Student Success and Retention Subcommittee Report

Date: November 16, 2020

To: Dr. Sheldon Wrice – Interim Vice President for Inclusion and Equity, Chief Diversity
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        Equality and Social Justice Working Group
        Dr. Julie Zhao – Assistant Dean Recruitment, Retention and Marketing College of
        Engineering, Co-chair of Racial Equality and Social Justice Working Group

From: Subcommittee on Student Success and Retention
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Subcommittee Recommendations: Student Success and Retention

Charge
The race and social justice working group was convened on August 11, 2020 by Dr. Sheldon
Wrice and Dr. Julie Zhao at the request of President Gary Miller. The group was provided the
following mission:

> *The University of Akron must adopt a leadership role in the community
> discussions and actions aimed at moving the country finally and decisively
> beyond hate, bias and discrimination. Ultimately, for us, action involves
> increasing educational opportunities for students of color by welcoming them into
> an inclusive, tolerant and nurturing learning community.*

Four subcommittees were created to focus attention on specific needs. Heidi Cressman, Dale
Gooding, Courtney Johnson-Benson, Christine Rose and Mike Strong were asked to focus on
student success and retention and provided two objectives: (1) to conduct a thorough evaluation
to ensure our policies and procedures do not inhibit us from seeing and acting to remedy
discrimination and unconscious bias; (2) to develop a set of institutional actions that will result in
real change on campus and in the Akron community.

Description of Subcommittee Process and Work
The student subcommittee:
- Brainstormed initial recommendations and identified key constituencies,
- Solicited personalized feedback from individual faculty, students and staff, then
  convened twelve focus groups (detail in Appendix A) and asked for additional feedback
  in response to written questions,
- Identified trend and themes emerging from community engagement,
- Reviewed relevant policy and literature while developing findings and recommendations.

The subcommittee met twelve times (detail in Appendix B) to discuss and shape the emerging recommendations. Initial recommendations were drafted from available information and submitted to Dr. Wrice and Dr. Zhao on September 3, 2020 and a review of relevant University policy, which may be impacted by recommendations, was submitted on September 25, 2020. Both preliminary reports were completed with information available at the time they were submitted and reflect much of, but not all, subsequent work included and referenced in this report. The subcommittee chose to define social justice broadly, including references to multiple identity groups and found that questions, concerns and thoughts about race anchored most of the dialog. Throughout the report the term, underrepresented students, is used broadly to be inclusive of minority, low-income, first-generation, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students. This report, which outlines findings and recommendations, concludes the work of the Racial Equality and Social Justice Student Success and Retention Subcommittee.

Summary of Subcommittee Findings

The student subcommittee witnessed hurt, frustration, and resignation within the University community when discussing race, social justice, student success and retention. Deficits of trust, feelings of isolation, and the perception of mixed messages add to confusion about the University inclusion of diverse students and commitment to anti-racism expressed by groups of underrepresented students. Other students, faculty, and staff were often unaware of such concerns. An analysis of first to second year retention data at The University of Akron from 2009 to 2018 found only 52% of African American students returned for a second year of instruction and 75% of white students. Given constraints of time and resources, it was not possible for the subcommittee to draw cause and effect relationships or correlations that directly address the persistence gap or the low retention rate for African American students. Even so, African American juniors and seniors, and students representing other underrepresented populations were far too familiar with the struggles of their peers. They also expressed frustration and anger that greater effort has not previously been taken to address the underlying structures and climate yielding untenable outcomes.

Strengths and opportunities for improvement were also evident. Students repeatedly highlighted individual relationships with specific faculty and staff mentors. Those relationships with faculty and staff who take time to listen, engage, encourage, and invest personally in the success of students are greatly appreciated and identified by student leaders as necessary. The subcommittee also identified broad enthusiasm from faculty and staff across the University for improvement and commitment to change. A shared interest from faculty and staff, regardless of knowledge, experience, or position, was a willingness to engage and a thirst for leadership.

The subcommittee heard from students, faculty and staff that meaningful changes must be made and made now. Students, staff and faculty reported the following themes and shared their perception that deficits constrain retention and success of students:

Advising

Students from underrepresented populations expressed significant concern with support available through academic advising units. Experiences with advisors lead to academic

questions unanswered and developmental needs unattended. Underrepresented students experience stereotype threat, racial bias, and micro-aggressions through the advising process. Examples shared with the subgroup included students waiting in reception to speak to an advisor far longer than time was given during the advising appointment; advisors asking students to begin planning alternate courses of study "have a plan B" before first-year first-semester grades were posted; advisors conducting appointments by speaking "at" students without working "with" students. Students perceive advisors as advocating for the University and college specific policies instead of advocating for their needs. Students wryly cited such advocacy as part of the systemic deficits in persistence and retention of underrepresented students. Advisors lack clear communication and personalized knowledge about their advisees. Students also reported advisors focus on deficits in their performance instead of strengths and that response to student issues tend to be reactive instead of proactive. Underrepresented students experience a focus on deficits in performance as related to their race, ethnicity, sexuality, etc. Students' discomfort within advising relationships leads them to seek support outside of advising structures.

University staff identified the need for greater assessment of racial bias in standardized testing used to place students in developmental courses and the need for better integrated early intervention strategies. University staff perception of bias that benefits white students within the testing process and its impact on underrepresented students, especially within STEM fields, was prominent. University staff also perceived the need for early intervention outreach and student engagement. Staff identified the need for timely, integrated, personalized support that is driven by data or metrics to supplement the support provided to the few students who self-identify as needing support. University staff also identified that relationships among advising units and support units (CARE team, Choose Ohio First, Dean of Students Office, Help-A-Zip, Tutoring Services, and Office of Multicultural Development) are strained when students seek support outside of advising appointments. Lack of seamless integration results in confusion and reduces student persistence and retention.

Climate Assessment

Lack of integrated campus climate assessment and sustained outcome assessment of key programs and activities impedes change. Review of available data revealed that two climate assessments were conducted once in 2008 and again in 2015. The available data demonstrates a clear deficit in the use of assessment to better understand the experiences of students related to race and social justice. Demonstrating sustained commitment to the needs of diverse and underrepresented students requires engaging the campus community regularly and routinely with data that provides a better understanding of the experiences of students.

Community Engagement and Committee Work

Sustained commitment to racial equality, social justice and the sustainment or improvement of the campus climate requires ongoing, broad scale, intentional institution-wide service. The lack of a centralized body of diverse campus stakeholders to accurately assess issues of diversity, contributes to a lack of effective communication across the campus community when issues affecting diverse campus members arise. Students, faculty and staff shared their perception that

the University lacks coordinated, centralized leadership and a clear strategy for engaging the University community on issues of social justice and racial equality. As a result, many underrepresented groups of students on campus reported they have no effective representation within executive leadership that reflects their voice. The broader campus community has suffered due to lack of resources and guidance in matters of diversity issues, leaving the campus community discouraged and feeling disenfranchised.

Individual participation in coordinated efforts to do this work varies greatly across the University. Structures that need to sustain effort and improve experiences of students, faculty and staff are underutilized. University rule 3359-38-01 references an Affirmative Action Commission that has not been convened within the tenure of the current Affirmative Action Officer or her two predecessors. Both Faculty Senate and University Council governing bodies have committee structures that could sustain goal driven diversity initiatives; they have not been mobilized to do so. Individual administrative departments such as Career Services have organized specific internal committees to sustain department initiatives. University wide engagement is perceived to be uncoordinated and lacking a clear focus and centralized leadership.

