

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION REPORT



WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY
Office for Sustainability

Introduction

Since its founding in 2010, the mission of Western Michigan University's (WMU) Office for Sustainability (OfS) has been centered around "building a diverse and flourishing learning community around sustainability... [to] improve [the] quality of life for all." A myriad of OfS jobs, internships, research projects, and initiatives provide opportunities for students, faculty, staff, and volunteers to explore this commitment in meaningful and impactful ways.

The OfS has developed a Diversity & Inclusion (D & I) initiative to strengthen these core commitments. Throughout this process, we have been exploring ways to focus on the inclusivity, equity, and diversity of our office environment, and how essential dedication to these values is in successfully pursuing a sustainable future. By developing new connections among the community, education and social systems, and quality of life the OfS will advance its efforts to create a workplace culture that is safe, accessible, and inclusive. We have made it a priority to restructure internal and external communications that foster collaboration among a diverse group of students, employees, volunteers, and community partners. We have also developed aspects of our work to expand our office's capacity for cross-cultural understanding and inclusive practices that support all our employees fully. Through ongoing assessment, reflection, and refinement processes, we are working to increase awareness and action around the role of D & I in meeting our collective sustainability goals. This Diversity and Inclusion Report provides an overview of the preliminary processes we have implemented so far and an outline of our vision for continuing this work in the future. This D & I Report, coupled with our 2019 -2020 D & I Action Plan, will serve as living documents to be reviewed and edited as necessary moving forward.

Framework Development

During the summer of 2016, a D & I team was formed to research D & I in institutional contexts. This research, led by Internship Coordinator Laura Donders, focused on examining strategies similar institutions and other campus organizations have used to improve workplace accessibility and reduce workplace barriers. This foundational D & I literature includes the WMU Diversity & Multicultural Plan (2006), Portland State's Diversity Action Plan (2012), Virginia Tech's Diversity Strategic Plan (2013), Dr. Dorceta E. Taylor's State of Diversity in Environmental Organizations Report (2014), and the University of Oregon's Diversity Framework (2016). These documents provided a significant base of recommendations and strategies to inform our effort to advance D & I in the workplace.

To develop a common understanding of D & I terms, commitments, and practices at WMU and other local institutions, Donders interviewed eight different community partners engaged and experienced in established D & I work. These community partners included directors and coordinators of WMU LGBT Student Services, Urban Outreach at the Kalamazoo Nature Center, WMU First-Year Experience Programs, Diversity & Inclusion at Bronson Hospital, Community Relations with the Kalamazoo Promise, the Kalamazoo Community Foundation, the Kalamazoo College Arcus Center for Social Justice, and the Mayor of Kalamazoo. Community partners were asked a series of interview questions to provide a basic conceptual

understanding of how D & I are perceived and addressed in different workplace settings. They were asked about successful examples, misconceptions, challenges, and measurements to inform and ensure the effectiveness of the OfS's D & I plans going forward. Although these interviews were structured around specific questions, they typically expanded into larger conversations about the inner-workings of D & I and potential opportunities for collaboration around the intersections of our work.

A set of key themes and findings were collected from both the community partner interviews and literature review:

Community Partner Themes

- Diversity is a core indicator of successful and effective organizations.
- Recognizing and honoring differences is integral to developing effective communication.
- D & I are separate yet intertwined concepts.
- D & I progress rests on developing a common language and defining terms.
- Effective approaches to D & I incorporate meaningful, long-term commitments, which are directed at shifting cultures and mindsets, instead of producing short-term diversity statistics.
- University settings serve as a hub and catalyst for advancing D & I.

Literature Review Themes

- “Diversity statements without a plan and rigorous data collection are just words on paper” (Taylor).
- College campuses have a unique opportunity and responsibility to prioritize and advance D & I.
- Every level of communication should be reviewed to identify and address implicit bias and exclusionary practices.
- D & I efforts should be collaborative, ongoing, and integrated into existing activities and responsibilities.
- D & I must be foregrounded in all recruitment, hiring, and retention procedures.

Based on these key themes, we found it necessary to process these topics with all of the OfS staff before launching into large-scale action. Coming to a collective understanding of D & I was central to our framework development process at the OfS. Much of the D & I literature and many of the community partners interviewed suggested that defining D & I should be a fundamental component of our initiative. Through our framework development process, we have come to recognize D & I as separate but intertwined concepts that have different contextual relevance from setting to setting. With this in mind, we decided that it was best to define D & I collaboratively as an office so that everyone had the opportunity to help clarify these terms and what they mean to us. Recognizing that the prioritization of D & I pursuits is a continual practice and that these definitions have the potential to improve in the future, we decided to treat them as “working” definitions that can be revised over time.

At an all-staff meeting, employees and interns participated in a twenty-minute workshop where Donders presented the key framework development findings, facilitated discussion about the significance of the OfS mission statement in our jobs, and prompted staff members to interpret

what they felt the two terms meant in small group discussions. At the end of this twenty-minute session, the group reconvened and the small groups delivered the core concepts of their definitions to Donders who subsequently synthesized them into the first draft of our working D & I definitions.

After the definition workshop, a D & I subcommittee was formed consisting of about fifteen OfS employees in student research, leadership, and internship positions. The subcommittee met three times to improve the D & I working definitions and discuss next steps in our process. After three iterations, the subcommittee felt that they successfully reflected participants' contributions and the OfS mission:

Diversity: the presence of a wide range of individual & group differences (i.e. race; sex; gender identity; ethnicity; socioeconomic status; physical & mental condition; personality traits; age; experience; perspective; educational background; nationality; sexual orientation; and religious, political, or other sociocultural affiliations) and the intersections of these differences that contribute towards improving quality of life for all.

