The University of Texas at Austin

UNIVERSITY DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION ACTION PLAN FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

March 30, 2017
Frequently Asked Questions

BACKGROUND

The University of Texas at Austin embraces and encourages diversity in many forms, and strives to create an inclusive community that fosters an open and supportive learning, teaching and working environment. Our strength as a university draws from our wide range of perspectives and experiences, and we support a free exchange of ideas alongside thoughtful consideration of our differences.

As both the current UT Austin president and provost have stated, diversity and excellence are mutually reinforcing. The purpose of this plan is to reflect upon how we can provide the best education possible for students from all backgrounds, especially those that historically have been marginalized. It should be noted that as a blueprint for optimal future diversity and inclusion efforts, successful implementation depends upon a number of factors including adequate budget and personnel.

The University Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan (UDIAP) includes eight focus areas:

1. University Leadership
2. Campus Climate and Culture
3. Students
4. Faculty
5. Staff
6. Alumni and Community
7. Pre-K–12 Partnerships and Education Pipeline
8. Communications, Assessment, and Accountability

GENERAL INFORMATION

Q: Why is there a need for a university-wide diversity plan?
A: Almost all colleges, schools, and units (CSUs) have some type of diversity or inclusion effort. This plan is a blueprint to guide CSUs in a unified and consistent direction and ensure that all efforts are coordinated and effective.

Q: Why is UT releasing this NOW?
A: The past year we have heard from students, faculty, and staff across campus about issues related to diversity, inclusion, and a respectful campus climate. Many of the items in this plan address those student concerns. This plan also includes the adoption of the university’s hate and bias incident policy released earlier this month.

Q: UT already won a court ruling to consider race in admissions, why is a new plan needed?
A: The Fisher v. University of Texas case focused solely on admissions policy. This new plan includes numerous other policies, practices, and initiatives beyond admissions that result in creating and fostering a more diverse and inclusive campus.

Q: Who OWNS this plan?
A: Although the Vice President for Diversity and Community Engagement (DDCE) is considered the “owner” of the plan, every CSU on campus has a stake in the plan and plays, or will play, a major role in implementation, particularly the Office of the Provost and the Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs. Both the provost and vice president for student affairs substantially contributed to the development of the plan.
Q: How does this new plan affect/impact me?
A: As a student: This plan addresses many student concerns including disparities in housing and transportation. It also strengthens training for faculty and instructors teaching diversity courses, encourages inclusive classroom training for faculty and instructions, and recommends the inclusion of diversity training for all students during orientation sessions.

As a faculty member: The plan provides for additional professional development around diversity and implicit bias. It also examines ways to recruit more diverse faculty, including strengthening the pipeline of diverse candidates through postdoc programs.

As a staff member: This plan increases diversity and implicit bias professional development for staff members at the director level and above, which includes writing job descriptions to attract more diverse candidates. It also provides diversity and inclusion training for staff.

As an alumni/UT community members: The UDIAP seeks to engage more diverse alumni members and continue the university’s community outreach initiatives across the state. It also reaffirms the university’s commitment to enhancing relationships with Historically Underutilized Businesses (HUBs).

Q: How much will it cost the university to enact these initiatives?
A: There has been no firm dollar amount placed on implementation of the plan. We anticipate much of the plan can be implemented with current funding. As feedback is received from our campus communities, priorities will be identified and funding decisions made at that time.

Q: Who will be in charge of the equity and inclusion committees for each CSU?
A: The Office of the Provost is working with each CSU regarding the equity and inclusion committees. Some CSUs already have similar committees formed, though the names may be slightly different. The deans and vice presidents of each unit will oversee the committees for their respective CSUs.

Q: Will this plan actually impact campus climate and culture?
A: The overall goals are to reduce inequities in the student academic and social experience and foster a more welcoming campus climate and culture, where all views and backgrounds are better understood and respected. In addition to the student experience, this aspirational plan will address campus climate and culture for all in the campus community, including alumni and constituents beyond the campus.

Q: What is the time frame for implementing the UDIAP?
A: There is no set time frame for implementing the various UDIAP components. Many of the items included are already in place at the university and the plan calls for continuation or strengthening of these existing efforts. The Implementation and Resource Guide provides additional details about implementation. After the feedback period (please see feedback survey), the Implementation and Resource Guide will be expanded upon. It should be noted this plan is seen as fluid and ever changing based on evolving university needs.

Q: How often will campus climate assessments be performed?
A: That has not been determined at this time. The first comprehensive campus climate assessment may take place as soon as the 2017-18 academic year.

Q: What will the transportation plan include?
A: The transportation plan will include improvements to pathways on campus for all individuals and adjustments to the bus routes now frequently used by students.
Q: How will the appointment of each CSU minority liaison for graduate students work?
A: The minority liaison position has been in place at the university for many years, though some departments utilize the position more than others. The liaison is a faculty member appointed by department chairs and serves as an advocate for and advisor to graduate students from underserved backgrounds.

Q: What is an example of a minority outreach and recruitment effort?
A: One example is a partnership between the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement and the Office of Admissions to reach students in public high schools that have been historically underrepresented at UT Austin. Faculty and staff affiliated with the DDCE reach out to students and their families to provide information on UT Austin and how it can support first-generation students and those from underrepresented backgrounds.

Q: How will leadership development for mid-career faculty be facilitated?
A: This will be detailed as the implementation plan is further developed.

Q: Do we have a list of career skills and cultural competencies that will be targeted in diversity and inclusion trainings?
A: A number of these areas are discussed in the UDIAP including:

• Inclusive classroom training for faculty members that focuses on cultural awareness; understanding the identities and differences that students bring to the classroom; and leading difficult conversations around race, religion, nationality and awareness.

• Training for faculty hiring committee chairs and staff members who lead hiring teams that focus on creating job descriptions that lead to more diverse pools, minimizing implicit bias in the search process, creating effective candidate evaluation processes, and structuring effective campus visits.

• Cultural competency training will be provided to staff.

Q: How does the Hate and Bias Incident Policy that was early in March 2017 overlap with this plan?
A: The Hate and Bias Incident Policy (HOP_9-1810) incidents supports a diverse and inclusive campus. The UDIAP and the revised policy were being developed at the same time and the plan includes an action item to support HOP_9_1810.

Have more questions or feedback? Please follow this link to send us your thoughts by May 15, 2017.

Q: Who is eligible to take the diversity and inclusion training?
A: Currently, anyone on campus can take advantage of diversity and inclusion trainings that are periodically offered by Diversity Education Initiatives, the Gender and Sexuality Center, and Services for Students with Disabilities. All of these units offer special training on a request basis as well. Housing and Food Services offers periodic training to its residents and all freshmen attending freshman orientation will receive diversity and inclusion training.