Discriminatory Conduct

Discriminatory conduct targeting students based on race, gender expression and ethnicity is occurring, is unreported and unaddressed. Students cited examples of unaddressed discriminatory conduct, feeling unheard, uncared for, and unwanted as reasons their peers left The University of Akron prior to degree completion. Students and staff perceive inequity in resources, training and policy addressing discriminatory conduct. Analysis of the Code of Student Conduct found discrimination is explicitly prohibited when it is based on sex (sexual harassment, gender-based misconduct, and Title IX policies) but not when it is based on other protected classes. Abuse and harassment are prohibited within the student conduct policy but without specific references to race, ethnicity, religion or other protected classes. There is little training across campus, resources or attention dedicated to raising awareness, identifying discriminatory conduct, reporting, or responding to reported behavior (other than gender-based misconduct). A summary of available reporting data found far fewer documented incidents of discriminatory conduct targeting students based on all other protected classes combined than those reported and related to sex. And this is despite clear indication from students that discriminatory conduct is present on campus

Diversity Center

Campus constituencies, and especially underrepresented students, are starved for additional centralized leadership from an integrated diversity center. Student leaders expressed available programs and initiatives are often inaccessible to students who are not personally engaged in mentoring relationships or through student organizations. Student leaders from underrepresented groups indicated available programs and initiatives do not yet address the diversity of needs present among multiple unique constituencies. Students and staff perceive lack of clarity within program outcomes which are designed to both (1) inform uneducated faculty, students and staff;

as well as (2) support the needs of diverse groups of students, faculty and staff. Efforts are perceived as unbalanced and failing to achieve often ambiguous goals. Lack of welcoming, highly visible physical space, university staff specifically dedicated to serve unique constituencies (Women's Center, LGBT Center, International Center, African American Center) and strategic initiatives designed to support such constituencies, contribute to the perception the University does not embrace diverse groups of students. Activism on campus and advocacy for change is perceived by students as unwelcome at the University. Underrepresented students report feeling they have no home on campus adding it is therefore hard to feel they belong.

Finances and Financial Aid

Underrepresented students' experiences in covering tuition and fees, navigating financial aid, managing their financial student account and deficits in financial literacy, create significant barriers to student persistence and retention. Staff and students identified need for an effective net price calculator to provide transparent and accurate information for students regarding cost of their education. Students and staff also identified a funding gap of as much as $3000 per semester as posing significant barriers to retention. Staff identified unintended consequences of the University scholarship structure, resulting in homogeneous student bodies within some colleges.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Student Support

The needs and support for the LGBT students on campus are not being met; students and staff identified systemic institutional barriers preventing students from receiving support. Students, especially new students, experience difficulty making connections and accessing available support. Student organizations such as LGBTUA are present on campus; however, finding and joining a student organization often involves managing unique barriers. Students who are not certain about their comfort engaging with other LGBT students or being identified as members of an organization, face difficulty integrating. Reliance on student lead initiatives also contributes to the perception that the University of Akron does not welcome LGBT students. Support and resources are also available through the Counseling and Testing Center; however, relying on programs within a counseling center also creates additional barriers for students who want engagement but not mental health or counseling services. Lack of University staff, department and leadership contribute to lack of trust and confidence that the University will protect transgender students who are targeted or perceive the threat of violence.

Students identified no clear department, officer, faculty or staff member designated to serve the needs of LGBT students. Students also reported a feeling of disconnect from the Office of Multi-Cultural Development. They also offered biting critiques of crisis communication strategies and faulted the University for making little effort to communicate with the LGBT community unless precipitated by a crisis, offering few messages to acknowledge or celebrate the LGBT community. Persistent micro-aggressions were reported by LGBT students and specifically from transgender students requesting to be identified by preferred names and pronouns.

Strategic Communication

The subcommittee found lack of culturally competent dialog and communication engaging constituencies around areas of diversity, inclusion, equity and social justice. Faculty, staff and students are able to provide a wealth of meaningful contributions. Even so, students and staff shared a perception that communication is limited to only a few tools which are used to send information to the University community with little to no opportunities for constructive dialog across departments or in response to messaging.

Students expressed significant frustration that communication regarding race or social justice grew from crisis and not from attending to strategic commitments to advocate for or improve services. Underrepresented students also perceive a lack of representation in department and University level marketing and educational materials, expressing that the University message should be inclusive with images and specific content designed to welcome underrepresented groups (i.e. a multi-lingual webpage). As a result, pertinent information related to safety, diversity, inclusion, and equity has suffered ineffective communication execution leaving the campus community frustrated and disenchanted.

Student Grievances

Underrepresented students reported their grievances are not attended to, leaving students feeling unheard and uncared for. Students, faculty, and staff express confusion and do not understand grievance procedures for addressing academic concerns. Grievance procedures within administrative units vary widely across the University resulting in student concerns having been summarily dismissed with no consideration. Often cited reasoning, "If I make an exception for one student, I have to make an exception for all students…" fails to acknowledge the disparate impact individuals face and inhibits critical review of systemic problems requiring innovative approaches. Faculty and administrators required to make decisions in response to student grievances need resources and training to allow for fair consideration of grievances.

Grievances specifically about race or other protected classes lack clear procedures to be addressed. Student grievances brought forward and related to race, color, religion, sexual orientation, age, national or ethnic origin, disability, status during pregnancy and after child birth, status as a parent of a young child, status as a foster parent, military status, genetic information or status as a veteran, have no clear resolution procedures. The Office of Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action responds to formal complaints requiring investigation of discrimination claims; however, if the support needed is specific consideration to correct a discriminatory experience, there is no institutional procedure to address. Further, there is little training provided for faculty, students or staff in recognizing discriminatory conduct, reporting requirements, or the assistance required to adequately respond to stop and prevent harm.

Supporting Faculty and Staff

Faculty, staff and administrative departments providing services directly to underrepresented students report feeling unsupported and overwhelmed. Attending to students who feel

abandoned, unheard, and uncared for by the University takes significant time and emotional resources. Faculty and staff from underrepresented populations are routinely called upon by students to serve as mentors for support and advocacy. Those faculty and staff express exhaustion having to work within the same culture, structure and systems that have left underrepresented students disenfranchised. Students, who need the most support, turn to staff that are overwhelmed. Staff reductions and changes to the organizational structure have exacerbated the perception held by staff serving underrepresented students that they are isolated and unvalued.

Sustaining Programs and Initiatives

Programs and activities that create opportunities for underrepresented student leadership and engagement have been difficult to maintain and important programs have been discontinued. Still, other programs demonstrate viability and sustainability yet have not realized full potential. Well-known University of Akron programs like the McNair Scholars Trio program have been discontinued at The University of Akron. The celebrated Black Male Summit initiative has persisted and has generated sustained interest from the Akron community. Yet, efforts to realize key goals:

       (1) promoting holistic development of young men at The University of Akron,
       (2) creating a sustainable community of black men at The University of Akron, and
       (3) channeling participants into programs and initiatives that will enhance growth,

have been stymied by lack of engagement of the University Community. In 2019 almost twice as many local and area high school students attended the Black Male Summit than currently enrolled University of Akron students. And combined, the attendance of all University of Akron students, faculty and staff only accounted for one-quarter of the summit attendees.

Important academic courses of study like Pan African Studies, Asian Studies and Women's Studies continue to serve undergraduate students with certificate programs to recognize concentrations in coursework. An academic support initiative, the Increasing Diversity in Engineering Academics (IDEAs) program in the College of Engineering, continues to serve underrepresented students 30 years after it was founded, and the Women in Engineering Program continues to serve students 27 years after it was founded. The University of Akron was recently invited to apply for the Howard Hughes Medical Institute grant designed to assist students with overcoming barriers such as socioeconomic status, gender, ethnicity and race in STEM majors. Faculty, University staff and administration continue to search for and find ways to make positive contributions through the development of programs and activities. Programs and initiatives should be stronger given the extraordinary effort that has been dedicated to their success; yet the programs operate independently of each other and lack a transparent integrated strategic plan to achieve specified goals outlined by University leadership.

Subcommittee Recommendations
The following recommendations have been organized under the same themes present within the subcommittee findings, with some recommendations having been informed by more than one finding.

