UAF Strategic Plan for Inclusive Excellence (SP-IE) Curricular Responsiveness Committee Report on 2022 DEI Forums

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To assess how faculty and staff perceive Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI[1]) at UAF in the area of academics, the Curricular Responsiveness Committee (CRC) facilitated two Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) forums. Participants were given the opportunity to contribute in-person or virtually using Google Jamboard, a digital whiteboard that allows for asynchronous and real time collaboration.

To facilitate discussion and encourage participants to share their experiences, the forums were guided by five reflective prompts:

1. What does DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) in academia mean to you or look like to you?
2. What is your favorite or most used DEI resource in your program, courses, or curriculum?
3. In what ways should we be integrating DEI content into our programs, courses, and syllabi (curriculum)?
4. What are the challenges to adding DEI content into your programs, courses, and syllabi (curriculum)?
5. What kinds of support would be helpful/needed for you to incorporate DEI into your programs, courses, and syllabi (curriculum)?

The first forum took place with faculty and staff in the College of Liberal Arts (CLA) in-person on January 21, 2022. After the forum, the Google Jamboard remained open for several weeks to provide space for participants who were not able to attend in person. A total of 24 individuals within CLA responded to the questions in-person or on the Google Jamboard. The second forum was open to the entire UAF community and facilitated virtually using the Google Jamboard. The Google Jamboard was open for two months of data collection, starting February 9, 2022, and ending April 9, 2022. 36 people contributed to the discussion. 60 faculty and staff members participated between the two forums.

Data Analysis

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[1] DEI and DEIA are both used throughout this summary report. The forum began by using DEI only and through discussions and participant responses, we felt it was important to use DEIA as much as possible to make sure we were including the A for access and highlighting the importance of the A to this work.

After data collection ended, five faculty members representing three disciplines at UAF analyzed the data. Using qualitative analysis, the faculty members reviewed all participant responses to generate themes. First, each faculty member reviewed the data separately, generating broad categories. Next, the faculty members used an iterative process to discuss their interpretation of the data, reworking categories into themes to answer each of the five reflective prompts. Representative quotes were also selected to further provide context and define the theme. To facilitate the writing process, each member of the CRC authored a section.

Results & Discussion

Q1: What Does DEI in academia mean to you or look like to you?

Participants shared a wealth of knowledge and experience about what DEIA is and what is missing and needed for change to occur.

Diverse Representation at All Levels
Participants shared repeatedly that diversity requires representation at all levels (i.e., administration, faculty, staff, students) and within curriculum, support services, and university practices and policies. When we have diversity at all levels, UAF is strengthened as a whole. This necessitates inclusive hiring and recruitment practices to ensure historically excluded groups are represented at all levels of the institution. DEI is discussed as including a curriculum that reflects diverse voices and ways of knowing, one participant shared the type of change required, stating, "Dismantling the academic tradition that is built on keeping dominant one type of knowledge and one type of person at the expense of others".

Ethical Communication
Participants identified that communication practices should honor and create safe spaces (also being discussed as Brave spaces). Participants discussed the importance of listening, engaging in productive conflict, creating space for respectful discourse by affirming "all ideas are welcome." Participants also noted that asking questions is valued. Recognizing the importance of communication to building meaningful relationships was also expressed by participants. One participant expressed the importance of ethical communication by noting the following: "All ideas are welcome. Everyone feels safe to share. Everyone is seen as having value, no matter their background."

Asset/Strengths-Model
DEIA is creating spaces where students' existing knowledge, skills, and abilities are valued. Recognizing the assets available to our community to help further our DEI initiatives. Honoring our past successes as foundational for future growth. One participant responded to this question by stating the importance of, "Recognizing and celebrating difference/diversity." Participants

also noted the importance of acknowledging what we are doing right in this area and learning from each other's successes.

