Diversity, Equity, and Inclusive Excellence Strategy Document
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Approaching Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Efforts

Higher education is continually changing as it engages the complex and diverse experiences of various individuals and groups. From conversations about diversity that have focused on categories of ethnicity, race, gender, nationality, and sexuality, we have added discussions related to age, ability, learning differences, and veteran status to name just a few. We are also taking up questions that work across these categories, in the support of, for example, LGBTQ+ students of color. From the visible to the invisible differences that make us human, universities have to carve out safe spaces for dialogue, inclusion, learning, and student success. There are also real barriers to making higher education more inclusive of diverse experiences and equitable practices, as our institutions are embedded in a society that has grown from its own structural inequalities governed by such historic forms of division like sexism, racism, ableism, and heterosexism. Higher education has mixed results when addressing these barriers, as everything from admissions strategies to teaching practices to the social norms of campus life may be complicit in maintaining structures of inequality. The result is that equity gaps in graduation are widening in some places, faculties remain less diverse than their student populations, and staff communities, who are more reflective of the areas in which our campuses are embedded, find themselves marginalized in conversations around equity, justice, and inclusion.

There is no simple solution to the question of how to best create a climate where as many people as possible feel welcomed and supported. The climate of our institutions will not change without a strong infrastructure that elevates the conversation to the level of the institution and the community in which that institution is embedded. That conversation must be guided and supported by campus. This leadership, coupled with an infrastructure that facilitates dialogue and builds trust, can position community members, regardless of how they approach their understanding of their own difference, toward greater success. We must move toward immediate change with *intention* and *purpose*. We have to begin by discussing the hard issues that relate to the diverse experiences of faculty, staff, and students and create support infrastructures, such as training programs and ongoing discussions of implicit bias, which must become part of the fabric of the organization. DEI must infuse all aspects of the institution. I have made this point in a recent piece on Tech Equity, where I argue that equity is not an individual challenge but a structural problem. At the same time, we have to push on the historical practices that limit inclusivity and equity. Challenging faculty on rigid hiring practices and changing how we advertise our positions to the wider academic community also begins to convey a message about what we, as educators, stand for. Intentional effort goes a long way to elevating the day-to-day work of those who are creating commonality and connection while respecting diversity and difference.

My commitment to the real, structural work associated with DEI is motivated by my experience as a feminist and social geographer, an HIV/AIDS researcher and community health practitioner, a scholar of the future of human work as it relates to robotics and automation, and as a leader in higher education. In that time, I have been pushed by colleagues, friends, and critics to both acknowledge my own privilege and recognize that being an ally is not about just saying "I am with you." Being an ally is about actively and overtly supporting efforts to break down the intransigence that stands in the way of a more equitable and inclusive world, while recognizing your own role in that messy world. From my early advocacy as a faculty member to hire colleagues interested in the work of DEI to my more recent efforts to reimagine the leadership of SJSU's Office of the Provost to bring new, diverse, and creative voices to the work of our campus, I have always been inspired by those who know there is no space for complacency. My current intellectual and practical thinking about DEI is thus motivated by those who refuse to be content with what is. The work of DEI is ongoing and it is every day.

Based on my experience, advocacy, and long-term commitment to DEI efforts, I provide examples related to practices that rethink structures which can reinforce impediments to student, staff, and faculty success. These examples guide my thinking for how I would lead as executive vice president and provost.

Creating Community with Intention and Purpose

First and foremost, we need to create a space of inclusivity in the context of individual and collective understandings of our diversity. By creating a culture of inclusion that works from bottom to top and back down again, you can attract a diverse group of world-class faculty, students, and staff. What this means in practice is:

(1) Creating a formal infrastructure of not just one person (e.g., a Senior Diversity Officer) but a team that works collectively to embed best practices for inclusive excellence throughout the institution. We must locate in each and every job position description and advertisement a commitment to and a responsibility for inclusive excellence.

(2) Developing cultural competencies education in all training and support of faculty and staff as well as student workers, while also supporting the communities that students, faculty, and staff desire to find commonality in a sea of complexity. Affinity groups and cultural community organizations traditionally are the heart of this work, as these organizations can help faculty, staff, and students navigate the campus in a safe and inclusive environment, but training programs on microaggressions or implicit bias in hiring practices must work in concert with community building efforts. These practices must be a regular, required part of the ongoing education and support of the entire campus community.

(3) Investing in tools that supports innovations in, conversations related to, the work of diversity and equity, including supporting real-time data collection and analysis of college climate, equity gaps, or college attainment, for example (see more below).

(4) Supporting the experts who are closest to the experiences of DEI work, including staff who come to our campuses from a wide range of backgrounds. Staff voices need to be elevated in the campus shared governance structures; they are a critical part of the teaching-learning environment. It is staff who are on the front line with many students, faculty, and other staff. This is why I established a partnership with the OpEd Project and their Public Voices Fellowship Program to support faculty *and* staff who are making an impact both on our campus and beyond with their work.

