

**Faculty Senate Task Force on Campus Climate, Race, & Diversity Issues**  
**Soon to be renamed: The Faculty Senate Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Task Force**

**WHO WE ARE:**

**Task Force Members**

Christine Neufeld, English, Incoming Chair

Peggy Trewn, Nursing

Kristin Judd, Biology

Barbara Patrick, Political Science, (outgoing chair, ex officio)

**Why does the Faculty Senate have a DEI Task Force?**

In the past several years EMU experienced several racist and anti-Semitic incidents resulting in student protests, the creation of the Black Student 10 Point Plan, and a decline in the retention of African American students. In these years, we have witnessed the impact of violence targeting minority communities in the United States and beyond impact our students' sense of well-being. Although steps were taken to improve the campus climate for minority students, concerns were raised to the Faculty Senate, particularly by student leaders, about the degree to which faculty were involved in efforts to create a more welcoming and inclusive EMU. In an effort to understand what concrete actions were being taken to improve the campus climate at EMU and determine ways the Senate could contribute to these efforts, the Faculty Senate Executive Board assembled the Task Force on Campus Climate, Race, and Diversity Issues during the Winter 2019 semester.

**Background on the Task Force**

The Task Force on Campus Climate, Race, and Diversity Issues began its work in the Fall of 2019. The diverse team of five, representing different colleges, departments, racial and gender groups started with the initial charge set forth by the Senate President and expanded its work to include action oriented goals. The initial charge stated "This task force is charged by the Faculty Senate Executive Board with reviewing the President's Commission on Diversity & Inclusion Report, and the Black Student 10-point plan to assess institutional progress in regard to the campus climate in relation to students of color and other minoritized populations. After this review, we will be making some concrete recommendations for actions to be taken in response to some of the challenges we have faced with racist and anti-Semitic incidents on campus over the last several years. This may involve supporting programs and other actions already recommended or planned by the President's Commission, or the college committees addressing these issues, and/or recommending other programming/actions that can be either initiated or advocated for by the Senate."

After reviewing the work and recommendations of both the President's Commission on Diversity and Inclusion and the Black Student 10 Point Plan, the Task Force noted the need for additional assessment of diversity issues on campus and action oriented steps promoting the achievement of the Commission's preliminary recommendations to promote a more inclusive environment for all students.

### **Four goals developed as part of the Task Force's action plan:**

- Assess university progress on expanding cultural competency and meeting the needs of minoritized students
- Pursue new initiatives demonstrating and promoting faculty involvement in enhancing campus climate
- Create faculty development projects or events focused on cultural competency and diversity
- Develop a clearinghouse of diversity and inclusion initiatives at EMU

### **WHAT WE DO:**

#### **Listening to the EMU community:**

**Student Listening Sessions on Diversity:** A series of four listening sessions were sponsored to assess strengths and weaknesses in the university's efforts to promote a more inclusive environment for diverse students. These sessions provided a safe space for students to meet with faculty and share experiences, challenges, and issues vulnerable students encounter in the classroom and across the campus. The sessions were attended by students representing dozens of student organizations and groups including multicultural, Greek, LGBTQ, African American, Native American, and Hispanic American organizations. The information shared by students have guided many Task Force diversity initiatives including those designed to assist faculty members in their efforts to promote more inclusive classrooms, more visible acknowledge cultural and social injustices directly and indirectly impacting students, mentorship and engagement with minority students, and increased faculty awareness of student support services for students' experiencing varying needs and crises.

**Faculty Listening Session on Diversity Needs:** The faculty session was designed to gain insight on faculty diversity and inclusion experiences, diversity needs in the classroom, and useful tools for overcoming challenges and discomfort with addressing the needs of diverse students. Similar to the student listening sessions, the faculty session has informed the Task Force's initiatives to provide meaningful diversity resources to faculty.

**Removing Informational Silos & Expanding Diversity Initiative Awareness:** The Task Force engaged in numerous actions to increase awareness of diversity and inclusion efforts across the campus and unite various departments and outlets. This includes inviting pertinent Student Affairs leaders to weekly Task Force meetings to discuss how faculty might become more connected to Student Affairs entities and giving invited talks to university entities such as the School of Social Work Faculty, Student Government and Student Leaders, School of Engineering, Faculty Senate, and university regents.

## **Helping to make visible the EMU faculty engagement with DEI:**

**Post-Election Discussion with EMU Faculty Experts:** The student listening sessions revealed the need for faculty voices and insights on cultural, social, and policy issues impacting citizens across the country and EMU students. The divisive 2020 election cycle is one example of such an event. In order to address student concerns regarding trust in the electoral process, fairness and equity, and general unrest across the country, the task force organized a post-election discussion. The panel of experts offering process expertise, mental wellness and stress relief tips, and helpful insight included faculty and administrators representing eight different departments and university outlets. More than 100 participants attended the informative event.

**EMU Standing Against Injustice Video:** During the Summer of 2020, the George Floyd incident invoked outrage, frustration, and protest across the country. The Task Force was compelled to unite the EMU community and create a video message acknowledging the movement and demonstrating compassion for emotionally distressed students. The resulting output was the release of a memorable video tribute allowing a wide variety of EMU students, faculty, staff, administrators, alums, and affiliates to exercise a voice, offer support for students struggling to cope, and be heard on an important issue. The video can be accessed here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r16A5npb7WA>

## **Developing Resource and Opportunities for Faculty to Learn about DEI**

**Race Matters: Equity & Action in Higher Education and Beyond Faculty Workshop:** The two-day faculty workshop was designed to increase awareness of cultural competence, student diversity needs and provide faculty members with tools to better address those needs. Workshop content targeted training in areas of weakness identified through student listening sessions, the Black Student 10-Point Plan, conversations with College Diversity and Inclusion Committees, and faculty seeking additional guidance and insight on how to create a more inclusive environment. University experts and invited scholars conducted sessions on cultural competence in the university setting, implicit bias, systemic racism, diversity and inclusion values in the classroom and on the syllabus, and mentoring students of color. The event was cosponsored with the EMU AAUP and voluntarily attended by approximately 135 EMU faculty during July 2020.

**Faculty Diversity Resource Guide:** Assessments of ongoing efforts to meet the needs of vulnerable students revealed informational silos and disconnections between faculty serving students within departments and individuals providing student support services in Student Affairs. Through a series of meetings and interviews with leaders and pertinent Student Affairs personnel the Task Force began the process of strengthening the relationship between the two entities. One notable outcome is the development of the Faculty Diversity Resource Guide. This guide is designed to inform faculty of internal

and external resources available to assist vulnerable students in need of various forms of support. It includes a brief description of the outlet providing student support services, information on services provided, and direct contact information. We have also included a one-page index of key contacts for faculty.

**College of Engineering & Technology Diversity Initiatives:** The Task Force was contacted by persons within the COT regarding concerns for diversity and inclusion initiatives and African American students' retention issues. Through work with the dean, associate dean, faculty, and students the Task Force proposed a series of activities designed to better address the issues.

***The Task Force is happy to assist other programs, departments, or colleges interested in doing similar work.***

**Faculty Training Modules on Diversity & Inclusion:** Both the student and faculty listening sessions revealed the need for faculty access to training materials and resources that will aid the university's efforts to create a more inclusive and welcoming environment for students. The Task Force seeks to address this need through the creation of video training modules providing faculty members with ready access to tools, tips, and resources on how to engage difficult conversations in the classroom and develop a more inclusive learning environment for students.

Fall 2021 will see the release of our first video series created by the team of faculty set up by the Task Force on *Creating a Culture of Belonging at EMU*.