Shared accountability
For change to occur, it is important for all levels of the institution to participate in DEIA initiatives to promote success and grow from the historical exclusion and discriminatory practices of people of marginalized and oppressed groups. DEIA shouldn't be relegated to a single committee. One participant described DEIA as, "Access. Trust. Brave space. Share power. Shared goal of bringing the outside in and the inside out. Decisions are made with shared vision."

Equity
Equity, equality, equitable outcome, equal access were all terms used repeatedly to describe DEIA. One participant shared, "Equity does not mean 'equal'. Equity requires us to recognize that each person has different circumstances. Therefore, diversity, equity and inclusion requires one to acknowledge and deal with the circumstances that have resulted in exclusion and inequity."

Lip Service
Multiple participants stated that they were not convinced that DEIA efforts are sincere: "At the moment it looks like a lot of lip service from above...it can and should be so much more" and "Agree...lots of lip service from above. No real substantive action." One participant emphasizes the depth of change needed by stating, "Diversity is structurally embedded in the entire organization rather than merely painted on to the surface."

What's Missing?
Participants also shared that disability is often absent from the DEIA discussion and they would like that to be more recognized as a part of DEIA. One participant shared that, "Disability is not often seen as being part of DEI - especially as part of visibility and community-building". Other participant comments include being aware of and respecting differences that are not visible, for example, military, socioeconomic status, etc.

Q2: What is your favorite or most used DEI resource in your program, courses, or curriculum?

Participants were generous in their responses to question two, sharing resources and ideas for course content and curriculum (see below), highlighting that representation and inclusion of diverse voices are foundational to DEIA efforts in our programs, courses, and curriculum. Some participants also cited as helpful the traditional professional and curricular development efforts such as Safe Zone, DEIA training, and eCampus' iTeach.

Participants noted the important roles that Indigenous knowledge systems and the self as a resource play in curricular practices. Participants mentioned collaborative, interpersonal actions such as engaging in "talking circles" and "small group discussion/s" and highlighted the benefit of inviting, involving, and consulting with elders and community members, naming specifically Fairbanks Native Association and Denakkanaaga. Regarding individual actions, participants suggested both straightforward, universal ones such as "listening," communicating, and having an "open door policy" as well as more introspective and individualized actions, such as cultivating open-mindedness and engaging in self-awareness practices with the intention of identifying implicit bias. Also referenced repeatedly were the critical elements of personal experiences and backgrounds (e.g., personal stories, students' individual experiences, and international exchange). The following list highlights the excellent recommendations by our own faculty and staff at UAF to enhance DEIA in our institution.

Faculty/Staff Recommendations for Curriculum Development
- Recommended Considerations for Course Design: OER and no/low materials, ADA-compliant, and delivery methods appropriate for low-bandwidth internet in rural communities
- Recommended Texts, Movies, Podcasts, Speakers, Websites, Checklists:
  - General: Readings in critical pedagogy; Readings in theories of visual sovereignty and narrative sovereignty, as applied in the arts and cinema from around the world (see Michelle Raheja and Barry Barclay below)
  - Adrienne Maree Brown, *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*
  - *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner* (2001 Movie)
  - Tracey A. Benson and Sarah E. Fiarman *Unconscious Bias in Schools: A Developmental Approach to Exploring Race and Racism* (Book)
  - Lori Patton Davis and Samuel D. Museus, "Identifying and Disrupting Deficit Thinking", [Identifying and Disrupting Deficit Thinking | by National Center for Institutional Diversity | Spark: Elevating Scholarship on Social Issues | Medium](#)
  - Robyn DiAngelo, *White Fragility,* [Publications - Robin DiAngelo, PhD](#)
  - Dr. Cana Uluak Itchuaqiyaq, presentation "Decentering Whiteness in Antiracism Initiatives" (UAF Center for Cross Cultural Studies, 2021 Speaker Series)
  - [Lyla June](#)
  - [Tema Okun](#)
  - [*Queersplaining* Podcast](#)
  - Noreen Naseem Rodriguez and Katy Swalwell, *Social Studies for a Better World: An Anti-Oppressive Approach for Elementary Educators,* [Social Studies for a Better World](#)
  - [Micro-inequities (including Micro-aggressions) and Micro-affirmations](#) by Mary Rowe.
- Additional Recommended Writers:
  - [Barry Barclay and Fourth Cinema](#)

