

October 22, 2020

**TO:** State University System Presidents  
State University System Board of Trustees Chairs

**FROM:** Brian Lamb, Chair, SUS Workgroup on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion  
Vice Chair, Board of Governors  
Marshall Criser, Chancellor, State University System

## **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: Strategic Priorities**

### **Introduction**

The State University System of Florida (SUS) has had a longstanding commitment to promote respect for and appreciation of all diverse cultures, nationalities, and communities. The tragic violence of Spring and Fall 2020 in the U.S., as well as incidents of racism and social injustice, have alarmed most Americans and caused us to pause and recognize the prevalence and the impacts of racism and social injustice in our country, examine the current inequities in our society, recognize the conditions that have created the current situation, and think seriously about how to repair the racial divide and restore equal justice for all.

The Board of Governors, responsible for the management and operation of the State University System, affirms that our state university communities are influential voices in Florida and have the wisdom and leadership to make a difference in our nation's continuing efforts to end incidents of racism and societal injustice. Showing immediate concern and resolve, Board Chair Syd Kitson issued a "call to action" and established a SUS Workgroup on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in June 2020 as a subcommittee of the SUS Task Force for the Fall Semester Opening (See Attachment I). The SUS Workgroup includes System leaders in academic affairs, student affairs, diversity, equity & inclusion, public safety, human resources, and financial matters, as well as the Florida Student Association and the Advisory Council of Faculty Senates, and has met to share experiences, gain insight, and identify best practices regarding racial and gender equity, diversity, and inclusion in the SUS. The input and direction provided by Workgroup members formed the framework for much of this memo's content.

While acknowledging federal and state law, executive orders, and administrative guidance, the Board of Governors is making a clear and steadfast commitment to prioritize and support diversity, racial and gender equity, and inclusion in the State University System and to hold each university accountable for policies, programs, and actions that will codify and operationalize the System's commitment. The Board will regularly collaborate with university administrators, students, and faculty on D.E.I. initiatives and will provide: (a) clear expectations for specific, measurable outcomes; (b) opportunities to come together to learn and share best practices; and (c) connections to national D.E.I. leaders to advance SUS initiatives.

## **CRITICAL COMPONENTS**

The Workgroup identified four critical components that should be in place for a university and the SUS to move forward in addressing diversity, racial and gender equity, and inclusion.

### ❖ Listening and Feedback Processes

All members of the campus community (students, faculty, staff) should have open and immediate access to systems and resources that enable them to easily ask a question, provide a comment, or register a complaint. A variety of intentional efforts to give and receive input should be established, communicated, and made easily accessible to all, including listening sessions, town hall meetings, social media formats, one-on-one sessions, and more formal processes. Universities should take full advantage of the popularity of social media technologies as means to provide information and receive feedback. Opportunities for anonymous and private input should also be made available.

Feedback that addresses diversity, equity, and inclusion issues, either long-standing concerns or immediate reactions to current national incidents of racism and social injustice, require special training and expertise. It is critically important for every university to regularly engage across all racial and ethnic members of the institution to ascertain if feedback mechanisms are appropriate and are being utilized.

Effective listening is a skill and university leaders and professional staff who serve as responders must be carefully chosen and well-trained, with clear operating procedures in place.

### ❖ Learning and Training Processes

Effective university education and workplace training programs provide information that is up-to-date, accurate, and effectively utilized. Training materials that address diversity, equity, and inclusion topics should be based on the latest knowledge and practice and be tailored to each institution's constituent groups: students, faculty, administrative leaders, and staff.

Where appropriate, universities should consider the integration of D.E.I. best practices into their academic curriculum, knowing that a university's curriculum is under the purview of the faculty and the established academic curricular review and approval structure of the institution. Nationally, there are universities that have identified specific D.E.I. competencies as a requirement for graduation in recognition that there are specific competencies that should be achieved by all degree-seeking students.

Moving forward, a cross-institution and system-wide review of D.E.I. education and training programs will serve to identify best practices in D.E.I. policies, programs, and services that can be shared throughout the SUS.

❖ Recruitment, Talent Development, Advancement Processes

Processes and strategies that ensure that all is being done to attract, employ, and retain a fully diverse population of students, faculty, and staff are essential. Both admissions and employment policies and procedures should be equitable and transparent, as well as welcoming and uncomplicated.

An established and ongoing evaluation period should be utilized for all departments and administrative levels to review current hiring procedures, including recruitment strategies, candidate interview and evaluation processes, orientation programs, and promotion policies. Orientation programs and services for all new hires should be well-planned and inclusive and include comprehensive activities to familiarize all new employees with university services and resources. Established connections to available employee and community groups will be important to newcomers. Additionally, mentoring programs that connect new hires with experienced campus employees are effective retention strategies.

Exit interviews with students, faculty, and staff who leave the university can provide valuable feedback on campus policies and procedures, particularly relating to overall satisfaction with the campus culture and the living, learning, and work environment.

❖ Supplier Diversity

Each university should prioritize being a good community partner by investing in local talent and contributing to job growth that will foster economic stability in the region. Providing minority-owned businesses of all sizes with equal access to the established bidding and negotiation processes enhances an institution's outreach within its community. This proactive outreach should exist for all business relationships including: professional services, technology, construction projects, supplies and renovation purchases, and consulting services. Open access, guidance, and support for minority-owned businesses will encourage their participation in the university's bidding and purchasing processes.