Inclusion: actively working to create a learning community in which equity is cultivated, everyone feels represented and upheld, and diversity flourishes.

Action Plan

After careful observation and feedback, the action plan has been updated to reflect on the current and future changes for diversity and inclusion at the Office for Sustainability. Throughout the 2025-2026 academic school year, this action plan houses an outline of the expectations and standards that we aim to meet throughout the year. Within this plan there are three main goals that each have their own set of action items. These include:

1. **Deepen the understanding of diversity and inclusion throughout the Sustainability Office and incorporate it into the regular office functions and operations.**
 - 1.1 Accessible materials for all members of the office which allows for internal promotion and includes but is not limited to the action plan, report, and foundational materials.
 - 1.2 All initiative materials are externally accessible on the Office for Sustainability website.
 - 1.3 Require supervisors to discuss the role of D & I with their team members at the beginning of each school year during training or the onboarding process.
 - 1.4 Complete an all-staff diversity education workshop early in the 2025-26 academic year to build office-wide aptitude in institutional D & I practices. This workshop will serve as a foundation to be built upon every following year through participating in other diversity workshops about specific topics and issues. All new hires will be required to complete an introductory diversity education lesson upon onboarding.
 - 1.5 Build budget and time for an annual training or workshop to address specific D & I topics, concerns, barriers, or challenges (ex. Implicit bias, antiracism, LGBTQ+ inclusivity, microaggressions, decolonization, accessibility for persons with disabilities, ageism, etc.).
 - 1.6 Devote time at all-staff meetings in each semester to review program goals, expectations, and reality of D & I topics and the Action Plan items.
 - 1.7 Work with WMU University Relations to better align all web content with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG).
 - 1.8 Annually check WCAG to keep content up to standard.
 - 1.9 Create a discussion guide with noteworthy questions, topics, and information for supervisors and project members to reference during D & I conversations. These conversations will be facilitated at the designated all-staff meetings as mentioned above, although one-on-one conversations around D & I are encouraged to take place at any point in time.

2. Review the communication policies and practices, both internal and external, that involve recruitment, hiring, and collaboration.

- 2.1** Examine implicit bias and offer implicit bias tests within the office on a yearly basis. Employees involved in communications, recruitment, and hiring processes will be required to take implicit bias tests and review results before engaging in any interactive events.
- 2.2** Update and revise recruitment and hiring guidelines based on well-researched and accredited resources to improve our current practices.
- 2.3** Review current recruitment and hiring policies and procedures to align them with the updated guidelines document. Job descriptions and all other recruitment and outreach materials will be reviewed and re-written as necessary to reflect the OfS's commitment to creating a more diverse and inclusive workplace.
- 2.4** Apply the same approach used to revise recruitment and hiring practices to review and revise job orientation and training materials.
- 2.5 Account for past and present target outreach patterns and identify institutions, populations, and organizations that have been overlooked in the past. Continually work toward building new relationships with these entities appropriately. Implement this process as an ongoing strategy.

3. Create an integral system that tracks the progress of diversity and inclusion while allowing for the promotion of healthy communication and shared responsibility amongst every member of the team.

- 3.1** D & I team members will create an annual D & I update and Action Plan that will be posted on the OfS website and distributed to all staff members by the beginning of April each year with suggestions and implementations for the upcoming school year.
- 3.2** Create an assessment to measure perceived levels of success pertaining to each Action Plan item. The assessment will be delivered to all OfS staff members at the end of each school year.
- 3.3** Build implementation and oversight of annual D & I Action Plan and assessment into regular Leadership Team meeting agendas.
- 3.4** Devote the agendas of the first all-staff meetings in December and April to open discussion and reflection on the past semester's operations at the OfS. This open discussion time is intended for staff members at all levels to share opinions on general office workings, successes, and areas for improvement. These may or may not be specifically related to D & I topics but is intended to create an avenue for open communication, transparency, and multi-level accountability.
- 3.5** Create a new section within onboarding materials notifying employees of existing WMU policies for external support, safety, and problem-solving resources should any conflicts, issues, or concerns escalate beyond the capacity of internal assistance. Inform staff about these resources and where to find them at the beginning of each year and during the onboarding process.

The OfS D & I Action Plan will be shared with office members at an all-staff meeting at the end of each semester. This will give all OfS employees the opportunity to review and discuss the OfS's D & I goals for the upcoming semester and our roles in meeting these objectives. D & I is a shared responsibility. Through effective implementation of the Action Plan, modeling of our collective D & I commitments, and reporting on our progress transparently, all employees will incorporate D & I into their daily work and responsibilities.

Conclusion

Working in a supportive environment where differences are celebrated is a form of empowerment. Creating such an environment is crucial to both carrying out our mission and creating a healthy and productive work environment that fosters the development of sustainability leaders. D & I should intersect every level of the work we do, be it recruitment, conducting research, or collaborating with the community. Through this D & I initiative, the OfS hopes to empower its employees to build more resilient and productive relationships both internally and externally. We recognize that D & I work — like our broader sustainability mission — is both ongoing and likely has no ending point. Through our Action Plan, we are committing ourselves to this long-term work to advance our mission to improve the quality of life for all in a more intentional and impactful way.

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