Increasing Student Success by Meeting Undergraduate Students "Where They Are"

No matter how hard we may wish that each and every student would fit in the "box" of a four-year undergraduate or a three year doctoral student, this is simply not the case. The majority of college-going students today are what we often call, ironically, "non-traditional." These so-called non-traditional students often come from communities that we desperately want to support in higher education. They are our adult learners, parents, and people with "some college and no degree." If we are going to meet our mission as higher education institutions, I believe we should do the following:

(1) Traditional models of undergraduate student success focus on academic progress and grades when evaluating risk. The correlation, for example, between a passing grade in a lower-division writing and math course, for example, does not automatically translate into later success. Grades don't always measure competency; measuring competency in the classroom means supporting faculty to rethink their assessments to better measure student learning. In so doing, faculty can break down the barriers to education that are often based in assessment models biased against BIPOC and other students of color. I have supported conversations and training programs that help faculty think through these issues.

(2) Better understand data on why student leave a university. The top indicators for students leaving higher education are not related directly to grades; they are related to a sense of belonging, financial stress, the ability to find answers to their concerns, and/or declining mental health. When building student support infrastructures, one can't use grades as the proxy for student success or outreach.

Universities lose students who are not "on probation" or "at risk" academically. To better understand student risk, universities must focus on student support models, such as "intrusive" advising, which link students to the multiplicity of supports available to address the "whole student."

(3) We need deeper relationships between students and professional advisors. Creating relationships between advisors, particularly advisors who are of similar backgrounds as students, helps students navigate complex higher educational institutions. We are putting this into effect at SJSU, where we will have a ratio of 300 students to 1 professional advisor for all students through their first 60 units. Students will also be assigned to the same advisor in a college regardless of what major they choose or change into. The goal is to build a partnership between the advisor and the student.

(4) Hiring advisors that think holistically about student success means directing attention to the real challenges that are often faced by BIPOC and other students of color, who come from first generation households. To meet these goals, I have created positions, such as a new Assistant Vice Provost for Undergraduate Advising and Student Success, that are populated by experts in student success and closing equity gaps.

(5) Rethink the very idea of what a "student" is and how we meet them "where they are." It is possible to create avenues of access that help students attain their educational goals while also understanding that not every one of them can take a class at 2 PM or even drive to a campus. Asynchronous online education, when built thoughtfully and collectively with faculty, can meet some of this demand. I spent five years at the University of Arizona on such a model. Students enrolled in Arizona Online had an average age of thirty, were working adults, and had more than double the Pell Eligibility of main campus students. We will launch SJSU Online in January of 2023. Such programming, however, must fit with the overall mission of the university. This does not need to be applied everywhere or for every program.

Reimagining Graduate and Professional Education to Change Higher Education

The activity in student success often focuses on undergraduate students; however, the challenge of recruiting and retaining undergraduate students relies on the development of a diverse and robust pipeline of graduate and professional students who can teach the next generation of learners. We need to increase the success of BIPOC and Latina/o/x students in every field of graduate education. And, yet, higher education often takes advantage of the fact that graduate and professional students have already been successful and therefore "know what they are doing." Here are some investments that can help a much more diverse pipeline of graduate and doctoral students succeed.

(1) Invest in graduate student success programs and infrastructures. SJSU launched a new Graduate College in 2019. One of the first new positions we created was an Associate Dean of Graduate Student Success. This person is charged with collaborating with the graduate faculty to build intentional programming that helps students navigate the transition from undergraduate to graduate education.

(2) Create programming in graduate student writing, data analytics, and research development. At both the University of Arizona and SJSU, I have witnessed the effective creation of programs in these areas that help graduate students not only transition into graduate school but begin to understand how to better position themselves for overall success. This includes programming that support second language learners but also first generation college graduates who do not know how to navigate their graduate or professional school experience. There is nothing intuitive about higher education and we have to build deliberate support structures for diverse graduate students that help them navigate not only the academic environment but post-graduate life.

(3) Build deeper partnerships with other campuses in the CSU and systems, such as the UC, where graduate students in high-needed fields can find employment supporting our State. Recent state laws are demanding increases, for example, in Ethnic Studies Education. Universities can respond

to these demands with new programming as well as programs that actively support graduate student transitions from across campuses in the State (and beyond).

