THE SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY
STATE OF DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION

Executive Summary

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February 2021

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since matriculating women students in 1870, Syracuse University has built a long history of inclusion, often ahead of its time. Its history has also been interspersed with periodic challenges that invite a process of exploration and strengthening of its approach to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). The university has responded, again and again, accruing a sizeable track record of improvements, especially in comparison with other institutions at the time.

In the last few years especially, efforts have included (yet are not limited to):

- Standing up a new Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer (CDIO) and department.

- Installing DEI training programs in every college/school and administrative unit.

- Assessing the campus to create accessibility.

- Creating and then reworking SEM100 into FYS101 plus a set of second courses.

Related to the activities in this report, we saw board members involved with students, faculty, and staff on campus and the hiring of consultants to assess the campus climate, to inventory all SU DEI programs, and to gauge the university's standing relative to peers in terms of DEI, as initial steps towards even further actions. Just announced in March 2021, the university has committed at least $50 million towards hiring and retaining diverse faculty, one of the strongest public commitments that exists to finance DEI in higher education. Commitment without currency is counterfeit, and this level of financial commitment to faculty diversity is a key step to moving the university forward with real and meaningful change that can be seen and felt on campus—not performative, not lip service, but real commitment that helps to frame the deep-seated commitments of the university as you work further to create a campus that is inclusive and excellent for all.

Campus Research and DEI Strategy

In November 2019, a DEI flashpoint was initiated by what became a series of over 25 bias incidents over the course of several months, eventually touching off student unrest and campus protests. Immediately, the university's board of trustees convened a special committee to examine the state of the university in terms of diversity, equity, and inclusion and to offer strategic recommendations to the larger board.

To that end, the special committee took several steps. They first tasked an Independent Advisory Panel (IAP) of four national DEI experts to dialogue directly with students, faculty, and staff about their lived experiences on campus. The committee members themselves visited campus to dialogue in listening sessions as well. They commissioned former US Attorney General Loretta Lynch to complete a special evaluation of campus police. These action steps all delivered a set of astute analyses and informed recommendations to the committee in mid-2020. (The final report of the special committee was made public on March 4, 2021.)

In March 2020, COVID-19 shifted everyone to distance learning and a new pandemic "normal." This incredible transformation, accomplished by the Syracuse campus community all pulling together, delayed the special committee's DEI research process for a time, while the health and safety of all became the clear top priority. Further national events extended the suspension of DEI research at SU, including a contentious political environment that encouraged racial othering, a surge of Black Lives Matter protests, and ongoing pandemic uncertainties.

When it became apparent that the pandemic was not going away soon, the board forged ahead with its mission even through this stressful time. As a next step, the board special committee engaged Dr. Damon A. Williams and his Center for Strategic Diversity Leadership and Social Innovation (CSDLSI) in Atlanta,

Georgia. His research team, who facilitated the earlier dialoguing sessions, was asked to implement additional surveys, both inside and outside of Syracuse:

(1) They first implemented a campus climate "pulse" survey of faculty, staff, and student perceptions of DEI on campus.

(2) They also compared Syracuse to selected institutions in a peer benchmarking study, looking at both demographics and DEI capacity.

(3) Finally, they engaged in an across-campus inventory or audit of all ongoing DEI programs.

All these surveys served to answer four primary questions, which we review (in bold), along with their findings, below.

It must be emphasized that the fall of 2020 remained in many ways a very challenging moment to pulse the community, not only due to the pandemic, politics, and widespread national activism but following on the heels of SU's own student campus protests. Even given those factors, the surveys and studies summarized in this report yielded a great deal of crucial data and valuable insights for the university to utilize as it advances its Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) capacities.

1. What is the lived experience of diverse groups of students, faculty, and staff at Syracuse University, and what are the related key challenges and opportunities?

The first resource towards answering these four research questions was the collected experiences in dialoguing with students, faculty, and staff early in 2020. Well over 50 meetings with a variety of groups plus individual interviews of university board leadership produced a rich array of qualitative data, stories, examples of both positive and negative experiences on campus, as well as a slew of suggestions for improvement. CSDLSI researchers coded all the data in order to cross-reference or triangulate it with other findings. These personal stories and feedback helped frame and give depth to the other research.