- ○ bell hooks
- ○ Ibram X. Kendi, Scholarship — Ibram X. Kendi
- ○ Susan Raffo, publications — Susan Raffo
- ○ Michelle Raheja
- Additional Recommended Resources:
  - ○ Springer anti-racism checklist
  - ○ Reconciling Ways of Knowing

Q3: In what ways should we be integrating DEI content into our programs, courses, and syllabi (curriculum)?

Participants identified five major themes on how to integrate DEI content into programs, courses, and curriculum.

Beyond the classroom

Participants expressed that experiences beyond the classroom can provide practical applications of DEI content. Internships and study abroad experiences provide real life opportunities for students to immerse themselves in different cultures and diverse environments. Learning foreign languages can provide students the opportunity to immerse themselves in another language and culture. Additionally, interdisciplinary practice allows students to learn about how to work with another academic or professional discipline.

Representation

The importance of representation within faculty, staff and students has been a consistent theme in each of the five questions in the survey. The importance of a diverse workforce and student population cannot be emphasized enough. Participants provided suggestions on how to better support this by:

- Advertising outside of the normal "academic" realms
- Being purposeful in incorporating Indigenous and other diverse voices throughout our curriculum
- Update programs to meet the needs and interest the current student population
- Actively seeking diversity in our faculty and staff
- Including #OwnVoices resources

Adaptation

In order for the University to remain relevant and attractive to both students and new faculty, it needs to be able to adapt to the current times. A process of continual reflection and review of the course content we are presenting and updating it to reflect the current discourse will be an important part of doing this. One participant shared their own process of self-reflection stating, "I

examine all my authors and sources for representation of minoritized populations. Include #OwnVoices resources. Include cultural values. Include activities to reject deficit-thinking." Additionally, the ability to collaborate across departments and disciplines to provide more robust and critical courses can also be valuable.

Inclusive Spaces/Community Building
For students, staff, and faculty the importance of being able to see themselves within the campus and online community in all ways is very important. This includes from the physical building and ensuring reflections of self in art, design, marketing, to online spaces. A key highlight to this theme was being mindful in the use of language in things such as marketing, course syllabi, and dialogue. The ability to share stories and learn from each other provides deeper understanding of diverse perspectives and lived experience. It is the faculty and/or staff's role to ensure those spaces are maintained within a respectful manner, but it is important to also feel free to disagree.

Formal
DEIA should be integrated formally throughout the course curriculum. Suggestions provided by participants in how to integrate this include:

- Adding a statement in the syllabi, specifically in GER courses.
- "Cruelty-free" syllabi should be embraced by all [Toward Cruelty-Free Syllabi, with Matthew Cheney](#)
- Assessment processes that start at the institutional level, to program review, to department and faculty assessments.

It is also recognized that the new institutional accreditation standard asks us to look at disaggregated student success data in our program review process and it is important that we find a way to work together to improve access and opportunity.

Transforming the Institution
The last theme that came through in this question was that we need to transform the institution from the ground-up to foster diversity, equity, inclusion, and access throughout. It is important to acknowledge and recognize the challenges faced by those who do not benefit from the system as it is currently because it has been and still is a system of privilege. How can we make changes to a system whose foundation and creation was meant for a select few and not for all? While "burning it down" is not an option, it is a metaphor for change and the need for creating something new from the ground-up.

Q 4: What are the challenges to adding DEI content into your programs, courses, and syllabi (curriculum)?

Across the campus community, faculty and staff have adopted a growth mindset and "love adding new materials, resources, and learning alongside my students"; however, embracing and growing a culture of diversity and inclusion is not without its challenges. The results of the data analysis revealed the following perceived challenges: Time, lack of knowledge/subject matter expertise, perceived faculty/student resistance, forced/mandated, and lack of faculty diversity. Each challenge is defined below, and representative quotes by participants are added to provide additional context.

