# Through the Lens of Diversity

University of Illinois at Chicago  Diversity Strategic Thinking

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*Appendices are available online at [http://www.uic.edu/depts/oaa/diversity/](http://www.uic.edu/depts/oaa/diversity/)*
Dear Readers:

The University of Illinois at Chicago continues to be a leader in diversity by many measures. We take great pride in knowing that diversity is a key characteristic of UIC. Currently, the composition of our student population is one that many institutions dream of achieving, one in which no racial or ethnic majority exists. Historically, UIC has been nationally recognized for supporting the success of groups traditionally underrepresented in higher education. However, we know that we cannot rest on these achievements. We must strive to realize even greater strength from the diversity we have—making it a more active and central part of working, learning and living at UIC. We must fully actualize our commitment to integrating diversity into our core mission and daily activities.

It was with excitement that I established the Diversity Strategic Thinking and Planning Committee in 2009. The committee was charged with conducting a diversity strategic thinking and planning process on campus, to probe the meaning of diversity and its value to UIC’s multifaceted mission, and to suggest ideas for incorporating diversity more deeply into the fabric of the institution in meaningful ways. Over the past year, the DSTP Committee and its subcommittees have visited numerous units and constituent groups, led diversity strategic thinking exercises and initiated on-going conversations across the campus. They have examined what it means for UIC to be a diverse institution, the benefits that UIC gains from diversity, and how our current activities relate to diversity.

I am proud of the work the committee has completed over the last year, and it is with enthusiasm that I share their results in this draft “thinking document” called Through the Lens of Diversity. Through the Lens of Diversity represents the results of a critical process for the campus, incorporating hundreds of hours of discussion and labor and a multitude of viewpoints. I believe this document and the process that produced it positions us to transform UIC and to provide even truer “Access to Excellence” for a diverse community. Through the Lens of Diversity will help us to understand the challenges and opportunities we face as a uniquely diverse campus and guide us to the next stage, developing a campus Diversity Strategic Plan.

The Diversity Strategic Plan will make concrete recommendations on how to advance our ability to offer an outstanding education to a diverse student body and insure that the continued excellence of our research and educational programs is enriched by the diversity of the people engaged in these activities. The plan will also emphasize the value of working collaboratively and encourage us to be more creative in building new collaborations on campus. Diversity will remain one of UIC’s singular strengths, a fundamental part of our identity and an extraordinary opportunity for the institution. My hope and vision is that the Diversity Strategic Thinking and Planning process will make UIC—a leader—even stronger.

R. Michael Tanner
Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs
University of Illinois at Chicago
March 22, 2010
Dear Readers:

The University of Illinois at Chicago finds great pride and strength in knowing that diversity is a key characteristic of UIC. As a major public research university in the heart of one of the world’s greatest cities, UIC’s mission is to create a campus environment in which diversity is a cornerstone of our scholarship and intellectual achievement. But beyond that, UIC’s diversity is one of the fundamental experiences that prepare young people for meaningful participation in a changing global society.

In 2009, former Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs R. Michael Tanner created the Diversity Strategic Thinking and Planning Committee (DSTPC) and charged it with leading a campus-wide diversity thinking and planning process. The committee first carefully interrogated the meaning of diversity and its many facets and their relationship to UIC’s mission. It then engaged the campus in a two-year-long dialogue on the intersections of diversity with UIC’s human capital, research and scholarship, and curriculum. These varied but related discourses and the ideas that emerged for weaving diversity more broadly and deeply into the fabric of the campus — to create a Diversity Intensive University if you will — were first presented to the campus in 2010 as a draft thinking document. That draft, an important step in our process, helped us understand the challenges and opportunities UIC faces as a diverse campus and prepared us to develop our strategic plan, A Mosaic for UIC Transformation. Our plan, published as a companion document to this one, enables the realization of the ideals set forth in the thinking document you are about to read.

I am proud of the “diversity work” accomplished at UIC over the past three years and, as a former DSTPC Co-Chairperson, I am pleased to share with you UIC’s diversity strategic thinking document. I do so on behalf of former Provost Michael Tanner, my DSTPC co-chair William Walden, the DSTPC, whose important and diligent work testifies to the members’ commitment to our campus, and indeed to the entire UIC community.

Through the Lens of Diversity articulates our aspirations for diversity and explores both UIC’s challenges and opportunities. Everyone who has been involved in the creation of this report hopes that it will be an inspiration to the many other campuses, nationally and globally, where diversity is perceived as a core value infused into every aspect of their missions.

Lon Kaufman
Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and Provost
University of Illinois at Chicago
August 20, 2012
This report shares with the UIC community the conclusions and recommendations for action of the Diversity Strategic Thinking and Planning (DSTP) Committee. This document has been long in the making; the committee began its work in Fall 2008. Much of the committee’s time and effort was devoted to gathering the ideas and opinions of individuals and groups from all sectors of UIC, distilling them into a preliminary draft, and collecting and digesting feedback on that draft before coming to this final version. The committee is deeply grateful to everyone who participated in this necessarily lengthy and painstaking process.

The time, care, and passion invested in crafting this report is a measure of its importance. In this document we articulate our shared aspirations for diversity on campus and the challenges and opportunities UIC faces. Its most important purpose, however, may be to provide the foundation for UIC’s diversity strategic plan.

The introductory pages of this report define the diversity issues UIC confronts and explicate a philosophy of diversity. The second section provides background information, intended to help the thoughtful reader become familiar with the context of the report’s preparation and contents.