Advising
Recommendations related to advising:

- Establish feedback cycles and evaluations of advising experiences that allow for students to voice concerns about responsiveness of advisors to students' questions and concerns.
- Reduce caseload for advisors and incentivize participation in student experience beyond advising appointments to establish more meaningful relationships between students and advisors.
- Conduct focus groups with advisors and students from underrepresented communities to ensure advisors are learning and adapting based on needs of students.
- Convene an independent assessment of the math placement testing procedures and instruction within developmental math coursework to identify deficiencies and establish goals to improve performance of students over time. Assessment should address potential bias within standardized tests.
- Diversify advisors through hiring and retention of staff from underrepresented communities and dedicate additional staff to assist with advising responsibilities.

Identify students who are most at risk for leaving the University. Provide these students more integrated and coordinated advising.

- Ensure advisors develop personal and supportive relationship with each student.
- Develop co-requisite coursework that is culturally relevant and designed specifically for low test performers as an alternative approach to remedial coursework.
- Develop alternative pathways that allow for students to receive individualized support to rapidly advance through development testing sequences if they are able to demonstrate competence in performing requisite knowledge for advanced coursework.
- Empower faculty and staff to accept mentees needing help in math and provide personalized support to encourage success.
- Enhance capacity for advisors to engage students with effective interventions by providing real time data within a semester on course progress or other metrics such as access to information about referrals to support services like Help-A-Zip or CARE team.
- Develop real time feedback and engagement strategies in which advisors are prepared to intervene with specific information about students' performance throughout the semester.

Second to faculty and classmate interactions, advising is identified as the next greatest opportunity to influence students' success for underrepresented students on college campuses. However, such an influence also bears potential for squandered opportunities reinforced with ineffective communication strategies. Advisors require additional training and support.

- Provide training to academic advisors annually to continue to develop increasingly culturally competent services and to ensure they are able to identify stereotype threat, implicit bias and micro-aggressions.
- Provide training to academic advisors to clarify differences in focus on students' strengths rather than deficits within advising appointments.

- Establish clear priorities, communication strategies, and boundaries that allow for integrated support and flow of information to and from advisors and colleagues providing student support from outside of advising units.
- Empower advisors to trust, consider, incorporate, and adapt when they are provided feedback from colleagues. Ensure advising priorities, concerns, and guidance are disseminated to colleagues.

Assessment and Climate
Recommendations related to assessment and climate assessment:

An assessment team should be convened to complete the climate assessment, coordinate with stakeholders across campus, follow up with departments and teams on setting and implementing goals. The team should assist implementing the subsequent recommendations.

- Administer a climate assessment at regular intervals (every four to six years). The assessment should meet academic rigor, be transparent, and be conducted by a team with the full support of the University administration.
- Establish regularly scheduled focus groups to speak directly with underrepresented students to supplement climate assessment data. Establish engagement with constituencies able to recognize and address emerging concerns within smaller communities that are hidden by a broad view of climate assessment.
- Provide climate assessment summary and data to multiple teams (Affirmative Action Commission, Faculty Senate, University Council, etc.) and constituencies on campus. Charge these teams to make set goals and integrate feedback with strategic planning initiatives.
- Convene bi-annual workshops and outreach strategies to inform board of trustees, executive leadership, deans and academic administration, faculty, students and staff of what the diversity assessment has demonstrated and engage community members in setting strategic goals to address.
- Provide direct assistance to assess outcomes to administrative departments, and teams working to address social justice concerns. Integrate program assessment into budget planning and annual performance review procedures to ensure assessment is robust, focuses on achieving outcomes and demonstrates high quality interventions.
- Create score cards that can be used to demonstrate institutional progress in creating a welcoming environment for all students.

Community Engagement and Committee Work
Recommendations related to community engagement and committee work:

Convene a campus wide representative body that serves under the direction and in support of the Vice President for Equity and Inclusion as a University Diversity Taskforce. Through the Office of Vice President for Equity and Inclusion, create a strategic diversity framework guiding incremental change. Charge the taskforce with the following responsibilities.

- Ensure that divisional units represented on the taskforce are fully informed and engaged in diversity initiative development across the University.

- Certify that the diversity initiatives within divisional units are aligned with strategic diversity framework and University direction.
- Receive and review diversity progress updates from each unit and team represented on the taskforce.
- Serve as the highest leadership council for University wide diversity matters.
- Appoint members of Faculty Senate, University Council, Undergraduate Student Government, Graduate Student Government, academic colleges, Office of Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action, Board of Trustees, Office of General Counsel and select faculty and staff engaged in strategic initiatives.
- Empower the taskforce to provide recommendations to the Office of the President regarding oversight of University policy and procedures as they relate to diversity, social justice and the creation of a welcoming university climate for all, and most directly, for underrepresented students, faculty and staff.

Empower established University teams and structures to set specific goals and advance ideas brought forward and concerns reported to the taskforce.

- Encourage Faculty Senate and University Council to work within established committee structures to identify initiatives that support strategic diversity framework and initiatives.
- Provide incentive to academic departments and administrative units who establish programs within their units that align with initiatives.
- Develop a diversity committee within each academic college and the Division of Student Affairs to ensure an infrastructure capable of collaborative efforts to create change.
- Convene the Affirmative Action Commission as outlined in University rule 3359-38-01. Charge the commission to develop an affirmative action plan to:
    - publish a review of the plan progress annually,
    - make recommendations to the taskforce to integrate response to discriminatory conduct addressed through the Office of Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action with efforts to create a welcoming and inclusive university environment,
    - assess University policy and procedures to ensure they achieve equitable outcomes,
    - establish ongoing scorecards or dashboard metrics to be used by administrative and academic departments.

Discriminatory Conduct
Recommendations related to students' experiences with unaddressed discriminatory conduct:

- Revise the Code of Student Conduct to clearly articulate with similar language used to prohibit sexual misconduct and sexual harassment, that harassment based on race, religion, or other protected classes is prohibited.
- Provide training to students including tools to effectively intervene, to stop or provide support in response to harassment based on race, religion, ethnicity or other protected classes. Training should occur through University orientation programs, integrated and embedded within each academic program, and supported with a strategic communication plan to raise awareness.

- Provide training to faculty and staff to increase recognition and reporting of discrimination based on race, religion and other protected classes. Training must adequately and clearly differentiate between behavior prohibited by the code of conduct and behavior that is related to race, religion and protected classes but which does not rise to the status of prohibited conduct.

Incidents of bias may or may not rise to the level of illegal discriminatory conduct or conduct prohibited by University policy. Further, some discriminatory language is protected by the first amendment and cannot, and should not, be addressed as policy violations. Such discrimination, often identified as micro-aggressions, is occurring and is perceived to be a primary contributing factor of underrepresented students who choose to leave The University of Akron. There is currently no University strategy or structure to identify instances of and address these systemic and persistent behaviors. The subcommittee recommends the University develop a strategic plan to respond to all incidents of discriminatory conduct including behaviors prohibited by the Code of Student Conduct as well as incidents of bias and micro-aggression, which cause great harm, but are not prohibited.

