PRIORITIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS
Strategic Plan • 2021-2025

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

DIGNITY • RESPECT • KINDNESS
Social JUSTICE
COMPASSION • CIVILITY

"I believe this is the only nobility to which we should aspire – that is, to be the best fighters against each other's oppression, and in doing so, build links of solidarity and trust that will forge an invincible movement against all forms of injustice and inequality."

— Leslie Feinberg

Southern Connecticut State University

INTRODUCTION

At Southern, we are committed to identifying and addressing systemic barriers to equity, access, and success for all members of our community. We are also committed to constructive dialogues where we treat one another with dignity, respect, kindness, compassion and civility as we share our stories and perspectives, to create a culture of inclusion and belonging. As we aspire to be a social justice and anti-racist university, we recognize that the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion are not new ideas at Southern. Over the years, significant progress has been made by many committed members of our community who have contributed to raising awareness, growing our knowledge, and increasing our capacity to challenge injustice and create a climate of inclusion.

With the arrival of the inaugural Vice President for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, Dr. Diane Ariza, and the formation of the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Advisory Council (DEIAC), established in spring 2021, we recognize the need to be more intentional and strategic with how the University integrates this commitment to DEI throughout the institution. This strategy will provide institutional leadership and assistance, to engage and hold members of the President's Leadership Team (PLT), deans, department chairs and all institutional leaders accountable to the University's mission; to create initiatives with measurable outcomes that will dismantle systemic racism and oppressive hierarchies; and to build equitable communities that drive and measure progress across Southern over time.

VISION

"Advancing Southern as a Social Justice, Anti-Racist University," a document of the priorities presented by the VPDEI laid out four areas of focus that guided the DEI Advisory Council's work:

- Create a centralized strategic plan and process to build capacity for greater equity-mindedness among faculty and staff across campus, through workshops, programs and practices that foster community collaboration and measures success over time.

- Recruit, hire, and retain additional staff and faculty from underrepresented, marginalized identities, focusing on department culture as well as recruitment and retention activities that are welcoming to and supportive of these new faculty and staff.

- Thread DEI throughout all communication materials to both our internal and external audiences—students, faculty, staff, alumni, and community leaders to include print materials, web and social media platforms, and visual representations on campus that openly express our message to different communities.

- Create a pathway for students and all members of the SCSU community to report incidents of bias or hate in and out of the classroom, with a protocol for response and action, and including ways to measure success over time.

METHOD/PROCESS

The DEAIC's work to accomplish the following overarching goals took place under the leadership of DEIAC co-chairs and consultant, Michelle Chatman, president of CMind (https://www.contemplativemind.org) and associate professor of criminal justice at the University of the District of Colombia:

- Illuminate the value of contemplative practice in our efforts to advance a DEI, anti-racist, and anti-oppressive lens throughout Southern, and integrate these practices into our various efforts towards social justice.

- Implement priorities outlined in the three-year plan 2020-2023 developed last fall. (/Users/arizad1/Documents/Social_Justice_Priorities[12].pdf)

- Provide recommendations, and help measure progress over time through a process of Council meetings, working group meetings, research, benchmarking, review of feedback from campus, and deliberations with the President Leadership Team.

The DEIAC came to consensus on several short- and long-term recommendations around each priority area to achieve its goal of Southern becoming a social justice, anti-racist and anti-oppressive institution. Four working groups were created to focus on the following areas:

Recruitment, Retention and Support for Faculty, Staff and Clerical

To identify barriers to, and opportunities for, increasing the recruitment and retention of faculty and staff of color, and to measure success over time.

Educational Professional Training and Development

To end systemic racism and institutional culture at Southern; create a centralized strategic plan and process to build capacity for greater equity-mindedness among faculty and, through workshops, programs and practices that foster and restore community; and to measure success over time.

Communication to Southern, Alumni and the Greater New Haven Community

To develop a strategy for how to brand, integrate, and communicate social justice and anti-racism to the university, alumni, and Greater New Haven, and communicate progress over time.

Bias Response Protocol

To create a clear pathway for students to report incidents and/or personal experiences of bias or hate in and outside of the classroom, including a protocol for response and action, and to measure success over time.

