students of color
- c. Establish a mechanism for Black students to have their voices heard for the purpose of taking action to enhance the campus climate and culture
 - Provide opportunities for students to meet with AA leadership, the AA UDO, and/or the AA Racial Equities Task Force
 - Invite members of the Students of Color Council
 - Identify and invite other BIPOC student groups
- d. Review existing academic policies and procedures for implicit biases and adjust accordingly
- e. Develop anti-racism Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), designed by students, faculty, and staff
 - Offer staff a certificate for professional development
 - Offer students a micro-credential or badge
- f. Partner with the UB Curriculum (UBC) Office and academic departments to embed anti-racism pedagogy within existing curricula to improve cultural competencies
 - Hire a staff member in UBC with the background and skill set for this to be the person's one and only job

5. Accountability Plan

- a. Maintain the AA Racial Equities Task Force to:
 - Support the work of the AA UDO
 - Develop benchmarks, monitor, and assess AA's implementation of accepted recommendations to ensure continual improvement on a quarterly basis
 - Support campus-wide anti-racism efforts
- b. Fully publicize the work of the AA Racial Equities Task Force on AA websites
 - Include **all** details from this document (once finalized and approved) so colleagues understand why AA has decided to focus on Black students, staff, and faculty
- c. Require all AA supervisors to include benchmarks for racial equity activities in their departmental Assessment Plans (effective for the 2021/2022 cycle)
- d. Encourage the Vice Provost for Academic Affairs and Deans of the decanal units to establish new reporting requirements in the Comprehensive Program Review that are explicitly designed for departments to report on their activities around achieving racial equity

Academic Affairs Racial Equities Task Force

Charge:

The Academic Affairs Racial Equities Task Force is charged with developing and recommending to the Academic Affairs Cabinet a vision statement that will guide efforts to achieve racial equity across the offices that report to the Vice Provost for Academic Affairs. This vision statement should be based on input from Academic Affairs staff. In developing this vision statement, the Task Force should consider areas for improvements within Academic Affairs as well as how Academic Affairs can assist the broader university in supporting the goal of racial equity. Key areas for consideration may include hiring practices, diversity training, micro-aggressions, and professional development.

Deliverables:

1. A statement of racial equity that will guide efforts in offices across Academic Affairs to achieve racial equity.
2. Recommendations of actions that can be undertaken in support of this statement.

Due date: October 2, 2020

Task Force Membership:

- Jacqueline Hollins, Student Success and Academic Support (Chair)
- Charlie Baxter, Experiential Learning Network
- Monica Carter, Graduate School
- Elizabeth Colucci, Fellowships and Scholarships
- Lauren Galgovich, Student Success
- Maggie Grady, Center for Educational Innovation
- Danielle Johnson, Daniel Ackers Scholars Program
- Sarah Mack, Office of the Registrar
- Darius Melvin, Honors College
- Mary Odden, Educational Effectiveness