



March 26, 2016

TO: CESS Faculty, Staff, and Students

FR: Scott L. Thomas, Dean

RE: Update on activity related to diversity and inclusion in CESS

I write with an update on recent and ongoing activity related to diversity and inclusion within the College. Over the past 18 months, we have gone to great lengths to listen, learn, and take actions to move us closer to the ideals of our mission and vision in the College.

On Monday, February 26, I committed the College to five significant actions intended to address an array of pressing concerns related to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

1. We will require faculty training for courses meeting UVM's diversity requirement.
2. We are enhancing staffing for diversity efforts in the College.
3. We are continuing to heighten efforts toward the recruitment and retention of faculty from underrepresented backgrounds.
4. We will provide annual, College-wide diversity & inclusion focused professional development opportunities for faculty and staff.
5. We will be incorporating explicit diversity & inclusion criteria into annual evaluations for faculty and staff within the College.

It is important to recognize these commitments rest on a foundation of deliberate, collective work we have engaged in over the last 18 months. Since that [February 26 memo](#) outlining the five actions above, I have continued to work with faculty and staff within the College to specify a series of steps to bring these commitments to life. What is clear is that we recognize the need to continue to work through our existing faculty governance and college decision making structures to ensure we achieve the deliberate and sustainable action that issues of this importance require.

Our College's commitments to diversity and inclusion are longstanding. More than 10 years ago, our college formed the faculty Committee for Diversity Initiatives to lead efforts to address inequities and promote social justice across our programs. Duties of the faculty Committee for Diversity and Inclusion cover a number of issues directly related to the commitment we made on February 26. The [faculty by-laws in CESS](#) stipulate that the committee "dialogue regularly with faculty about issues of bias and discrimination; promote accountability in meeting diversity objectives; inspire instructional initiatives across the units to develop programs to address bias, develop multicultural competence, and assess curricular and candidate outcomes; advance our mutual learning and professional development on diversity-related matters; and advocate for the recruitment and retention of diverse faculty, staff and students." This committee has benefited from the extraordinary leadership of the College's leading experts on diversity, inclusion, and a host of related topics.

In the past 18 months, we have, as a College, recommitted to issues of diversity and inclusion as core tenets of our mission and strategic vision. Last year we offered a full-throated reaffirmation of our commitment to the College's mission and articulated a five-year plan to guide our commitments and resources through 2022. During the current academic year, we have initiated an array of strategic actions central to our mission and vision. Among these is a significant commitment of time and resources to promoting diversity and inclusion, values central to our College's identity.

Last summer we took a number of important steps toward this commitment on the part of faculty, staff, and students in the College. In July we added a new "Assistant Director for Diversity, Retention, and Student Services" to create capacity aimed directly at issues of diversity and inclusion among our student body. In August of 2017, we set the stage by inviting renowned diversity scholar Daryl Smith to campus to guide us in the establishment of a blueprint for updating the College's diversity plan to align with our College's strategic vision and direction. All faculty and staff in the College were provided with a copy of Dr. Smith's highly-regarded "Diversity's Promise for Higher Education", chapters of which formed the basis for a series of focus groups and interviews of faculty, staff, and students within the college, deans of other colleges, and senior administrators of the University.

This year we formed the CESS Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Action Committee, a College-wide group charged with the development and eventual maintenance of the College's updated Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan. This group is comprised of faculty, staff, and students from across the College with additional support from faculty serving as outside advisors to the Committee. The group is designed to complement the faculty-led activity of the CDI. Among the issues within the domain of this Strategic Action Committee are recruitment and retention (faculty, staff, and students) and professional development to raise awareness and sensitivity to the core value of diversity within our College. These are issues that sit at the heart of our College's identity.

At the beginning of this year, we established an annual College lecture devoted specifically to issues of diversity and inclusion in higher education. This year's lecturer is Jeff Milem from UC Santa Barbara, and we have incorporated his talk into the 2018 Blackboard Jungle. The Blackboard Jungle Symposium is designed to support UVM faculty, staff, and all others seeking to develop skills, knowledge, and a deeper understanding of diversity that supports excellence in teaching, service, and research. The symposium sessions are dedicated to creating "open spaces" where all members of our community can participate in authentic dialogue, valued reflection, and expanded learning to promote inclusive excellence for all. A tradition in the College is to cover all fees for any member of the CESS faculty or staff who wish to attend each year, and I was heartened to see so many of us in attendance last week.

We also have made time for listening and sharing within our college. On a monthly basis, I host an informal "First-Tuesday" brown-bag (with food provided) discussions for the faculty and staff in the College to discuss ideas for grassroots activity to promote interests in diversity and inclusion. On March 1, we held a CESS Community Gathering in the Ira Allen Chapel to come together and share our concerns and hopes moving forward. Working with the Faculty Executive Committee, we sponsor an annual day of professional development for faculty and staff to help us better understand issues related to implicit bias and the power of cultural diversity.

The above is only a sampling of activity breathing life into our expressed commitment to diversity and inclusion in the College. There is a great deal of intentional activity happening within our departments and at the program level as well. And we also provide roughly \$20,000 of support annually to various diversity-related activities, many within the College and others hosted by offices and organizations across campus.

Despite the considerable work and commitment of resources outlined above, our actions have not insulated the College or the University from continued episodes of racial bias and hurtful actions that are inconsistent with our core values. As a matter of respect and dignity for all of us in our College community, and we will continue to strive to get it right. I hope that each of you will continue to work with me toward this end.