Time
A major challenge identified by participants is time, a luxury for focus group participants who have navigated years of budget cuts, staffing shortages, and an ongoing pandemic that has fundamentally transformed the landscape of higher education. Time as a challenge identified by participants includes two dimensions:

● While DEI is part of the UAF Strategic Plan 2027, no adjustments have been made to assigned workloads to create space to engage in professional development, critical reflection, and sensemaking between faculty within departments, across our campus community, and within our respective disciplines. Time is needed to "incorporate diverse voices" into the curriculum and "integrate [DEI] mindfully."
● While many faculty report feeling "drained" and challenged to find time to do DEI work, Black and Indigenous people of color (BIPOC) may face additional time-related constraints as "emotional labor and actual labor falls on people with less power in the system."

Lack of Knowledge/Subject Matter Expertise
Even if time were not a challenge, focus group participants expressed concern about adding content as "current faculty expertise does not fully allow implementation of DEI" and some disciplines may be perceived as "deprioritizing DEI." Moreover, for faculty with a desire to implement DEIA, "it's not easy to know what activities, concepts, topics, words, statements, actions/inactions, etc. will impact individuals and groups." As such, participants were left feeling underprepared and challenged to add content that is genuine, informed, and respectful vs. "artificial."

Perceived Faculty/Student Resistance
While time and lack of knowledge represent challenges to implementation, resistance is a significant area of concern. Perceived resistance is framed in several ways by focus group participants:

● DEIA is perceived by some members of our UAF community as "forced or mandated." If DEIA were "a natural part of befriending our associates," we would but currently do not:

- Partner with our "community experts and pay them (instead of out of pocket like I normally do)."
- Live DEIA vs. framing these initiatives as "an add-on, extra-curricular, covered only one day a year, an afterthought, etc." Having a perception of adding-on is expressed in this participant quote, "DEI is not traditionally a part of my courses or programs. It can still be worth it, but adding thoughtful discussion of DEI inherently takes away time from the subjects the course is nominally about."
- Establish consistent criteria across programs and hold ourselves accountable.

Lack of Faculty Diversity

Lack of faculty diversity was frequently discussed by focus group participants and offered as a challenge for promoting DEIA. Lack of diversity in faculty and staff may limit curriculum, identification of needed resources and representation for historically excluded student populations. Currently, we are not hiring in a way that "[allows] departments to expand and [diversify] course content, cluster hires and collaborations across departments."

Q5: What kinds of support would be helpful/needed for you to incorporate DEI into your programs, courses, and syllabi (curriculum)?

Participants thoughtfully shared a variety of activities and practices that support them in incorporating DEIA into their curriculum. It is important to note a few participants stated they were "unsure" of what they might need to incorporate DEIA into their programs, courses, and curriculum. This is an important statement in and of itself, highlighting the need for more dialogue and shared understanding and learning. Themes found focused on hiring practices; workload and compensation; expectations and examples; education and professional development; peer resources and networking; and accountability and recognition.

Hiring Practices

Participants continue to discuss the importance of hiring practices in DEIA, both for representation and to hire individuals that understand that DEIA is an important component of their position at UAF. One participant reflected on the need for mandatory new hire training on the history of Alaska. "Also...for a long time I have thought that new faculty hires should be required to take a workshop on colonization in Alaska and the history of Alaska Native people, including information about boarding schools and intergenerational trauma. I think new faculty (from outside Alaska) need the history. I sure would have benefitted from this 18 years ago!" Another participant shared the importance of those in leadership positions making sure to model DEI practices and hold faculty and staff accountable to these practices.

Workload and Compensation

Workload and compensation emerged as a consistently important theme for faculty and staff and many shared that there is a need for incentives to support their efforts of including DEIA in their curriculum because it takes time to do this well and in a good way, there is also a need for dedicated time and funding to focus on this. There was an expressed interest in exploring how workload units, workload allowances, and course releases could be negotiated to ensure that DEI in curriculum is a priority. Participants would also like to see, "Inclusion of DEI efforts as a meaningful portion of unit review criteria (i.e., criteria for promotion)".

