

## **Background**

The Diversity and Equity Advisory Board was formed in 2015 to serve as an advisory group to the President of the College and the Cabinet on all matters related to diversity and equity regarding faculty and staff. The Board expands the work of the former Minority Concerns Committee, Women's Concerns Committee, and ADA/504 Advisory Board. The Board takes an intersectional approach regarding matters related to race and ethnicity; gender, sex, and sexual orientation; disability; and other identities.

As stated on DEAB's 21-22 annual report, DEAB views its goals as to: "A) to provide DEI perspective to various committees and taskforces, B) to recognize and support the DEI issues that are brewing, C) to direct issues and interact with appropriate offices, and D) to improve recognition of various identities/issues that are not represented elsewhere."

## **DEAB Charges for 2022-23**

**Charge 1:** *"The Diversity Equity Advisory Board (DEAB) is asked to undertake an inventory of campus buildings and spaces that operate with an ADEI lens to determine the facilitation of diversity and equity within the college itself and to promote a sense of physical inclusivity on campus. This facilitation should include considerations of accessibility – both for students with disabilities and in a design sense, particularly furniture arrangement – and a sense of belonging, including representation (or lack of representation) in artwork".*

- The members of DEAB reviewed the charge during Blocks 1 and 2. We gathered information regarding similar reviews at other institutions and used that information to develop a rubric to evaluate spaces on campus from a physical, cognitive and cultural inclusivity lens. During Block 3, members of DEAB, either individually or in teams, evaluated some spaces on campus, representing academic buildings, large community spaces and administrative buildings. In Block 4, the team discussed the evaluation process, identifying strengths and challenges of the rubric and the difficulty of norming the use of the rubric given our different perspectives and experiences with the spaces we walked.
- In piloting the use of the rubric we identified the following challenges:
  - The number of spaces on campus that should be reviewed is large. The membership of DEAB was significantly diminished on the staff side throughout the year, diminishing our collective capacity.
  - Our collective perspectives are limited by our personal use (or lack thereof) of any given space; it will miss key concerns of those who use the space routinely.
  - We will be stepping into spaces that people care deeply about and are likely to be seen as critical of their choices.
- With those challenges in mind, we proposed that we empower the campus community, faculty, staff and students, to utilize the rubric to collaborate with DEAB in the evaluation process, specifically in their own spaces.
- In December 2022, DEAB shared a mid-term report with the President's Office. The response the co-chairs received indicated that that charge was meant to be a quick audit of all commonly used spaces on campus to identify those that were welcoming to all individuals, and that we had made the project more complicated than was necessary. DEAB was asked to revisit the charge

and walk the campus to identify buildings that were welcoming (and to whom) and those that weren't.

- DEAB members noted that we have put in the time and work needed to develop and pilot an assessment tool from a physical, cognitive and cultural inclusivity lens and in the absence of an inclusive analysis, the task remains at a personal preference level. It is important to note that DEAB membership includes Deans Phagen, Rodriguez, and Hope who provided feedback and insight into this work. The members of DEAB felt strongly that the rubric was a well-researched and a constructive tool and that might be useful in collecting data on space inclusivity when the college is ready to use data to improve spaces.

During our piloting of the rubric, DEAB members analyzed several commonly used spaces and found certain themes that are prevalent at the college:

- There is a lack of signage related to accessibility resources, including what offices are in various buildings.
- There are no resources available to determine the technology resources that are available in any given space (along with information on how to use it) especially for those with disability related needs – elevators, sound accommodations, etc. The general acoustics of most common areas need attention.
- We found artwork to be problematic in most spaces – it was outdated, not relevant (for example, pictures of birds in the student center), and not representative of multiple perspectives or cultures. Often, it was non-existent thus, making spaces feel empty and cold. We believe that student voices and presence should be elevated – for example, by sharing student (or faculty/staff) artwork throughout all spaces, using art borrowing programs in collaboration with FAC or creating prints from the archive of photos from Communications database. A greater presence of our diverse student body should be represented in the artwork. All the specific spaces discussed below should incorporate appropriate artwork.
- In many spaces, the choice of furniture was not intentional. Size and disability inclusive seating were not intentionally considered.
- We were asked to examine large common spaces during our December conversations. All the thoughts expressed above apply to these buildings. Some specific thoughts regarding inclusivity in specific spaces are as follows:
  - Cornerstone Arts Building: it is a very large building that lacks signage regarding what is in the building and where. One tends to feel overwhelmed in this space.
  - Armstrong Hall: the external doors are extremely heavy; there is lack of signage regarding which departments exist in this building and where along with the classrooms.
  - Shove-Common Grounds: This is a beautiful and inclusive space in many ways but it is not physically accessible to all individuals.
  - Worner Student Center: Offices in this building should be student-centered. Students should be included in thinking about how it will be used.