The priorities and recommendations, to begin Spring 2022, will focus on the following initiatives:

RECRUITMENT, RETENTION AND SUPPORT FOR FACULTY, STAFF AND CLERICAL

- Hire the Recruitment & Retention Specialist.
- Create a team to determine standard reporting needs and the data offices need to collect to achieve common goals.
- Research best practices for recruitment and retention as a short- and long-term, ongoing initiative.
- Partner with doctoral-granting Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic Serving Institutions, Tribal Colleges & Universities, and Minority Serving Institutions.
- Create development plans for annual staff evaluations and hold supervisors accountable for equitable staff development.
- Begin process to establish a Leadership Academy.
- Create a strategic plan for how to recruit doctoral candidates, including how to think about creating a summer workshop.
- Create a candidate pool by working with departments to encourage and maintain relationships with professional associations with a greater number of underrepresented candidates.
- Create a program and process for mentoring faculty of color to intentionally enhance their success and likelihood of being retained.
- Reconstitute DEI Recruitment and Retention Committee by including new hires.

Educational and Professional Training

- Hire the Director for Education and Restorative Justice.
- Continue training with PLT, deans and chairs using Narrative 4 as a form of building community, recurring story exchanges across staff and faculty.
- Support and build curriculum content that speaks to diversity and equity.

- Create Conversation Circles – Summer Read 2022.

- Establish training for faculty to improve their ability to see students.

- Develop dinner groups with faculty, staff, and students.

Communication to Southern, Alumni and the Greater New Haven Community

- Develop a diversity style guide for the campus community to use.

- Clarify what we mean by social justice and anti-racist work and develop an "elevator speech."

- Develop a strategy for how best to communicate on- and off-campus initiatives.

- Work with Integrated Communications & Marketing so that university's communications and marketing work aligns more closely with the Division of DEI initiatives.

Anti-Bias Protocol

- Identify key stakeholders needed to comprise a task force and subject matter consultants.

- Create processes, protocols, communication for response to incidents of bias or hate.

- Begin preparing a website for bias response.

- Identify mechanisms and structures for data collection.

- Create launch plan for fall 2022 to include a plan for educating about bias and bias response.

In addition to these recommendations, the DEIAC recognizes the great work that other divisions and offices have initiated in the last year:

- The Men of Color (MOC) Initiative
Collaborative Partners: Student Affairs, Enrollment Management, Academic Affairs, DEI

- The *Real Talk* Podcast
Collaborative Partners: Integrated Marketing and Communications, DEI

- The 360 Student Equity Audit, Implementation and Sustainability Plan
Collaborative Partners: DEI, Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, Enrollment Management, Instructional Technology

- Integrated Justice and Social Change Collaborative
Collaborative Partners: DEI, Racial and Intersectional Justice Group, Community Leaders

In closing, we want to thank the DEIAC for the magnificent work they did this past year. However, we know that to advance this work and ensure success, we need everyone to be engaged. Also, critical to our success is understanding that a one-way approach will not help us advance this work. We must allow space for open and honest conversations that will allow us to critique and approach our work with a deep commitment to a spirit of collective community, empowerment, and liberation.

"Change happens. Change is definitely going to happen, no matter what we plan or expect or hope for or set in place. We will adapt to that change, or we will become irrelevant" — adrienne maree brown

2020-2021 DEIAC MEMBERS

Co-Chairs – Diane Ariza (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion); Steven Hoffler (Social Work); Brandon Hutchinson (English); Tracy Tyree (Student Affairs)

Members – Andreina Barajas, (Undergraduate Student); Betsy Beacom (Integrated Communications and Marketing); Dian Brown-Albert (Student Affairs); Richard Cogswell (Facilities); Renea DaCosta (Graduate Student); Esteban Garcia (Finance and Administration); Ciara Houghton (Administrative Faculty Senate); Roland Regos (Office of the President); Cassandra Lang (Clerical); Angela Lopez-Velasquez (Faculty Senate); Trudy Milburn (Academic Affairs); Tisha Miller (Human Resources); Paula Rice (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion); Meredith Sinclair (UCF); Sir Snowden (Admissions);
Vu Trieu (Information Technology); Tiana Williams (Institutional Advancement)