- Include in plan, a reporting structure that allows the University to identify patterns and trends in reported behaviors.
- Include in plan procedures to respond to incidents of bias.
- Include in plan non-punitive actions that can be deployed following incidents to prevent recurrence of bias and micro-aggressions.
- Include in plan actions that can be taken by faculty, departments, and administrative units to mitigate the impact of bias and micro-aggressions within departments.
- Include in plan remedies that should be offered to students subject to discriminatory conduct which ensures impact of discriminatory conduct is addressed; and, that reports of discriminatory conduct never result in lowering academic standards or expectations of students.
- Realign and deploy staff resources equivalent to those deployed to prevent Gender-based discrimination. Appoint a formal Title VI Coordinator and explain through clear and concise language the coordinator's role in providing leadership to address discrimination based on race, color or national origin.
- Differentiate in policy and procedures language, prohibited conduct from discourse that is uncomfortable and may be uncivilized but that which allows for a robust and free exchange of ideas required by the First Amendment.
- Establish unambiguous messaging that can be deployed to address public speech which includes bias, micro-aggression, and discriminatory language protected by the First Amendment, in instances when such speech contributes to systemic barriers and disparate outcomes. Clearly identify such instances as inconsistent with University values while upholding the right for the speech to be offered and welcoming descent.
- When discriminatory and proactive speech is offered on campus, create space for constructive dialog, through town meetings and open forums to raise the quality of discourse and provide opportunities for individuals to voice dissent, anger, and hurt.
- Develop and implement training that recognizes the costs of discrimination based on protected classes and that critically examines the adverse impacts faced by the targets of

the discrimination, the agents of the discrimination, and the community within which the discrimination occurs.

Diversity Center
Recommendations related to a diversity center:

Create a center that welcomes all underrepresented students including students who identify as LGBT, African American, LatinX, religious, international, disabled and women's groups. Through the center, offer students of various communities, a place to connect with other students to share their experiences, culture, preferences and promote a sense of belonging among underrepresented groups on campus.

- Locate center centrally in high traffic area, such as the Student Union, providing physical spaces for students to gather in community and space for administrative support and professional staff.
- Dedicate individual staff members to provide support and coordinate engagement with each group of students. Create additional positions to ensure coordinated effort necessary to sustain and expand programs and initiatives is viable.
- Incorporate existing administrative departments and staff into Diversity Center, including Office of Multicultural Development and International Center. Provide integrated liaisons to faculty and staff in academic colleges such as the College of Engineering IDEAs program, and Buchtel College of Arts and Sciences Women's Studies Program.
- Provide leadership for the Diversity Center through the Vice President For Inclusion and Equity.
- Create a centralized, culturally inclusive website that incorporates all activities, programs, and initiatives, and provides information for new students about how to engage. Share information on social media to reach out and actively engage students. Advise University Communications and Marketing on when it is necessary to speak directly to underrepresented students through social media.
- Work to have the University of Akron recognized on the Campus Pride Index.

Through Diversity Center provide programs, training and services to University staff.

- Coordinate, sponsor or co-sponsor all programs specifically designed to support specific groups of students through the center, such as Black Male Summit, Advance Orientation, and Upward Bound.
- Coordinate, sponsor or co-sponsor all University wide programs and events designed to educate campus community about diversity through the center, such as Rediscover Race, Hispanic History Month, Black History Month, Women's History Month, Diwali, World Aids Day, etc.
- Expand upon mentoring programs already established in the Office of Multicultural Development to provide direct peer-to-peer support to underrepresented students.
- Expand networks of engaged student organizations and leadership opportunities available through Student African American Brotherhood, Student African American Sisterhood, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Union, Hillel, etc. Provide additional support, integrated faculty advisors, and guidance to these organizations. Co-sponsor programs

and activities with organizations when possible to demonstrate University commitment to partner and sustain organizations and not call or rely on organizations to produce change.

- Host workshops to help students develop better advocacy and nonviolent civil disobedience skills. Focus workshop on supporting independent student goals, establishing safe, effective and meaningful strategies to achieve change.
- Host an annual Hackathon event to address longstanding and persistent lack of diverse representation of students in University marketing, department marketing, University website, and print materials. Hackathon should also be deployed to address the need for portions of The University of Akron website to be made available in multiple languages.
- Offer diversity audits for administrative units, advisors, and academic departments to help recognize policies and procedures that create barriers and unintended consequences of disparate impact across diverse groups of students. Tools should include diversity audits, double blind assessment, and training on incorporating assessment findings to change policy and procedures.
- Collaborate with deans, academic departments, and Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action to provide training designed specifically to meet the needs of University departments, divisions, or colleges related to supporting underrepresented groups of students and preventing hostile and unwelcoming environments.

Financial Aid
Recommendations related to students' experiences with financial aid and with managing the cost of University tuition and fees:

- Deploy personalized assistance and programmatic support dedicated to the completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Multiple departments, faculty and staff must be mobilized to ensure timely submission of FAFSAs which are required for financial aid awards. Delayed submission of student FAFSAs creates significant barriers for students' receipt of award, and compounds otherwise manageable personal financial challenges. Students who submit the FAFSA may be tagged by the Department of Education requiring additional aid eligibility verification. Underrepresented students report struggles with understanding requirements, accessing documents, and responding within established timeframes.
- Deploy a financial literacy course required of all students receiving financial aid.
- Conduct bi-annual assessment of the financial aid application and award process. Share outcomes with colleges, committees across campus, and community to ensure underrepresented students are not disproportionately awarded aid.
- Solicit support through development and create privately funded scholarships to better address persistent financial needs of underrepresented students. Establish strategic partnership within the local and regional community partners to expanded and deployed scholarship opportunities.
- Task governing boards such as University Council and Faculty Senate with bringing forward recommendations to reduce the cost of Higher Education. Students and staff identify funding gap of $3000 that many underrepresented students struggle to close after financial aid is awarded.
- Develop required training for new University faculty and staff, (provided to departments upon request), to better understand financial obligations, available resources, and

deadlines, allowing for increased community literacy and support for students lacking financial literacy.

Students have expressed significant concern regarding the timing of all University bills including tuition, room, board, and student fees in relation to financial aid award disbursement, payment deadlines, and when date holds are applied to student accounts. Multiple students reported multiple unique concerns related to understanding their individual cost for attending the University in a given semester and year, in addition to navigating the process of paying the bill.

- Conduct an independent audit and assessment of the student billing procedures bi-annually to identify barriers to student persistence that do not result in disparate outcomes for underrepresented students.
- Realign University bills (tuition, room, board and student fees) to ensure each student is left with a clear, unchanging and unambiguous cost of attending the University each semester.
- Establish relationships with governing bodies that allow for greater collective oversight of billing procedures if an independent audit and assessment demonstrate persistent barriers.

Administrative staff, faculty, and students perceive significant disparities of underrepresented enrollment in the various University Colleges. Some colleges are perceived as ethnically and racially diverse while others as homogenous. The use of scholarships to attract high achieving students who arrive at the University, ready to be admitted directly to the college, is perceived to be a significant factor contributing to disparity in enrollment among colleges.

- Create a scholarship to be deployed to underrepresented students by the Department of Financial Aid and awarded prior to any scholarship awarded by the colleges to provide incentives for students from underrepresented backgrounds.
- Conduct regularly scheduled assessments of college scholarship to ensure for equitable distribution across gender, race and ethnicity of eligible applicants by colleges awarding scholarships to new students.
- Distribute scorecards that are transparent and allow for students, faculty, staff and constituents to see demographic make-up of each college and the distribution of scholarships within the college.
- Link scholarship funds allocated to the colleges to established recruiting and retention goals supporting underrepresented students. Linking the funds to these goals could help especially if multiple assessment cycles demonstrate persistent inequity and failure recruiting and retaining diverse student bodies.
- Create incentives that allow for colleges to sustain scholarship funding despite failing to diversify student bodies by establishing and enhancing college level strategic diversity initiatives.

LGBT Student Support
Recommendations related to supporting LGBT students:

The University of Akron relies upon students, faculty and staff to develop programs and activities in support of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students. The University must accept and own responsibility for coordinated efforts to welcome students and reduce barriers to access of communities of support.

