

**Faculty Senate – Social Justice Committee  
Year-End Report for AY 2022-23  
Executive Summary**

**Report Preparation**

David Valentiner prepared the Executive Summary. Three workgroup reports are appended. Xiaodan Hu prepared the report for the Academic Affairs (AA) workgroup. Natasha Johnson prepared the report for the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) workgroup. Beth McGowan prepared the report for the Institutional Racism (IR) workgroup. This version of the report was finalized on August 23, 2023.

**Committee Composition**

- Sheila Barrett (Health and Human Sciences, Nutrition and Dietetics) – Fall
- Felicia Bohanon (Supportive Professional Staff)
- Vicky Books (College of Education, Kinesiology and Physical Education)
- Dallas Douglass (Student Government)
- Melani Duffrin (Health and Human Sciences, Interdisciplinary Health Professions) – Spring
- Xiaodan Hu (College of Education, Counseling and Higher Education), Chair of the Academic Affairs Workgroup
- Natasha Johnson (Operating Staff), Chair of the Diversity Equity and Inclusion Workgroup
- Dan McConkie (Law) – Spring
- Beth McGowan (Library), Chair of the Institutional Racism Workgroup
- Biagio Palese (College of Business, OMIS)
- Chris Scanlon (Visual and Performing Arts, Music)
- Sahar Vahabzadeh (College of Engineering and Engineering Technology, Mechanical Engineering)
- David Valentiner, (College of liberal Arts and Sciences, Psychology), Committee Chair

**Background**

The Faculty Senate Social Justice Committee (FS-SJC) was created as a standing committee of the Faculty Senate based on the recommendations of the Ad Hoc Social Justice Committee of the Faculty Senate, as described in the Ad Hoc Committee’s report in May 2020. The FS-SJC identified five recommendations from the report for prioritization. The five prioritized recommendations have guided the work of the FS-SJC:

- 1) secure ongoing support from the university administration for the committee’s work;
- 2) work with the administration with recruitment and hiring of BIPOC faculty;
- 3) work with the administration to assure equity in NIU’s tenure and promotion policies;
- 4) work with the administration to develop a five-year university-wide diversity plan; and
- 5) work with Colleges and Departments to critically evaluate the course offerings, academic programming, curriculum, and pedagogy to address equity and social justice concerns.

The FS-SJC has met as a whole approximately once per month during each AY, including during AY 2022-23. Three workgroups have been meeting as needed, generally about once per month, to work on circumscribed tasks associated with the five prioritized recommendations.

## **AY 2023 Activities and Accomplishments**

### ***Some Context***

DEI work at NIU is complicated by the fact that there are many individuals and committees that undertake DEI-related initiatives without a formal structure for communication or coordination with others at the university. In addition, there are dramatically different views of social justice issues, at times leading to interventions and approaches that work at cross purposes. Recognizing the need for collaboration across the NIU community, Dr. Vernese Edghill-Walden (NIU's Chief Diversity Officer, and Director of NIU's Office of Academic Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (ADEI)) identified a strategy to support coordinated action – she introduced the Shared Equity Leadership (SEL) model to NIU. The SEL model shows promise, but its implementation has been slower than anticipated. It is not clear at this time whether the SEL will be implemented successfully.

### ***Summary of Workgroup Reports***

At the request of ADEI and in anticipation of the implementation of the SEL, the committee has delayed some initiatives. In addition, the SEL is expected to create a context of shared purpose and understanding, and a willingness to hold each other accountable – the foundation needed for effectively advancing DEI work at NIU. Although the promise of SEL has not yet been realized, the FS-SJC workgroups have continued many of its initiatives, as detailed in the attached workgroup reports. Here is a summary of those reports.

*Academic Affairs Workgroup.* The AA workgroup has done considerable work of advancing the revision of Tenure and Promotion policies at NIU at the university-wide level. The products of this workgroup's efforts include a set of specific changes to the Faculty Senate by-laws, to be proposed to the Faculty Senate soon, perhaps as early as December 2023. These changes are largely consistent with the changes suggested by President Freeman. In addition, the AA workgroup has begun to develop resources to support and guide the considerable work that remains to be done at the college and unit levels.

*Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Workgroup.* Until recently, the DEI workgroup had made little progress in addressing the longstanding problem of securing ongoing access to the type of data that is needed to evaluate NIU's status with regard to diversifying its faculty and staff, and evaluating change over time. Four years ago, then-President of the Faculty Senate, Kendall Thu lamented that appropriate data to evaluate NIU's status and progress toward diversifying its faculty and staff was not available, despite long-standing and repeated requests for access to those data. The problem of access to the appropriate data has not been solved. The DEI workgroup recently received word that access to some data is forthcoming, so perhaps there is reason for optimism despite the historical intractability of this problem.

The DEI workgroup has also submitted a proposal to the Provost for DEI Fest, annual conferences to showcase NIU's diversity-related scholarship and community. Shortly after submitting this proposal, President Freeman announced a "Racial Healing: Through the Lenses of Truth Campus Conference," led by Student Affairs and ADEI. The co-occurrence of two similar proposals is another instance of ineffective communication and coordination of DEI efforts at NIU. At present, the status of the DEI workgroup's proposal and the reconciliation of these initiatives have not been addressed.

*Institutional Racism Workgroup.* The IR workgroup has been charged with moving NIU forward in its goal of addressing institutional racism. A top-down approach to institutional change for addressing DEI issues is seen as necessary, but incomplete. Such a model begins with the articulation of a vision and mission by the leadership, which President Freeman has substantially advanced through the articulation of the annual Presidential Goals. The top-down approach also involves ensuring alignment to the President's Goals throughout the NIU community (e.g., committees, colleges, departments, faculty, etc.). In addition to attempting to facilitate the top-down approach, the IR group attempted several initiatives to supplement that approach. These initiatives included the development or accessing of more effective DEI training resources, and the establishment of mechanisms for more effective coordination of efforts. Multiple initiatives by this group during the past year were met with request from ADEI to delay action until the SEL could be implemented.

Efforts by the IR workgroup to activate several key committees of the university to more effectively align with the President's goals have generally met with resistance. It appears that many of the individuals and committees that the IR workgroup has interacted with anticipate resistance from others, do not believe that they have the authority to make demands of others, and/or do not believe that there is institutional support for the work that is being asked of them. Presumably, the implementation of the SEL model will lead to clearer directives from the shared equity leadership teams, reducing fear of implementing controversial changes.

### ***Looking Forward***

Some of the workgroup's initiatives have met with success and some have not. The future of DEI efforts at NIU appears to depend heavily upon the successful implementation of the SEL model. Of particular importance, it is not clear whether Dr. Edghill-Walden's successor will have the commitment and skill needed, and whether there will be adequate administrative support to implement the SEL model. Of note, the SEL model requires the creation of "spaces to support personal journeys," including spaces for NIU's leadership to effectively engage in "personal journeys toward critical consciousness." Such spaces will also require that members of the NIU community will care enough about the development of NIU leaders to "allow some things to be vulnerable, so that their leadership can actually have some space to make errors, or to try things, or to be courageous and step out a little bit more." Some have doubted the practicality of the SEL imperative that we all "engage with emotions" and engage in "personal journeys toward critical consciousness." Detailed steps for achieving this cultural shift have not been delineated. NIU's plan to address DEI issues requires that we successfully meet this formidable challenge of implementing the SEL model.

## FSSJC – Academic Affairs Workgroup Annual Report

1. Accomplishments of 2022-23 goals:
  - a. Established the goals for 2022-23
  - b. Completed remaining [presentations](#) to College Councils
  - c. Summarized findings from 2021-22 first-round College Council meetings ([Summary of 2021-22 First-Round College Council Conversations.docx](#))
  - d. Based on the current literature, best practices in the field, 2020-21 BIPOC faculty conversations, and first-round of findings, we discussed [potential changes to FS bylaws](#) in second-round college Council meetings
  - e. Summarized findings from 2022-23 second-round College Council meetings ([Summary of 2022-23 Second-Round College meetings summary.docx](#)) to inform future FS bylaws language changes
  - f. The Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost released proposed language changes to Article 8 (relating to T&P policies) that are consistent with our recommended revisions
2. Our subcommittee’s three recommended principles for revising the FS bylaws are:
  - a. Add DEI content to the Preamble so that FS Bylaws demonstrate commitment to DEI within T&P and encourage alignment with university goals
  - b. Add recommended cycles of review (perhaps 5-10 years) for each academic unit’s T&P policies to regularly re-align them with core values and existing knowledge of DEI
  - c. List resources that offer specific DEI-relevant examples within the existing T&P categories of teaching, research, and service
3. 2023-2024 Tasks:
  - a. Propose specific amendments to the FS bylaws based on the three recommended principles by December 2023
  - b. Provide the resources listed above in Part 2(c)
  - c. Continue to engage college councils and complete outstanding second-round meetings with the College of Business, College of Law, the Libraries, and College of Engineering and Engineering Technology next semester