From Access to Success in a Data-Informed Environment

Higher education institutions have more data than they know what to do with—and it shows. Most institutions don't use data effectively to not only track student success but also assess program quality and engagement. This is in part a result of the fact that data are not collected consistently and they are held in systems that are not integrated. If a university or system is going to understand why some students stay and others go, or how universities are supporting BIPOC students or Latina/o/x students, for example, they need not only good data but an organizational culture that can respond to the findings. This means:

(1) Building an integrated data management organization, such as those made possible by institutional-level customer relations management (CRM) systems. This includes constructing a data warehouse model so that a campus or system can have "one source of truth." These systems can also help campuses customize messaging and action-based interventions to various student, staff, or faculty groups.

(2) Using data to make informed decisions on what strategies work and what strategies don't work. Campuses and systems must build data analytic capacity and used well-known methods, such as propensity score matching, and predictive models to evaluate program success. Data analysis is never helpful if you won't use it to make organizational change. I have found, for example, that leadership programs can, when deployed at scale, can help BIPOC and Latina/o/x students transition into the university and build community.

(3) Using a sophisticated analytic model to evaluate student success at the aggregate and individual level. We have to "personalize" universities to better assess who may not be successful at the institution. At SJSU, where 70% of students graduate in six years, it is clear that there are equity gaps between, for example, BIPOC and Latina/o/x students and Asian-American and white students. But, over the last five years every single group has seen increases in graduation rates, such that some sub-populations of the Asian-American community are well over 80%, while the white student graduation rate hovers in the mid-60% range. Personalization and disaggregation allow a better understanding of why some students leave and other don't across all groups and communities. Put another way, we have to better train everyone on a campus to use systems to track the complex experience of each student, so that we have a more complete picture of what challenges they may face toward success.

(4) With better disaggregation of the data institutions can respond to the learning challenges that some individual students live with every day. This includes those sometimes invisible markers of difference – dyslexia, ADHD, gender dysphoria, for example – which may be as important as race and/or gender differences when it comes to student success. Investing in learning specialist models, such as the ones that support student-athletes, can help create strong support infrastructures for students living with these personal learning challenges. We used such strategies successfully at the University of Arizona.

Acting with Purpose in the Recruitment and Retention of Outstanding Faculty/Staff

A university cannot be welcoming and inclusive for students if it does not also have a diverse faculty and staff community. In my time at SJSU, I launched the first Office of Faculty Success, whose Vice Provost is an academic expert and practitioner in DEI efforts. This office has created a suite of tools to support the faculty hiring process as well as support retention efforts. These efforts are supported by a number of strategies, including:

(1) Being clear about what sorts of university citizens you want on your campus. As Provost at SJSU I have put in place a number of structures to diversify faculty hiring, in particular. This includes:
   a. Required training on implicit bias in candidate evaluation for all search committee members every year.

b. Templates that emphasize our institutional values in the area of DEI, including what we expect of faculty working at a HSI and AANAPISI institution.
c. Required assessment of the candidate pool not just at the front end of the process but also at the mid-point before finalists are invited to campus (this process includes re-evaluating candidate pools if the diversity of the applicants is not maintained through the various stages of the search).
d. Establishing a required DEI Statement that is supported by a clear set of guidelines that applicants can use to structure their discussion of their work.

(2) Valuing difference in research, scholarly, and creative activity. This means valuing not only the traditional forms of scholarship that academics are known for, but also supporting efforts in the "scholarship of engagement" and other forms of public intellectual work, including our campus' participation in the OpEd Project and its Public Voices Fellows Program. At SJSU, our campus Retention, Tenure, and Promotion guidelines have been augmented to better recognize this work across all aspects of a candidate's record. This builds on efforts at a number of research institutions across the United States.
(3) Increasing efforts to hire faculty and staff members who focus on the experiences of BIPOC, Latina/o/x and Trans communities. In the last year at SJSU, we pushed departments to more clearly integrate interests in these communities into their job advertisements. While we met with resistance, the searches that were adjusted are more diverse than previous searches in the same departments.
(4) Supporting Affinity Groups that can help build community and create structures of more formal representation on campuses and in the community more generally. Such communities, developed with support of the campus administration, force the administration and the campus' shared governance organization to continually reflect on how they might create more inclusive conversations about institutional direction and focus.

Being More than a "Serving" Institution in Name

I want to close on a note about being an institution that "serves." Higher education must push past the status of HSI, AANAPISI, or minority-serving institution as a metric achieved through demographics. Instead, higher education institutions must make structural changes that reflect the values of the communities who are represented at the institution. In so doing, institutions can move from being "serving"/enrolling HSI's or AANAPISI's to "thriving" ones. What this means is that we have to continue to push higher education to "serve" better by ensuring that leadership – administrators, faculty, and staff – can build the infrastructure, such as SJSU's HSI Institute and the nascent centers for APIDA and Native American Student Success, that prioritizes direct support and programming to help diverse community members thrive and excel. Building leadership teams across all aspects of the institution that reflect such a commitment is an essential component of such an effort.