The Campus Climate Pulse Survey

To attain a clearer picture of the lived experience of people of all identities on campus, CSDLSI next conducted a three-part campus climate pulse survey—to credibly "take the pulse" of the interpersonal or social environment for the SU campus community. Due to the pandemic, the survey launch was delayed until fall 2020. This delay provided a unique opportunity to add specific survey questions that teased out the influence of the pandemic and the elevated national conversation around issues of racial justice and inequality. The survey was announced by campus email, with reminder emails from the chancellor, university leadership, CSDLSI, and the Syracuse campus community provided a robust response.

This climate pulse survey accomplished several valuable goals. One, it established a demographic baseline around identities such as gender, race/ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, military service, and more, which can be used in future years to track changes. Secondly, the surveys dug into six key topics from many angles to paint a detailed picture of life on campus.

In terms of participation rates, students put in a solid 22% response rate (N=4,536), faculty a robust 47% (N=1,017), and staff an admirable 42% (N=2,322). These rates are all excellent for a non-incentivized (voluntary) survey. Statistical weighting was performed to eliminate selection bias and ensure that the data based on each respondent group correctly represented the entire population for each body surveyed: students, faculty, and staff. Here is an overview of the findings:

1. *Satisfaction:* Consistently, no matter how the data were examined by identity, students, faculty, and staff reported remarkable consistency in feeling dissatisfied with their experiences during the previous 12 months at SU. It is important to note how incredibly unusual this response is. Most

frequently surveys find dissatisfaction concentrated in smaller groups, typically historically underrepresented identity groups, but not so here, a point we return to below. While this response suggests the university still has a great deal of work to do, we also see many positives and burgeoning strengths as well.

2. *Institutional Response to COVID-19:* Here, most of the community offered fairly positive reviews of the university's actions, while expressing notably high levels of personal stress and worry. Worry and stress were greater in underrepresented communities.

3. *Institutional Commitment to DEI:* When asked how committed they felt is the university to diversity, equity and inclusion, participants again across the board expressed negative viewpoints here.

4. *Discrimination Felt:* Participants were asked whether they had experienced discrimination on or around campus and, if so, in what context? The answers here clearly pointed to a handful of problem areas where Syracuse can now focus resources and attention to more effectively create improvement. Students reported the most discrimination in classrooms, with faculty, and with peers of different racial/ethnic identities. Similarly, faculty and staff reported the most experiences of discrimination with peers/colleagues of other racial/ethnic identities and within university buildings. On the positive side, interactions with law enforcement, either on campus or with the City of Syracuse force, were minimal, only occasionally rising to a level of concern.

5. *Valued and Belonging:* The answers to this series of questions about feeling valued, listened to, and like they belong at Syracuse made researchers sit up and take notice. Even after participants expressed low satisfaction and deeply negative views about the university's commitment to diversity, numerous participants felt that yes, they belonged at SU. To determine why, researchers cross-referenced this research with qualitative comments in the dialogue sessions that highlighted the importance of SU's many affinity groups, organizations, dedicated gathering spaces, and support services. Essentially, although some had struggled and experienced difficulties on campus, they had also found support and a kind of "home."

6. *Equitable Access to Opportunities:* Finally, this last section of the campus climate pulse survey asked whether students, faculty, and staff felt they had to work harder than their peers or whether they had the same opportunities that others did. Again, responses across the board were at a level of concern, pointing to a general perception of unfairness and inequity.

Details about all questions asked on these climate surveys and the participants' percent responses are available in the accompanying *Student, Faculty, and Staff Climate Pulse Survey Technical Reports*.

2. What DEI approaches, units, and capacities exist to advance DEI at Syracuse University?

While this question appears fundamental, a university rarely is able to answer it accurately. Syracuse stepped up to the plate and asked CSDLSI to examine and catalogue its existing programs, initiatives, and scholarship that support DEI themes or goals.

The DEI Inventory Survey

Researchers surveyed 27 SU schools, colleges, and administrative units to tease out all relevant initiatives and the details about them, identifying over 450 visible programs. For each program submitted by an SU school/college or unit, researchers evaluated its robustness by asking whether it is evidence-based—that is, structured in an informed way based on existing research and best practices (instead of merely being a nice idea)—and whether the outcome of each program is tracked with data collection and evaluated, for example before and after data or collecting qualitative information about how much someone was helped.