It is equally important for universities to reach out to community business partners and support purchasing relationships with companies that support anti-racism and promote social justice for all citizens. All business partners should be accountable for their policies, procedures, and actions relating to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

To establish meaningful and productive relationships with minority-owned businesses, each university should conduct a comprehensive review of all supplier categories, particularly in areas with a lack of participation and/or low penetration. Additionally, it is important to evaluate the procedures that are in place to onboard new diverse suppliers, particularly for small minority-owned businesses, in order to facilitate their success in the process.

University financial administrators with authority and experience are in agreement that identifying, promoting, and monitoring their institution's spending with minority-owned businesses are important in order to track institution commitment and evaluate progress and outcomes in achieving equal access to contracting opportunities. Transparency is critical in these

areas and all activity designed to increase and further support supplier diversity should be regularly shared with university leadership, including the board of trustees.

## **STRATEGIC PRIORITIES**

### **Leadership and Governance**

University leaders have primary responsibility for establishing the campus culture and setting the day-to-day living, learning, and working environment for all university community members. Regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion, high quality policies, programs, and services can determine the level of satisfaction and buy-in by students, faculty, and staff. A focused and resolute review of an institution's D.E.I. policies and programs can determine if they are optimal and effective, if greater commitment and clarity is needed, if important gaps are identified, or if significant organizational change is needed.

Please consider the following points of priority as you reflect on the question "are we doing all that we can to answer Chair Kitson's call to action."

#### ➤ **Strategic Planning**

The Board of Governors has made clear that the Strategic Plan for each university provides the cornerstone for the institution and that all functions and operations of a university should relate back to its strategic plan. Accordingly, a university's strategic plan, as well as its mission statement, should prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion and provide clear direction for the total integration of D.E.I. initiatives throughout the institution. There are universities that have established distinctive strategic plans for diversity for their campus, which is commendable.

The annual university Equity Report that is required for the Board of Governors will be both prioritized and operationalized by the Board. Additionally, annual D.E.I. accountability measures and a broad array of performance indicators will be established, monitored, and reported on for each university.

#### ➤ **Boards of Trustees**

Each university board of trustees should be diverse and representative of the population that it serves. A university's D.E.I. strategies and related initiatives should be viewed as strategic priorities by its board of trustees. The review of D.E.I. policies and programs should not only occur during the annual review of the institution's strategic plan, but should be a regular agenda item.

#### ➤ **D.E.I. Leadership**

The importance of having a senior-level university administrator to lead the establishment, implementation, and monitoring of D.E.I. initiatives cannot be overstated. An individual who has direct and regular access to the president and senior leadership, a clearly defined role and responsibilities, and is supported with authority and resources will be most effective in this role.

➤ Official University Communications

Effective communications regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion are communications that are crystal clear to all stakeholders. Official D.E.I. communications that promote and support D.E.I. policies and programs can be integrated in all university materials, including materials for:

- students and student applicants
- orientation and training programs
- faculty and faculty candidates
- the website and social media
- staff, civic and business partners, and visitors

➤ System-level Councils/Groups

State University System leadership councils, including the presidents, the Council of Academic Vice Presidents, the Council for Student Affairs, the Council for Administrative and Financial Affairs, the Council on Equal Opportunity and Diversity, the SUS Police Chiefs, the SUS Human Resource Directors, the Florida Student Association, and the Advisory Council of Faculty Senates, provide important opportunities for the support and advancement of D.E.I. initiatives. D.E.I. initiatives can be a regular component of meetings and activities of these groups, especially for the sharing of best practices.

**The Board of Governors as Advocate**

In light of the intensifying concern over incidents of racial and social injustice, the Board of Governors continues to work toward expanding diversity, racial and gender equity, and inclusion initiatives in the SUS. The work of the SUS Workgroup on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion has prepared the Board for an ongoing discussion to identify D.E.I. best practices that can be implemented throughout the SUS. Actions and focused planning will continue and will include exploration of a system-wide convening in the coming year that would provide opportunities for university D.E.I. leaders to come together, learn from each other, solve problems, share best practices, and advance the culture of inclusion.

In the coming months, Board leadership will be conducting a review of all Board operations through the lens of D.E.I. and best practices in these areas. As the Board follows its approval cycle for university strategic plans and the annual approval of accountability plans, it will be looking for strong action and strong intention in each plan that expresses diversity, equity, and inclusion as strategic priorities.

**The Road Ahead**

Moving forward, work on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion as Strategic Priorities must not be a “check the box and move on” activity. To produce meaningful and sustainable outcomes, this challenging work will need to continue long after our urgent responses to the crises of 2020 are completed, as diversity, equity, and inclusion will need to be identified as critical priorities within the mission of each of our 12 state universities.

Workgroup members confirmed that the diversity, equity, and inclusion landscape in the SUS is not barren as there are many active and productive D.E.I. professional staff and programs in

place. In the short term, university-wide efforts should continue to focus on and provide the conditions necessary for all campus members to feel welcomed, supported, and valued by all in the community. Regarding long-term D.E.I planning, the critical goal will be to continually improve each university's preparedness, transparency, performance, and sustainability.

The SUS Workgroup on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion believes that the State University System is a strong and influential voice in Florida and urges the students, faculty, staff, and alumni at each of the 12 universities to actively engage in finding solutions peacefully to eliminate racism, end inequities, and promote social justice.

Attachment I

**2020 SUS Workgroup on Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion**

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<b>Dr. William Hudson</b>	Vice President for Student Affairs Florida A & M University Chair, SUS Council for Student Affairs
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*In Consultation with:*

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