- Create a position within the Diversity Center or Office of Multicultural Development for a staff person dedicated to providing support to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students.
- Develop a clear University brand infused campaign to be sent to new University of Akron students, applicants, and the broader University community that welcomes lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students to the University. Include information about preferred name options, gender-neutral bathrooms, student organizations, and support groups available through the Counseling and Testing Center.
- Seek membership within the Campus Pride Index, a National Listing of colleges and universities recognized for supporting lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students.
- Coordinate a home for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students within a Diversity Center or Office of Multicultural Development that is empowered to advocate on behalf of students seeking support as they navigate the complex University environment.
- Continue to expand opportunities, knowledge, policy, and tools to allow for the expanded use of preferred names on campus. Make clear and definitive statements directed to faculty and staff across the University through memos and personal communication from Deans and Department leaders that employees are expected to use preferred names when requested to do so by students. They should also be prepared to direct students to resources able to assist if students have additional questions and concerns.
- Provide training developed to make faculty and staff aware of micro-aggressions experienced by non-binary students as well as information about the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender student experience and the support structures and resources available to them. Require all new staff to complete this training.

Strategic Communication
Recommendations related to strategic communication:

Establish a communication plan that routinely recognizes and engages with underrepresented students, faculty and staff.

- Schedule and conduct meetings with groups of underrepresented students, faculty and staff. Work to continue dialog and establish trust through ongoing outreach.
- Provide intermittent messages to campus community to ensure they are aware of resources available, especially those specifically designed to assist underrepresented students.
- Demonstrate commitment to the University by highlighting programs and activities designed to educate the campus community through the offices of University executive

leadership. Use short video, social media, and podcasts to raise awareness of programs and initiatives.

- Hold a 2-3 hour workshop each semester with the taskforce or groups identified within these recommendations to identify programs which require coordinated, collaborative messaging or assistance from University Communications and Marketing to produce.
- Use scorecards, established goals, outcome assessment, and campus climate data to continue to engage campus community in a productive ongoing dialog.

Plan for increased engagement and dialog following crises or incidents of national conscience related to race and social justice. University community has called for the community to provide greater, more personalized and more authentic concern in response to incidents.

- Establish communication networks and expectations within hierarchical University structures. Prepare department leadership, deans, faculty to be ready to address concerns during meetings with comments that reference coordinated messages from University executive staff.
- Prepare written communications expressing empathy and appreciation for underrepresented groups and specifically for groups that experience stereotype threat, racial bias, and micro-aggressions. Work with representatives of the taskforce, Office of Multicultural Development or Diversity Center to ensure messages are culturally competent and able to effectively convey intent.
- Prepare social media posts and other concurrent communication to be used to supplement formal messages delivered by University leadership.
- Establish a group of University leaders able to speak directly with students, listen to concerns, identify themes, report to executive leadership and the taskforce, Diversity Center and Office of Multicultural Development. Prepare to hold town meetings or sensitive dialogs following incidents on or off campus that require empathetic and coordinated University response. Prepare for discussions to be ready to deploy on 2-3 days' notice or as necessary to support the campus community.
- Make reference to and recognize students, faculty, and staff that may need to debrief or attend to personal needs following incidents that challenge community norms or expectations, are public acts of discrimination, or trigger emotional responses from community members during meetings, activities and events.
- Designate a team of University staff to consult and monitor the need for coordinated and integrated response following crises or incidents of national conscience.

Student Grievances
Recommendations related to student grievances:

Empower middle managers to exercise discretion and ensure all faculty and staff responsible for responding to grievances receive adequate training.

- Create a one-page document that can be distributed to all University students, faculty, and staff that clearly delineates which student grievances are considered and by whom. The document should include links or directions to additional information, instructions on how to appeal or contest decisions not receiving full and proper consideration, who

exercises the final discretion, and contact information for University staff trained to explain to students the procedures to request consideration.

- Ensure faculty are reporting all grievances considered to department chairs, to make teams aware of how often student concerns are brought forward, and what action is taken to address concerns and refine practices.
- Provide training to faculty, staff and decision makers that recognizes the role grievances play in identifying systemic structures that are not achieving optimum results, and that dismissing grievances without full consideration inhibits critical reflection necessary for improving University policies and procedures.
- Provide training and clarity for decision makers that exceptions to rules, in and of themselves are not inherently unfair; that after providing full consideration of available information, they should be empowered to follow the most just and fair outcome. Ensure training also clarifies faculty should not compromise expectations of academic performance and rigor while considering requests from students. Ensure training reminds faculty and staff to listen completely before rendering a decision, and report incidents when discriminatory conduct or criminal behavior is apparent.

Establish clear and definitive protocols that allow for fair consideration of student grievances related to race or other protected classes.

- Establish clear procedure for responding to incidents of discriminatory conduct. Include procedural steps to ensure students are provided an equitable remedy following incidents and reports of discriminatory conduct, as well as access to submission of formal complaint.
- Remind faculty and staff annually of their responsibility to implement the University Anti-Discrimination and Harassment Policy 3359-11-13 and make training regarding the policy available annually to faculty and staff.
- Notify faculty, staff and students annually in direct communication explaining that discriminatory conduct is prohibited, where to seek support and information, and how to report misconduct as necessary.
- Appoint a single University employee to serve as the arbiter and advocate for students needing academic accommodations following reports of grievances involving discriminatory conduct. The employee should track and report annual aggregate data to the diversity taskforce, and the Office of Equal Employment and Affirmative Action.
- Ensure all students subject to discriminatory conduct or conduct which could be discriminatory, are provided an opportunity to debrief their concerns, and have University procedures including filing a formal complaint explained to them. Address procedures outlined in the Anti-Discrimination and Harassment Policy or Code of Student Conduct as applicable.
- Provide training to department chairs, including offering fair consideration, recognizing bias or unfair circumstances, identifying barriers to students reporting and participation in class, preventing retaliation, and taking immediate steps to stop discriminatory conduct from continuing.

Supporting Faculty and Staff
Recommendations related to supporting faculty and staff:

- Students, faculty and staff recognize lack of diverse leadership within academic and administrative departments. Diversify University leadership.
- Hire more diverse faculty and staff.
- Perceptions that staff reductions and lack of stability within the reporting lines requiring frequent changes in institutional organization and new supervisors, creates significant hardships for staff loss of time spent acclimating, assimilating, and responding to evolving expectations. Make strategic decisions now that can account for and sustain leadership through transitions and provide organizational stability.
- Underrepresented students are searching out, finding, and calling upon University staff and faculty to provide support outside of roles and job responsibilities. It is evident students do not trust that University faculty and staff are prepared to handle the unique needs of diverse student groups. Invest in more training for all faculty and staff and more direct engagement between students and faculty across all units.
- Establish and use more effective grievance procedures to relieve stress on faculty and staff who are called on by students to advocate outside of their roles.
- Provide opportunities for staff and faculty serving underrepresented students to share feedback, identify barriers to student success, and help departments and individuals to recognize and deconstruct systems that perpetuate disparate outcomes.
- Invest in informal and formal mentorship relationship programs to sustain commitment to working with underrepresented students, despite challenges faced by faculty and staff working to support these students.

Supporting Sustaining Programs and Initiatives
Recommendations related to sustaining programs and initiatives:

- Engage in a strategic planning process to identify and account for all University programs, diversity initiatives and activities and programs designed to support underrepresented students.
- Develop long term goals including development of new programs, revisions to existing programs, and assessment of unmet needs.
- Establish clearly defined outcomes for each program and assess programs regularly to ensure goals are met.
- Coordinate programs and initiatives and engage more fully established committees in University Council, Faculty Senate, Undergraduate Student Government, Graduate Students, and the taskforce to make better use of organizational capacity of the entire community to affect change.
- Set aside funds that allow for internal micro-grant or micro-incentives to be deployed by the Vice President for Inclusion and Equity in support of program initiatives.
- Establish and recognize commitment within University community for participation and engagement with current programs. Call upon faculty, students and staff to serve, participate, and create an engaging environment through their participation in programs and activities.