What the researchers discovered was that Syracuse University already has a great deal of DEI-focused programming active and ongoing, surprising given the overwhelmingly contrasting opinions about DEI shared in the climate pulse survey. What Syracuse now has an opportunity to do is twofold: (1) Identify promising programs on campus already and leverage them across its decentralized sectors; and (2) begin working a DEI component into everyday policies and processes, such as strengthening the DEI development factor in annual faculty and staff employment reviews and ensuring the bias incident reporting system is both a best practice and carefully followed.

3. Where does Syracuse University rank versus peer and other institutions on critical demographic and other strategic DEI dimensions?

In addition to the results found in the campus climate pulse survey identifying DEI challenges and opportunities, researchers examined a set of nine other colleges and universities comparable to Syracuse University. This benchmarking review of peer institutions further enhanced our understanding of the climate pulse survey results, and, triangulated against the listening session inputs and climate pulse survey, began painting a picture of the key challenges and opportunities at Syracuse.

The SU Benchmarking Comparison

Demographic Benchmarking. Based on data current through the 2018/2019 school year, SU in fact turns out to be one of the more diverse institutions among their selected peers, leading the pack along the demographic dimensions of international students, Native American students, African American/Black tenure-track faculty, and women tenure-track faculty. Syracuse came in second in percent of women undergraduate students, a 150-year tradition for the institution. The school also boasts one of the most diverse management teams in the nation.

In contrast, along the critical dimensions of URM undergraduate students, women in graduate school, and women studying in the STEM disciplines, the university was trending negative. One bright spot, however, is how much SU increased its URM student graduate rate between 2013 and 2018, even as total enrollment numbers contracted. SU is currently experiencing a dearth of Hispanic/Latinx and Asian Americans in leadership roles as well as among its faculty. Finally, the number of URM students were found to outnumber faculty approximately two to one, a significant gap in representation, and one that can lead to the question, "Why don't I see faculty who look like me?"

DEI Benchmarking. The second benchmarking process that CSDLSI completed was to compare formal DEI structures and programs within Syracuse to these same nine peer institutions. This second benchmarking study focused on three factors: (1) Diversity planning and accountability, (2) The CDO role (CDIO at Syracuse) and infrastructure, and (3) Notable DEI findings. Diversity plans "can't breathe" without Accountability, Infrastructure, Incentives, and Resources—or AIIR (Williams, 2013)—and these are the four criteria used for evaluation of these plans and programs.

The results were illuminating. Like Syracuse, many institutions in this review developed DEI capacity in the wake of high-profile diversity flashpoint, microaggression, or campus climate incidents that sparked student activism. These incidents may indeed be the new normal and will require a polished, swift response mechanism from every university. It was disappointing, however, to see such weak DEI accountability systems across the ten institutions. Many have made high-profile DEI commitments, even promising mandatory DEI training, yet accountability reports, metrics, and public updates were scarce. Public accountability is an area for opportunity at Syracuse as well.

Intergroup dialogue programs are a best practice, and Syracuse has affirmed that it is training facilitators and offering intergroup dialogue programs for faculty, students, and staff. Syracuse may lead its peers here, even as more work remains to be done to build upon this promising start. In this moment, Syracuse has a wide open opportunity to proactively strengthen the DEI dialogue structures Syracuse has in place in a way that could create profound impact.

4. What are the most important next steps to help Syracuse University move forward to support diversity, equity, inclusion, and anti-racism?

As mentioned, Syracuse has a solid start with a significant number of DEI programs across all schools and administrative units. For these efforts to become more than the sum of their parts, they should meet two criteria: Efforts must be consistently designed and shared across campus in a way that affects all students, all faculty, and all staff. Excellent, results-oriented programs must be elevated and shared. Secondly, these efforts must also become regular, with a cadence built into the very fabric of the university's policies and operations.