## FSSJC – Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Workgroup Annual Report

The charge of the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Subcommittee of the Faculty Senate Social Justice Committee is to (a) identify factors contributing to institutional racism at NIU, particularly policies, practices and procedures hampering diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI); (b) study best practices of selected group of US and Canada institutions that are at the forefront in the implementation of DEI; (c) review current practices on diversity, equity and inclusion at NIU and compare them with the above mentioned institutions; (d) engage BIPOC faculty regarding their perceptions of NIU's DEI practices; and (e) review past and current data for BIPOC faculty, the student-faculty ratio and their retention at NIU.

At the start of the Fall semester, the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Subcommittee of the Faculty Senate Social Justice Committee asked for access to university data. Those data are required to perform disaggregated analyses that could help the group in understanding the status quo and in providing recommendations for the 5 years plan. Due to delays outside our control, in the data acquisition process and other unforeseen priorities of Affirmative Action we have postponed the data analysis to Summer/Fall 2023.

At the start of the Spring semester, the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Subcommittee of the Faculty Senate Social Justice Committee began to work on the creation of a brand-new university-wide annual event that will expose and involve faculty, staff, students and the community to various DEI topics. The event named DEI Fest will have not only an academic side but also an entertaining side. The structure, content and budget of the DEI Fest has been vetted by the Faculty Senate Social Justice Committee and other committees across campus. We are currently awaiting approval from Provost Ingram to move forward with this initiative.

Towards the end of the Spring semester, the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Subcommittee of the Faculty Senate Social Justice Committee met with an Affirmative Action group of stakeholders regarding gaining access of the data required for our data analysis. We are getting approval and receiving the data needed to offer informed recommendations for a 5-year action plan that is part of our subcommittee charges. As soon as we receive the data, we will be able to move forward with this task.

## FSSJC – Institutional Racism Workgroup Annual Report

Two priorities were set out for the IR working group in the summer of 2021: the first was to change the culture of the University; the second was to decolonize the curriculum. While the working group made several attempts to begin these monumental tasks by addressing our concerns to bureaucratic structures that oversee culture and curriculum, we found that the University structures inhibited us. Our task force's goals collided with normative procedures that continuously placed the responsibility to effect change elsewhere, hampering this group's efforts. For example, to decolonize the curriculum, we approached the Baccalaureate Council, only to be told that the role of the Baccalaureate Council was not to interrogate the content of course offerings, that being the sole purview of departments, but to oversee course changes only for their effect upon graduation rates and for consistency. The goal of decolonizing the curriculum, our group's goal and consistent with Presidential goals, did not filter down into the oversight group overseeing NIU's undergraduate curriculum and could therefore not be enforced. Therefore, the members of the subcommittee question the feasibility of the priorities as outlined in the 2021 report at this time. Perhaps the Shared Equity Leadership Model will ameliorate the issues involved.

### **Goal One: Change Culture of University**

Things attempted:

- Pass a FS resolution that would bring a university-wide education training about racism to NIU via Crossroads
  - Rejected by ADEI bc they feared the primary focus on racism that Crossroads training provides would alienate others across campus.
- Pass a FS resolution to require all units on campus to create a DEI plan by the end of 2024
  - Rejected by ADEI and then FS-SJ committee bc ADEI wanted to go more slowly, did not want to alienate those on and off campus. Furthermore, depended upon creation of a rubric for units to follow.

Accomplishments

- Create materials to send to all faculty re: Xroads so that individual faculty members can spend their allotted professional development or private funds to pursue this training.
- Choose a title on racism and higher ed, to support a ONE READ, coordinate individual reading groups of 5 to 6, chosen work begun
- Discuss individual policies brought to our attention that might adversely affect poor and/or BIPOC students
  - Bursar/bookstore/one card book buying, meeting scheduled
- Created repository for Departments to share their revised Bylaws and T & P documents to address issues of social justice

### **Goal Two: Decolonize the Curriculum:**

- Approached Baccalaureate Council – told this was not the job of the Council to look at this, that this was an issue only for departments
- Approached Grad Council re: request that grad faculty submit a DEI statement, told that this is up to individual colleges not for the University to make such a plan Already a standing committee supposed to do this, headed by ADEI's Vernese Edgehill Walden, designated low priority work at this time. This committee's work to be rolled into SEL model.