- Reestablish the McNair Scholars program at the University. Identify and remove barriers underrepresented students face in applying to graduate and professional studies by taking actions such as waiving admissions application fees. Integrate the trio program with faculty and staff serving in mentorship roles for undergraduate students.
- Create meaningful incentives to engage faculty and academic departments in program development and collaborative partnerships.

Subcommittee Concluding Statement

There is significant disparity between the experiences of students related to race and social justice at the University. This was evident across the student body and also within groups of African American, Hispanic, and LGBT students. The subcommittee also witnessed similar disparities in faculty and staff awareness of student concerns. Every student, faculty and staff experience represent the experience of a unique individual with unique needs. Those students who were most engaged in our conversations, whose need to be heard was most evident, whose voices were most passionate, spoke most directly to the subcommittee. They indicated that for far too long their voices have been either ignored or marginalized by others who failed to listen. They asked the University to demonstrate commitment to race and social justice not through words, but through actions. Their voices echo the concerns raised by faculty and staff through multiple conversations and focus groups. Each perspective is unique, each voice independent, but the fundamental call was clear that we must attend to each student personally, as an individual, and with respect and consideration of their needs.

Appendix A – Focus Groups and Written Feedback

Derivations of the following questions were used during twelve focus groups conduct by the student success and retention focus groups:

1. What barriers do students of color or other underrepresented groups experience when using University services? Ideas for solutions?
2. What stops or gets in the way of your ability to intervene on behalf of a student of color or other underrepresented groups? How would you change that?
3. Share two or three things that you feel are done well to serve students of color, LGBTQ+, students with mental health illness etc.
4. Tell us about how you support students in crisis.
5. Tell us about how you support students with complaints or grievances.
6. Share two or three things that would help you to better serve the students.
7. Are there any policy changes that should be considered to make serving underrepresented groups easier?
8. Who are your key partners/relationships in your work with students of color or other underrepresented groups?
9. Tell us about training, what is available, what should be available, what is needed.
10. Are the students you work with represented in materials across campus?
11. In your experience, do you feel that there are areas on campus that constantly test students' perceptions of belonging (ie. UAPD, a particular professor, student housing…)
12. How is the University doing in helping minority groups on campus?

Focus groups were conducted with the following administrative departments or groups:

- Academic support and advising staff in the College of Engineering
- Counseling and Testing Center
- Cross section of experienced student affairs staff and administrators with at least 5-10 years tenure at the University
- Cross section of staff working directly with new students transitioning to the University (i.e. financial aid, orientation, student success, center for academic success, learning communities)
- Cross section of staff working to provide direct support of students following reports of distress (CARE team, Help A Zip, Dean of Students Office, Tutoring, Residence Life and Housing, etc.)
- Cross section of staff working to provide programs, activities and programs for currently enrolled students (ZPN, SRWC, Sorority and Fraternity Life, etc.)
- Health Services
- Office of Multicultural Development and Inclusion and Equity
- Student Athlete Advisory Committee
- Student Leaders (three separate meetings were convened)
- University of Akron Police Department

The same questions were used to solicit feedback from smaller groups of faculty and administrative staff when time constraints did not allow for meetings directly with the subcommittee.

Appendix B – Meeting Schedule

The student success and retention subcommittee met on these dates:

- August 11, 2020
- August 18, 2020
- September 1, 2020
- September 8, 2020
- September 15, 2020
- September 22, 2020
- September 29, 2020
- October 6, 2020
- October 13, 2020
- October 20, 2020
- October 27, 2020
- November 3, 2020

All meetings were convened using Microsoft Teams and occurred at 2pm on Tuesday afternoon.

Appendix C – Further Discussion of Findings

Discussion of Academic Advising

Cross Campus Meetings with Key Stakeholders and literature review have demonstrated the following: students have experienced stereotype threat, racial bias, and micro-aggressions through advising resulting in performance failures and lack of retention and, at the very least, a lack of comfort for the advisor; students and constituents that work with students feel that faculty and advisor responsiveness to student issues as they arise is poor (I.e. a better student tracking system and response time for identifying struggling students); students, advisors, and other constituents on campus feel that standardized testing for the placement of students into math coursework results in bias against students of color; students indicated that advisors focus on deficits in their performance instead of strengths and that response to student issues tend to be reactive rather than proactive. The lack of responsiveness has resulted in academic confusion and reduced student retention.

Next to faculty and classmate interactions, advising is the next greatest influence of student success for underrepresented students on campus. So, the importance of the authentic and meaningful interactions between advisors and students can eliminate barriers to student success.

A major area of concern is with testing of students and the direct bias that is associated with standardized testing and related remedial coursework as it pertains to people of color. Both advising, tutoring and counseling focus groups indicated a strong bias exists against students of color particularly as it relates to math placement testing at orientation and ACT/SAT test results. Students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, minorities, and women are victims of the inherent bias of standardized tests (Alon and Tienda, 2007). Additionally, we know that LatinX and African American students, when compared to Asians and Whites, typically average lower scores on their ACT or SAT exams (Fishkin, 1998; Sacks 2000). In fact, standardized tests do not measure qualities like motivation, imagination and curiosity (Alon and Tienda, 2007: 490) which are important for sustained learning and do not accurately predict academic success in college (Blau et al., 2004; Rotherstein, 2004). Despite these shortcomings, our institution relies on standardized tests for math placement and scholarships. As a result, students of color are more likely required to take remedial coursework in these areas. Nearly 20% of students who choose to attend a four-year institution are placed in remedial coursework and upon learning of their placement, decide never to take coursework (Complete College America, 2012). Therefore, this may be a major barrier to recruitment as well as retention. Nearly 39.1% of African American students and 20.6% of Hispanic students are placed into remedial coursework and only about 33% of those students will complete a degree in 6 years (Complete College America, 2012).

We find that taking co-requisite coursework that is culturally relevant for low test performers, may be an alternative approach to remedial coursework because it removes the stigma associated with remedial work. It also eliminates the stereotype threat associated with remedial courses which can increase the likelihood that a student will not succeed (Anderson, 2004), a stigma that can affect underrepresented students throughout their remaining academic career. This inherent bias has resulted in the recommendation that an advising plan should be developed which helps

advisors to address students if they achieve low test scores for placement. This plan will address common areas of underachievement in math, language and science, which were identified as the most common coursework requiring tutoring and will offer methods of assessment of students' strengths vs. their deficits without offending students and their abilities.   Advising initiatives often focus on the needs/deficits of students of color but should be more strength focused. Research shows that when advisors, faculty and staff help students become actively engaged and aware of their strengths, those students see higher retention to graduation rates (Soria & Taylor, 2016). It was recommended that advisors refrain from advising students on a career change (plan B) until after allowing students to exhibit success or failure in their first year.

Students have raised concerns about lack of response time from advisors and confusion about their advisor assignments particularly if they are serviced by more than one area on campus. Better communication between areas like Choose Ohio First and Office of Multicultural Development and other advising units could improve response times to students and eliminate escalation of student issues to crisis level.

Conducting focus groups across campus and a literature review, the Student Success Committee found that students of color, women, LGBTQ+ and other groups are under-supported by the current advising structure. Diversifying advisors is one solution, but cultural competencies can be developed through better training for advisors on topics such as micro-aggressions, LGBTQ+ issues, implicit bias, and racial history within the University setting, which would allow students to feel comfortable with any advisor and eliminate some biases. Provide training to advisors about implicit biases, appropriate phrasing of standard conversations and develop best practices for advisors so that they can better address individual needs in a way that reduces offensive behavior whether intentional or unintentional.