Expectations and Examples
Participants requested clear expectations and the need for specific examples on how to implement DEIA into the curriculum. One participant requested, "Example syllabi or example course materials of how to incorporate DEIA into a course. How should we talk about DEIA in a science course for instance?" There were requests for example syllabi, activities, resources, to show how DEIA gets integrated into curriculum across disciplines. There was also a question as to how we define terms for all of the DEIA concepts, so we are clear on what this looks like. The SP-IE website has recently added an extensive dictionary of DEIA shared language that can be found here: https://uaf.edu/diversity/strategic-plan/dictionary.php. One participant shared an interest in starting affinity groups across campus to begin to engage in dialogue and support each other in this work.

Education and Professional Development
Education and professional development were clearly requested by participants that involved a range of ideas on training to include, "authentic DEI training" and "diversity training by experts on various topics". There were requests for "meaningful, experiential learning on how to integrate activities, materials" and to hold "workshops with other faculty, specific to discipline, with an open discussion of practices". One participant shared the need for "Pedagogical training in handling student resistance to DEI Content. Training in responding to students who feel attacked by DEI readings." In addition to training was a request for funding for training and time to do training and professional development in this area. Exploring the notion of resistance to DEIA is a great discussion to have with faculty, staff, and students in the future. Participants also discussed utilizing experts from within UAF and sharing what we already do and know in this area with each other. There is a need to support and nurture peer resources and networking. One participant shared, "I like the idea of workshops where others can share ideas that have worked or been challenging. I learn from others and this models what we hope to accomplish." These responses all highlight the need for ongoing support at all levels.

Accountability and Recognition
Finally, accountability and recognition were both discussed by participants. Accountability was viewed as something that should be explored as something that will help us remain diligent to this effort, although it was not discussed fully as to how this would or could look. Recognition

was discussed as recognizing what UAF faculty and staff already do in this area. One participant shared, "I feel like DEI is already incorporated well into courses in our program. It would be great to learn what others are doing." This is a hopeful outlook that creates a starting point for this effort, a place to ground ourselves in our strengths and good efforts as we commit to also doing more and doing better.

Conclusion

Faculty and staff recognize the importance of DEIA at UAF; moreover, our campus community is actively engaged in this work, sharing DEIA knowledge, practices, and support. While there are strengths, we have opportunities to learn and grow together. To facilitate growth across our campus community, DEIA content needs to be incorporated across every discipline. In addition, DEIA efforts would be enhanced by including a multitude of diverse voices, knowledge, and experiences into our respective fields of study to better meet the needs of our students, as whole people, in our ever changing and diverse world. While the goal of these faculty and staff forums was to understand perceptions and experiences with DEIA in academics the information shared has impacts at every level and aspect of the university system because of the interconnected nature of the work.

Next Steps

The outcomes of this report will help to inform the next steps in exploring DEIA in curricular responsiveness across the university system. This will include 2023 surveys, interviews, and/or focus groups/sharing circles with UAF students at every level and across disciplines to listen to their experiences and learn from them the needs around DEIA and what it means to feel a sense of belonging in the institution. The outcomes of this report and the student report can be shared in a variety of spaces, such as, new-faculty orientation and the faculty accelerator website, and the information can support long-term faculty with ideas and examples of adding DEIA content into their respective disciplines. Faculty and staff have expressed interest in learning about what others at UAF are doing in their own DEIA efforts, supporting the idea of possible roundtables or exchanges to foster more curiosity, inspiration, and learning as a community. It is important to note that this report is not to mandate policies or procedures at UAF, instead create awareness, understanding, and support so that we all benefit, most especially students. In highlighting the importance of DEIA to the whole, one participant states, "Like a rich ecosystem, so does human diversity enhance outcomes."