In pursuit of the goals held by the university and its board of trustees to improve the Syracuse University experience for all, and based on the insights brought to light by the findings from these interlocking studies and by the careful examination of dozens of institutional DEI plans and actions, CSDLSI offers the following action steps for consideration as the SU DEIA strategic planning task force continues to build upon the DEI commitments already in motion:

(1) *Commit to a systematic approach to strengthen campus DEI plans, structures, and accountability systems.* Take all the data presented in these studies into consideration. Continue to build the office of the CDIO, especially adding a stronger lateral infrastructure in the schools, colleges, and administrative units. Create a campus-wide DEIA plan and accountability system and fund it. This work is already under way.

(2) *Elevate DEI as a visible strategic priority in all academic, communication, philanthropic, and programmatic activities of the university.* Create an elevated DEI (DEIA) platform for the community to engage with annually around progress and actions and offer regular DEI town halls for communication of progress and community input.

(3) *Further mandate DEI* professional development training and leadership development for all students, faculty, and staff. The university has many efforts ongoing that can be scaled up. Most importantly, SU needs an integrated DEI training and professional development framework, and implementation model, to make your efforts amount to more than the sum of their parts.

(4) *Improve campus climate by building community.* Consider the accessibility audit results for classrooms, buildings, public spaces and respond; also consider other community needs that arose in these surveys (such as prayer space) and address what you find. Bring renewed attention to staff DEI initiatives. Scale up DEI-centric student living-learning communities (LLCs). In short, engage in efforts to bring the Syracuse community together.

(5) *Continue to work to enhance faculty and staff diversity.* There are many best practices in this area, and your recent $50 million commitment is a bold step in the right direction.

A complete copy of all reports and the data findings from each survey has been forwarded to the office of the CDIO.

Now Is the Time

Today's Gen Z students are diverse and socially conscious, frequently calling for a higher gear of DEI commitment and responsiveness from their institutions. They are our most diversity-aware generation yet, most comfortable with difference and with an innate understanding of identity—and of discrimination, no longer content to quietly endure it. Gen Z is an activist generation as well, ready to stand up and speak up for the underserved, as the broad base of student dissatisfaction scores demonstrated.

In hindsight, Syracuse student protesters were ahead of their time, ahead of the national curve that elevated conversations of race and ethnicity to the dinner tables of most Americans. Those Syracuse students put

their futures on the line in order to get their message of fairness and unity heard. Last summer, the rest of the nation caught up with them.

Like its student body, in many ways Syracuse University is also on or near the forefront of addressing DEI issues, as we could see in the benchmarking study. SU has long history of inclusion and diverse campus community. It has made strides to build a new CDIO structure, is implementing an DEIA task force to make further change, and holds much promise for bringing together all its community members in a unified Syracuse University family.

With such great potential, the university also has this opportunity to step forward and lead both its peers and the nation into a brighter future of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility. There is no better time than now—to respond to this research and the issues it has raised, the weak areas and the strengths, and to take on the mantle of responses that it now holds in the form of this report.

The next step for SU is to simply say yes—to keep building the vision, to keep scaling good programs, to keep developing relationships and clear communications. And most importantly, Syracuse must continue the process of healing and repair. It must build upon the commitment, intentionality, and energy that you have already demonstrated. In this way Syracuse will create a unique and exciting brand of Inclusive Excellence, a unified whole through diversity in many dimensions, where no viewpoint is lost or silenced, where cross-pollination knows no limits, and where every student leaves fully prepared to skillfully succeed in an increasingly global and diverse world.

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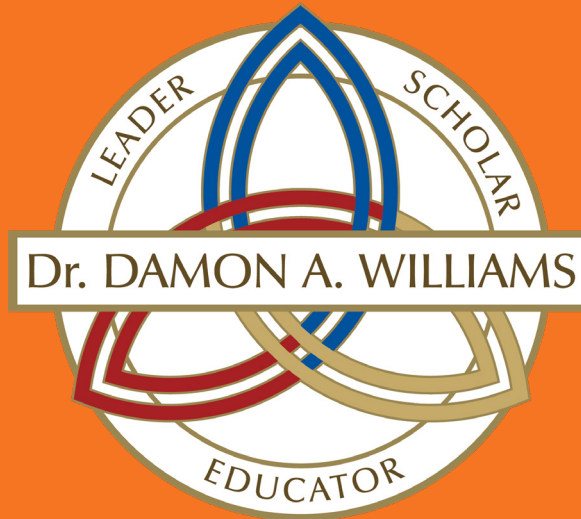
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