

## **Moving the Needle: Improving the Diversity Climate Via Employee Engagement**

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In recent years, the College of Design (CDes) Diversity Committee has been actively pursuing several strategic initiatives to improve our collegiate diversity climate and ensure that our college operates in a way that is more inclusive and equitable. We were able to merge our most recent initiative with our college-wide Employee Engagement efforts – an assessment of our diversity climate and our subsequent unit-by-unit response strategy to the findings. In 2014-2015, our collegiate Employee Engagement Leads met with each CDes unit (i.e., academic, administrative, and research) to review our survey results and work with them to develop action steps they could take to address one or two areas of opportunity identified in the results. Units identified their own timeline for completion, unit leaders reported on their action plans to the dean, and the dean followed up with unit leaders to check-in on their progress. These results and action plans were also communicated to the entire college. This strategy worked well for our college and the majority of our units completed their action steps. Subsequently, we saw an increase in many of our scores on the 2015 survey.

Since our Employee Engagement response strategy was so successful, especially because it mobilized all CDes units to act, we opted to apply the same strategy to our diversity climate assessment findings. Coincidentally, the Office of Equity and Diversity (OED) contacted us at the same time to ask our college to participate in their College MADE initiative (i.e., Multicultural Access, Diversity, and Excellence). With this initiative, OED asked colleges to develop goals in the following three areas:

1. broaden access and opportunity and enhance diversity within student, staff, and faculty populations;
2. understand and address diversity and inclusion climate issues within their college community;
3. create partnerships between the college, university, and external communities to bring about beneficial social change on campus.

Thus, the CDes Diversity Committee met with each CDes unit (i.e., academic, administrative, and research) to review the climate assessment findings and work with them develop action steps they could take to, again, address one or two issues identified in the findings. Those action steps then informed unit goals that could be categorized into the three areas identified by OED. Yet again, units developed a timeline, unit leaders reported on their plans to the dean, and the findings and action plans were communicated to the entire college. Currently, units are working on their action plans and the Diversity Committee is tracking their progress in a spreadsheet viewable on our collegiate diversity webpage.

By merging our Employee Engagement and diversity work, we have been successful in activating all CDes faculty and staff in the process of improving both. Additionally, we have been able to raise faculty and staff's awareness of the importance of this work by better imbedding it into the structure of what we do on a day-to-day basis. Thus, over time, we anticipate being able to “move the needle” to improve both our employee engagement and our diversity climate.

## 2016-2017 Unit Diversity Goal Development Guide

### Executive summary

The list below is a summary of the themes identified in the College of Design (CDes) Diversity Committee's climate assessment last year. It can serve as potential guide when brainstorming diversity action steps and goals for your unit:

1. being "the only one," which describes the experience or feeling of isolation underrepresented people in our college environment;
2. sense of belonging, meaning the extent to which diverse others in our college feel like they belong in our environment;
3. socioeconomic status, an unanticipated theme that emerged that describes the hardships low-income students encounter in our college;
4. recruitment and retention explores the expressed desire for our college to grant more focus to these areas
5. respect and cordiality, which explores the ways in which stakeholders behave in opposite ways in our college and how that affects our environment;
6. hierarchy and power, which explores the way in which hierarchy and power can affect inclusion;
7. microaggressions, meaning the subtle/covert ways in which stereotypes and discrimination were exemplified in our findings;
8. culture of unwillingness, inability, and/or fear to confront, which describes collegiate stakeholder tendency to not confront others when witnessing intolerance;
9. St. Paul vs. East Bank, which examines the presence of diversity in each location.
10. diversity is everybody's everyday work, which explores the expressed desire that stakeholders in all levels of our organization engage in diversity efforts;
11. diversity and excellence, which highlights examples of how some in our college perceive diversity and excellence to be mutually exclusive; and, finally,
12. breaking down the silos, meaning diversity can be strived for via greater interdisciplinarity.

These findings highlight that CDes has some problematic diversity climate issues related to complacency, exclusion/isolation, and stereotyping.

## **A Quick Note on the Office of Equity and Diversity's College MADE (Multicultural Access, Diversity, and Excellence) Program**

The key purpose of College MADE is to foster agency and urgency for equity and diversity action within and amongst colleges. College MADE advances the idea that for the University of Minnesota to reach its ambitious diversity goals outlined in the strategic plan, leadership, commitment, collaboration, and shared responsibility and accountability from our colleges is critical.

Here are the three buckets of focus from OED to consider as you develop your diversity goals:

1. Increasing representational diversity;
2. Improving the campus climate; and
3. Leveraging strategic partnerships and initiatives.

### **Your Unit Action Steps**

Keeping in mind the above information as suggestions and guidelines, please work with the members of your unit to develop 1-2 action steps for your unit to focus on in the coming year. You should also identify goals that these action steps will lead to and ways in which you can measure your progress. You will be asked to update the Diversity Committee and the Senior Leadership Group on your progress in April 2017. Please write these action steps in the space below, along with brief description of your goals and measurement strategies, and email your document to Holley Locher at [loche007@umn.edu](mailto:loche007@umn.edu).

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