*Charge 2. "In addition, the DEAB is also asked to consult with Lyrae Williams, Associate Vice President for Institutional Planning & Effectiveness, to disseminate and promote the LACRELA climate survey. The board is encouraged to coordinate Brown Bag Discussions around the student and staff survey results".*

- This charge was not fulfilled due to timing and change in process. Deans Phagen, Rodriguez and Hope advised DEAB that the results were not going to be shared until adequate data analysis was completed. Once the data was analyzed, the ADEI team decided on a different process to share the results and engage in dialogue.

*Charge 3. Finally, as the ADEI team has assumed the advisory role DEAB originally filled, and because we continue to decrease redundancies in positions, processes, and practices across campus, please consider these questions: what function does DEAB serve that is distinct from the work of the ADEI team and the ACC? Would DEAB members be more useful, and benefit more from being on other campus committees that leverage members' skills and expertise?*

### **Proposed Changes to DEAB**

**Justification for Changing DEAB.** Diversity and Equity Advisory Board was imagined as a space where several different committees could be combined (Minority Concerns, Women's Concerns, and ADA) to provide a more unified perspective on DEI issues. The composition of this advisory group reflected need for DEI work in all areas of college life, from human resources to faculty and staff issues. The DEI-related data collection, analysis of external and internal surveys, and responses to students' raised DEI concerns were among the issues brought forth to the college president's attention for further response. The focus of DEI issues at the college, championed by DEAB (among others), led to establishing of the Butler Center for student-centered DEI issues. The external review of antiracism work at the college has led to creation of three leadership positions of ADEI deans and the Office of Civil Rights. Given this progress at the college, it is time to reimagine the role of DEAB.

**Membership.** We envision the new DEI group to be a taskforce with two or three faculty, two or three staff, workplace culture from HR (ex-officio), library liaison (ex-officio), ADA representative (ex-officio), and if needed one or two additional people with expertise aligned with a given task. As the committee assignments change the composition of the committees every year, it is advised that the assignments to this committee be yearly and aligned with a specific task. The structure proposed is intentional in its composition and is focused on tasks that would benefit from one-year focused commitment that are large enough to require time and attention, such as examining questions such as, what constitutes a block of teaching? (discussed further below)

The structure of DEAB requires approval by the FEC and the faculty along with the president's office. We recommend that committee as written in the handbook not be assigned for the coming year. Minimally, we suggest equity-related tasks to progress by assigning liaisons to particular committees. For example, teaching equity is a big issue that is being discussed in divisional committees and requires careful analysis of data. We are recommending assigning two or three senior faculty members to focus exclusively on this task in conjunction with Divisional Committees to bring their report forward to the FEC to move this work that has languished for years due to significant work being done by FEC and the divisional committees. It may be important to note that none of the faculty members currently serving on DEAB would like to serve on it for the coming year.

**Potential Directions.** DEAB faculty and staff are a motivated group that want some agency in determining the DEI issues that they want to tackle that lead to improvements on the ground for students, staff, faculty. Thus, we are proposing a new structure for ADEI work that would allow faculty and staff to engage with Faculty Executive Committee, Divisional Executive Committees, Staff Council,

and ADEI deans to prioritize those issues of equity and inclusion that have not filtered up to the level of the ADEI-deans but require additional ADEI work. For example, what counts as one block of teaching and questions around teaching equity were brought to DEAB toward the end of this year when we could not add this to our workload. The new DEI Taskforce could take on such weighty issues. In addition, this group can focus on ADEI-related informal conversations and capacity building that would enhance the overall ADEI focus at the college. In addition, DEAB could potentially take on identifying support structures that increase retention of BIPOC student, staff, and faculty and assist in developing ways of improving our collective sense of belonging.

Central to the idea of DEI Taskforce is to recognize that faculty and staff voices are important in identifying ADEI issues that rise up or those that have languished due to overburdening of certain committees or due to the difficulty of the task itself as illustrated by the question of teaching equity above. We have highlighted a few of these above. A committee of faculty and staff focused on prioritizing some issues of relevance and engaging in providing potential solutions is still necessary at the college. We are open to further conversations on composition and tasks of a revised DEI taskforce.