

UNIVERSITY SENATE DIVERSITY COMMITTEE

ANNUAL REPORT APRIL 2020

Committee charge: The Senate Diversity Committee shall review University policies, practices and conditions relevant to supporting and promoting diversity among students, faculty and staff.

Diversity Committee members: 2019-2020: *Amy Howell (Chair), *Dorothea Anagnostopoulos, * Edith Barrett, *Clarissa Ceglie, *Diane Lillo-Martin, *Micki McElya, *Margaret Rubega, *Dana Wilder (Assistant Vice President for Diversity and Inclusion, Ex Officio member), Sandy Bushmich, Casey Cobb, Alice Fairfield, Christina Irizarry, Maya Murarka (undergraduate student), Avolyn Nieves (undergraduate student), Lisa Pane, Willena Price, Stephany Santos (graduate student), Aida Silva, Cindy Tian, Anastasios Tzingounis, Susana Ulloa.

*Senate member (2019-2020).

Dates of Diversity Committee meetings during 2019-2020 academic year: September 12, October 10, November 14, December 12, February 11, March 9, April 14.

Main topics for the academic year:

There were three areas that were carried over from the '18-'19 academic year:

1. *Improving the campus culture for gender diverse students, staff and faculty with a particular focus on transgender individuals.* A subcommittee had met in the '18-'19 academic year to identify both short and long term strategies to address issues encountered by gender diverse faculty, staff and students. In particular, the subcommittee had worked with the Rainbow Center to develop a poster campaign on pronoun usage. This poster campaign was rolled out at the beginning of the '19-'20 academic year.
2. *Improving data gathering related to recruitment and retention of under-represented faculty and staff.* A second subcommittee from the '18-'19 academic year had strategized on what data should be collect to understand the reason that the percentage of under-represented faculty and staff is largely stagnant, in spite of decades of attempts by the University to change this. This issue has also captured the attention of the administration. The Diversity Committee chair met with John Volin (Vice-Provost for Academic Affairs and Sarah Croucher (Director of Academic Policy) to discuss shared concerns on recruitment and retention, and John and Sarah came to the February SDC meeting. They shared that the University had recently contracted Harvard's Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education (COACHE) to do a follow-up survey (to one done in 2014-2015) on faculty satisfaction. The earlier survey had included only tenure track faculty. The current one included both tenure track and in-residence faculty. In addition, the University contracted COACHE to do a study on faculty retention because internal data indicated that low retention is part of the reason that there is not an increase in faculty diversity. John shared that part of this 3 year contract will include exit interviews and benchmarking. John also indicated that he would welcome SDC participation in examining the results of the COACHE survey and deciding on actions based on the outcomes and in evaluating strategies around results from the retention study.
3. *Land Acknowledgement Statement.* Representatives of the University and of the Connecticut Tribal Nations developed an Indigenous Land Acknowledgment statement as a formal statement that recognizes and respects Indigenous Peoples as stewards of

this land and the enduring relationship that exists between Indigenous Peoples and their traditional territories. At the end of the '18-'19 President Herbst officially released the Acknowledgement as a University statement and has encouraged its usage in appropriate forums. The SDC wants to continue to monitor that the University is encouraging the use of the Statement at the beginning of each academic semester. The University Senate should recite this Acknowledgement at the first Senate meeting of each academic year. The SDC notes that the Statement is readily accessible on the Senate website.

There are several other issues that the Diversity Committee has been participating in or tracking. These include:

1. *Neurodiversity*. Christine Wenzel (Center for Students with Disabilities) visited the SDC in November. She shared that there has been a recent shift and reframing of how disability is perceived, looking at it as a diversity issue, rather than as a social construct. From that standpoint, students with disabilities could be viewed as one of the fastest growing minority populations. Some of UConn's students would like to see CSD move away from classifying "disabilities", but there are legal issues on access associated with a student disability status. It was recognized by the Committee that neurodiversity is something that should be on our radar as it is likely that this will become a more prominent diversity issue in the future.
2. *Diversity data reporting from the Admissions Office*. Nathan Fuerst, Vice President, Division of Enrollment Planning and Management, visited our December meeting to discuss SDC committee concerns about reports (internal and external) that highlight percentages of students of color. While numbers/gains in that category are encouraging, the committee was concerned that the prominence given to those numbers might mask the data related to the numbers of underrepresented minorities, which is a less encouraging figure. There was a discussion of how admissions data is often shared to internal and external constituents at other universities. The difficulty of gleaning accurate information based on categories available and on the fact that reporting race/ethnicity is optional was recognized. Nevertheless, the prevailing sentiment among the Committee was that, while sharing the percentages of students of color was important, data about underrepresented minorities should be prominent/readily accessible, even in presentations to the Board of Trustees and to external constituents. It is critical for all to know where UConn is so that we can more readily move towards where we want to be.
3. *CDO search*. The SDC, like many at the University, has viewed the hire of a CDO as a critical step in making substantive positive changes in diversity, equity and inclusion at UConn. The SDC and SEC met with President Katsouleas in the fall to discuss issues of diversity in general and the CDO position in particular. Both committees were clear that the CDO should report directly to the President and that identifying someone with a clear record of action/achievement was critical. The SDC also wanted representation on the search committee (which it had in the Chair) and an opportunity to meet with the finalists. The CDO position was ultimately elevated to Vice President and CDO. The SDC and the SEC met with each of the four finalists. In their April online meeting, the SDC developed the questions that were used in our interview sessions. Those who met with the candidates were able to provide anonymous feedback on each individual candidate. In addition, the SDC met separately and after extensive discussion provided a Committee report to the CDO search committee.