Reduce advisor person-load so that as standard practice, advisors can have time to respond quickly to students and provide follow up e-mails or other contact after they have met with a student to guarantee that student walks away with highlights of the meeting and an attitude that they are cared for. Some schools have demonstrated that responsive advising (including multiple methods of connecting-text, virtual meeting, in person and high level student tracking systems), which requires that advisors respond quickly upon receiving an alert of a student's poor exam grade or failure to enroll in classes, help first generation students who are struggling to navigate the University more effectively (Banks & Dohy, 2019). The immediate assistance of advisors and their frequent follow-ups with struggling students leads to better retention results. Within our current advising structure, in the Office of Multicultural Affairs and other advising units, the ability to provide this optimum service is affected by the lack of human resources.   Extra layers of support and personnel, like those available for honors students or OARS students, could produce higher levels of retention.

Discussion of Climate Assessment
Review of available data revealed that two climate assessments were conducted once in 2008 and again in 2015. An additional assessment by faculty (Tiger Team), which resulted in recommendations to improve retention, persistence and graduation, was performed in 2019. The available data demonstrates an institutional deficiency in the use of assessment to better

understand the experiences of students related to race and social justice. The reports indicated areas of strength and weakness that differed from the experiences of students shared to this committee during the 2020 Fall Semester. One assessment included findings and recommendations for additional courses of study, from which no action was taken. The reports and assessments were not widely distributed or used within the University apart from those who conducted the survey. Demonstrating sustained commitment to the needs of diverse and underrepresented students requires engaging the campus community regularly and routinely with data that provides a better understanding of the experiences of students.

Those universities with the most tolerance for diversity have also been shown to be the most innovative (Siegel and Kammerer, 1978).   But, to determine whether UA's culture, practices and procedures favor diversity and inclusion, it is the recommendation of the committee after speaking with all focus groups, that a Climate Assessment be conducted immediately to establish a baseline of accountability for University units seeking to improve their culture of tolerance. This is especially important since the last Climate Assessment occurred in 2015, and prior to that in 2006. These assessments, in light of recent tragic events, no longer accurately paint a relevant picture of the current feelings of belonging or otherwise that underrepresented students, faculty, staff, alumni and community members hold. Our assessment must identify the practices, processes, routines and methods that constituents experience (i.e. how do minority students access advisors, what is our RTP process), assess the status of the University's responses to these routines (e.g. how long does it take to receive an advisor's response, how long does it take for minority faculty to promote vs. other groups), and use assessment results to make changes to the University's process if necessary (Yeo, 2006).

Climate Assessments must be ongoing to provide data by which the diversity efforts can be measured to the baseline assessment across campus units. By transparently providing "scorecards" in terms of both qualitative and quantitative results to campus units, we are able to measure the efficacy of the campus efforts to improve the cultural tolerance across the campus and continuously improve the campus environment, while holding campus units accountable for creating a truly inclusive campus.   Assessments should be done at a frequency that would accurately measure campus improvements (every 4-6 years).

Discussion of Community Engagement and Committee Work
Recently, the President has called for a committee to investigate Racial Equality and Social Justice issues across campus. Our research has examined these issues across campus with a variety of stakeholders. From those discussions, we strongly recommend that a diversity committee be convened which includes representation across races, ethnic groups, gender orientations, sex, faith, disability and age. This committee will continue to discuss campus issues with policy and build a unified campus body to assess policy and procedures regularly. It will also share diversity issues and concerns, and formulate recommendations for improvement, which will include developing a scorecard on diversity to measure success across the campus units.

In benchmarking, it was found that most universities of our size and composition have a campus wide diversity committee that builds and maintains cultural competency. This committee serves the interest of students and employees.

University Rule 3359-38-01 6 © already states that The University of Akron shall maintain an Affirmative Action commission, which shall serve as a continuing review panel on the status of protected class members of the University. The Affirmative Action commission shall be appointed by the President annually and shall include adequate representation of teaching personnel, administrative personnel, civil service personnel, and students at the graduate, professional, and undergraduate levels. The president shall insure that minorities, disabled persons, women, and part-time personnel are represented on the commission. The activities of this commission shall be supported by the Affirmative Action/Equal Employment Opportunity director and staff. The activities of this commission include but are not limited to:

(a) Annual review of the Affirmative Action plan and publication of the results of such review,

(b) Hearing and investigating grievances, complaints, and allegations of violations of the plan and recommending remedies thereto,

(c) Making recommendations to university persons with personnel authority through the Affirmative Action/Equal Employment Opportunity director regarding individual relief, implementation, enforcement, and improvement of the plan.

We recommend extending the duties of this committee to include the assessment of policy and procedures related to issues of racial equality and social justice, to update and maintain a public university scorecard or dashboard of assessment on diversity and inclusion efforts and to provide guidance on policy and diversity efforts to diversity committees at the college level indefinitely.

Discussion of Diversity Center
Cross Campus Meetings with Key Stakeholders and literature review and benchmarking have demonstrated students from underrepresented groups (i.e. LGBTQ+, African American, LatinX, religious, international, disabled students and women's groups) need a place to feel that they belong and are visible. Through focus groups in advising, counseling, admissions, student support and student activities groups, as well as orientation, the conclusion was reached that the current Office of Multicultural Development, while serving a mission at the most organic level, should develop more programming for the wider population of underrepresented students. However, for a variety of reasons including lack of human resources and reduced financial resources, the office is not able to maintain such a broad effort. Suggestions from focus groups recommend a need for enhanced and sustained programming that supports Hispanic History, Black History and Women's History Months, and Gay Pride, including efforts to establish our Campus Pride Index. This would also include a centralized and culturally inclusive website (available in multiple languages) that incorporates all activities in one location for students, a physical office location in the Student Union or other visible location on campus, and support of student activism.

A lack of campus-wide support for international students was commonly expressed by many focus groups. These groups felt that the students are strongly supported by UA's international office but underserved by other areas across campus. This committee recommends that international students undergo additional workshops or events with campus police outside of orientation to help them develop a better understanding of the role that police play in the U.S. (e.g bribery, deportation) and clearer communication of how students can be helped by police (e.g. police only talk to international students during orientation when a strong language barrier exists). We also suggest that food choices that are more culturally authentic be derived when students gather for special international events. If these foods are not available, barriers should be removed that prevent students from preparing their own culturally relevant foods when celebrating holidays such as Diwali, etc. Finally, the health insurance program for international students is difficult to understand and often requires additional guidance from health services professionals when treatment is provided. Additional resources should be considered to help in this area.

A Diversity or Multicultural Center is believed to offer students of various communities a place to connect with other students to share their experiences, culture, preferences, and promote a sense of belonging among underrepresented groups on campus. Conducting focus groups across campus, a literature review and thorough benchmarking of peer institutions, the Student Success Committee has found that students of color, women, LGBTQ+ and other groups are under-supported when compared to sister institutions. The suggestion to create centralized programming hub like a Diversity Center to house African American, LatinX, LGBTQ+, religious, international students, disabled students, and women's groups, was a common finding across most information gathering and focus group efforts.   Benchmarking of peer institutions suggests that Diversity or Multicultural Centers exist in 11 of 12 similar institutions. It has been reported in Mitigating Barriers to Persistence: A review of Efforts to Improve Retention and Graduation Rates for Students of Color in Higher Education, that "Students of color that attend schools that are predominately White with predominately White faculty body experiences of institutional, implicit and blatant racism, resulting in feelings of isolation and disengagement" (Banks & Dohy, Higher Education Studies, 2019). Success for African American students, particularly men attending institutions of higher learning in an urban setting, is highest when a strengths-based approach is used rather than a deficit remediation model. Part of the strengths-based solution, which includes having close relationships with peers of the same race in order to share experiences and to mediate against overt racism (Strayhorn, 2017), can also lead to a reduction of opportunity gaps that currently exist between African American students and their White cohort. Having the ability to meet with other students of the same race, has been shown, in a study by Brooms (2018), to increase feelings of belonging and correlates strongly with engagement and retention rates. Opportunities for improved access to resources and mentors, other institutional leaders and greater understanding of the academic support resources, led to increased academic motivation (Brooms, 2018). Inclusiveness is fostered by sponsoring varied culturally enhanced programming and funding multicultural centers, offering programs where a safe dialogue is the norm and exists to explore other cultural groups and celebrations of diverse events (Smith 2014).   It has been shown that students who have a secure place to vent their frustrations about instances of implicit bias and their racial insecurities within their own

homogeneous peer groups, do experience increased retention and graduation rates when this safe space is available as it increases their sense of belonging (Blake and Moore, 2004). Blake and Moore further suggest that feelings of isolation increase the chances that a student will not succeed at the institution and that racial tension can serve as a launching point for these feelings in the marginalized populations on campus. As a result, of this evidence, we strongly believe that a Diversity Center should be developed that focusses on the direct needs of minority students, LGBTQ+, religious, disabled students and women. Leadership of this center should be directed from a cabinet level position.

Discussion of LGBT Student Support
The needs and support for the LGBT community on campus are not being met. After meeting with a very diverse group of students on multiple occasions several examples were given that demonstrate the need for a better support structure for this segment of our community. The lack of acknowledgment for recognized LGBT groups on campus makes it difficult for new students or students who want to associate themselves with this community to find them and join their organizations. Very cumbersome and difficult procedures also make it difficult for this group to use and be identified by their preferred names and pronouns. There is a lack of staff designated to help address the needs of the LGBT community and a feeling of disconnect from the Office of Multi-Cultural Development. There is also a general sense that the University only communicates in response to crisis involving this group and offers little communication that is celebratory and supporting in nature.

Several initiatives can be incorporated immediately to reduce the minority stress associated with LGBTU membership. LGBTU students have indicated a need to improve campus wide culture by assessing our campus culture and seeking membership with the Campus Pride Index. Aligned with this recommendation is a need to include LGBTU in university branding and to provide staff in a central location that is dedicated to the LGBTU student population. This staff member should be experienced with LGBTU issues and willing to assist students with information necessary to their immediate needs (e.g. how to ask for a name change and which LGBTU groups campus organizations to join). Students have indicated that there is a need for a more robust system in place to address the issue of preferred name.

A report by Budge, Dominquez and Goldberg called "Minority Stress in Non-binary Students in Higher Education: The Role of Campus Climate and Belongingness" suggests that higher learning environments need to focus on non-binary students and their needs to reduce minority stress outcomes (i.e. suicide, depression). In particular, it is strongly recommended that training should be provided to all constituents on campus which focuses on micro-aggressions commonly exhibited towards non-binary students and suggests that faculty and staff should move away from the use of pronoun options and gender examples that are only binary in nature in the classroom setting (Budge et al., 2020). The report further suggests that departments, health services and other student service areas across campus should post inclusive and visible information showing support of the LGBTU community in order to increase the sense of belonging and reduce minority stress thereby improving retention (Budge et al., 2020). Our health services focus group indicated the need for a single contact through which they could

distribute much needed health service information to the LGBTU community but also indicated a need for a better understanding of the needs of the transsexual community. The LGBTU student representatives also indicated the need for faster dissemination of crucial information, particularly during crisis (i.e. transgender person's body found shot on near campus). These needs combined with research, support the following: (a) necessity for increased training on the issues within the LGBTU community across campus constituencies; (b) improving knowledge for all constituents on campus regarding issues like use of pronouns; (c) establishing gender neutral classrooms and facilities; (d) providing best practices for sororities and fraternities when working with LGBTU and especially trans-members; (e) maintain assessments for Campuspride.org; (f) supporting our recommendation for a center dedicated to LGBTU community center which would be housed within a larger Diversity/Multicultural Center.

Discussion of Strategic Communication
Cultural competency across campus requires that the exchange of information take place across the higher education institution (Engberg; Smith) around areas of diversity, inclusion, equity, and social justice. The dissemination must be intentional and across all campus units using formats such as meetings, virtual meetings, open forums and workshops that occur regularly and promote open and honest dialogue. The communication may also be in written form such as newsletters, video, through social media or e-mails, and be distributed in a structured environment to ensure that all constituents, faculty, students and staff are informed in a timely fashion. Having an effective communication plan, organized by one central office, will reduce uncertainty, fear and improve transparency in the institution as well as enhance trust among underrepresented groups, faculty and staff alike. In addition to creating communication about diversity and inclusion programming, communication must also include data about diversity and inclusion for constituents across campus. This communication must be centered in accuracy so data which includes sex, ethnicity, age, citizenship, gender preference, disability and race must continue to be generated by institutional research for dissemination to outlets used to communicate to the community and beyond. For communication generated at the time of crisis, it is important to have an agile communication plan that can disseminate information quickly. Collection of data must occur at regular intervals (minimum yearly) and the communication plan must be reviewed and updated yearly (at minimum) to accommodate changes to personnel or university structure.

Discussion of Student Grievances
Meetings with student groups and other UA community members have demonstrated a need for better communication across campus in order to provide supports for students. A repeated theme is the concern that underrepresented populations of students do not feel connected to the University. As the Tiger Team recommended in 2019, the feeling of belonging can easily be created by just one person on campus but that "the entire university community commit itself to promoting quality interaction between the faculty and our students as well as making sure that the students are fully engaged with the University's environment throughout their academic careers" (Tudor et al., 2019). Underrepresented students often experience dismissal to grievances they bring forward as an example of an uncaring institution unwilling to help.

The University Rule 3359-11-13 was recently revised. Previously, the rule was an exclusively sexual harassment policy prohibiting sexual harassment; however, after revisions, it is now an anti-discrimination and harassment policy. Grievances specifically related to race, color, religion, sexual orientation, age, national or ethnic origin, disability, military status, genetic information or status as a veteran are now clearly prohibited by University policy. Even so, reports of discriminatory conduct are routinely managed by academic and administrative departments across the University without consultation or reporting to Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action. With no systematic approach to tracking and accounting for such grievances, it is unclear how often they occur and what collective impact our students, faculty and staff face.

By contrast, Title IX and Gender Based Misconduct Procedures and Policy, allow for clearly delineated procedures and support for students, faculty and staff. A Dean of Students Office report of cases of Gender Based Misconduct in 2018-2019 revealed that 158 reports of gender-based misconduct (sexual assault, sexual harassment, dating violence, stalking, domestic violence, sexual exploitation, retaliation, indecent exposure) were received. From those reports, 97 complainants elected to meet with a University representative and following those meetings, 17 formal complaints were submitted requiring formal investigations. The report demonstrates investigating formal complaints is an important part of an integrated University response to discrimination but account for only a small portion of all of the services provided and actions taken to stop and prevent discriminatory conduct related to sex and gender. No parallel system or supports have been established to track or respond to discrimination other than the Title IX and Gender Based Misconduct Policy and Protocol.

Without a clearly defined process, questions abound within the community concerning how to address reported behavior. Faculty and staff with question questions consult with different leaders across campus resulting in confusion and inefficient overlapping efforts to respond. Unresolved questions the subcommittee discussed include:

1. Where should student grievances related to protected classes (other than Title IX) be directed? Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action, Dean of Students, Inclusive Excellence, Student Affairs, Academic Deans, etc.?
2. When students have a grievance what steps should be taken to stop the reported conduct, mitigate the impact of discrimination, ensure for safety and security of the parties, and prohibit retaliation?
3. How are reports of discriminatory conduct tracked and recorded? How prevalent are these behaviors?
4. Are faculty and staff able to recognize discriminatory conduct when students do not directly accuse or make formal complaints? What responsibility do faculty and staff have in reporting and addressing micro-aggressions?
5. If faculty and staff become aware of discriminator conduct within their departments can they manage the concerns directly without reporting? If so, how should faculty or staff approach a student with a concern? How do faculty and administrative staff manage conflicts of interest when supervisors or department leadership are reported to be responsible for prohibited conduct?

Appendix D – Bibliography

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