The next three parts of this report present the conclusions and recommendations of the DSTP subcommittees on climate and environment, staff, students, faculty, teaching and learning, and research and creating knowledge. The subcommittees’ work and contemplations are presented to illustrate the connections among these six aspects of the university. Of course, no arrangement can completely capture the overlaps and connections among the major topics. For example, it is impossible to separate students from teaching and learning, or faculty from research. None of the three major sections of this report, then, can stand alone; to grasp the depth of the committee’s and UIC community’s discussions, each should be considered in the context of the whole document.

Finally, the committee offers a closing message that highlights seven top diversity priorities. These priorities are offered to guide plans for action, including the creation of administrative structures, programs, and venues for meaningful interaction and conversation that will work in a coordinated way to deeply and permanently embed diversity in the core mission of UIC.

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Ralph Cintron, Associate Professor of English Member of the DSTP Committee

This document may exist at a historical juncture in the relationship between diversity and academia. The first incarnation of diversity has been largely about including more bodies, people of color, and acknowledging their histories and perceptions in the name of social justice. So, if the first incarnation questions justice itself, the second incarnation questions one of the central foundations of the university: knowledge production. A more thoroughgoing theory of diversity raises questions about the methods for producing knowledge, its criteria of evaluation, and the purposes to which knowledge is put, and it does so across all disciplines, not just the humanities and social sciences.

I would love to see what engineering can do to address the issues of the poor. Can it address issues of toxicity in marginalized communities, air quality, air samples, water samples and so on and so on? Can it create a curriculum around such issues? Can we set up a system in which there are grants that bring people together who are working in more traditional conceptualizations of diversity, say African American Studies, but are interested in matters of law, of the legal, of engineering, of mathematics? Can we actually create new forms of knowledge-making by bringing new people together who normally would not be talking to each other?

Ralph Cintron, Associate Professor of English Member of the DSTP Committee
Introduction: The Challenge of Diversity

“Diversity” has many meanings. Our committee has adopted a working definition that encompasses UIC’s firm commitment to inclusion, access, and equity, with an emphasis on groups that have been historically under-represented, excluded, marginalized, or otherwise discriminated against. We borrow from the College of Education in defining diversity as the totality of the ways that people are similar and different — including by race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation and identity, disability, national origin and citizenship status, age, language, culture, religion, and economic status, particularly when those similarities and differences are used as a basis for unfair advantage and inequity.

We acknowledge that all forms of difference do not have the same valence and that the mere occurrence of diversity in a population does not achieve justice and equity. Therefore UIC must seek to rectify institutional and individual forms of bias, overt and more subtly embedded that are based on similarities and differences are used as a basis for unfair advantage and inequity.

We further acknowledge that similarities and differences may be used to mask the complexity of diversity: when one defines a group simply by gender or race, for example, it is a grave error to assume that all members of that group share every other possible characteristic. It is crucial to remember that there is diversity within groups of people as well as among groups of people. Identities like gender and sexuality intersect with other identities like race, ethnicity, disabilities and class. Diversity calls upon us to break out of our silos and segmented perspectives, seeing the many aspects of identity we recognize in ourselves but might tend to overlook in others.
Why is diversity so important?

There are external and internal reasons. First of all, there has been a steady challenge to diversity efforts at universities across the country over the past decade, in the form of lawsuits by special interest groups targeting Affirmative Action programs. These Affirmative Action programs, while never flawless, were important door-openers for hundreds of thousands of people from previously excluded groups. The erosion and dilution of these programs at many institutions demands that those of us who still hold the principles of inclusion dear step up and reaffirm our commitment, and back up that commitment with action. Second, with progress in some areas, some have suggested that racism, sexism and other forms of systematic discrimination are dead and buried. We wish this were so. However, empirical and anecdotal evidence tells us otherwise. Finally, with budget challenges and structural reorganization at the University of Illinois, we need to be explicit that JADE [Justice, Access, Diversity and Equity] will not be a casualty of these changes.

— A response to the preliminary draft of Through the Lens of Diversity offered by faculty and staff of diversity-concerned units.

The principles supporting greater diversity and equity respond to an historical context in which many institutions of our society for far too long actively excluded, discriminated against, or minimized and devalued the contributions of people identified as belonging to certain groups. If discrimination and injustice had not existed and did not persist, active diversity initiatives would not be necessary.

Valuing and celebrating diversity are important correctives to past and present wrongs and will make us a stronger and better institution. UIC must strive to create an environment that allows individuals and groups to create and enjoy opportunities; our goal must be success — not simply participation — for all.

Individuals are multifaceted. Throughout this process of thinking about diversity UIC students emphasized that most people proudly recognize that they inhabit multiple identities. True diversity acknowledges this reality and respects the depth and breadth of cultures and microcultures that our communities comprise.

No racial or ethnic majority exists among UIC’s student population. We take pride in the racial and ethnic diversity of our campus, but recognize that too often our ideals do not match our demographics. For example, our faculty diversity is much less than we wish to achieve; some departments lack racial and/or gender diversity. We also recognize that the pursuit of broad and deep diversity requires us to address issues besides race and ethnicity.

Diversity of our neighboring communities and region.

UIC students, faculty, staff, and the external community frequently cite diversity as one of our distinguishing attributes. Yet, as mentioned above, diversity does not have the same meaning for everyone. Not only does the term lack a universally accepted definition, but the word also is fraught with emotion, as it evokes complex historical and social struggles and triumphs. We view diversity as a constantly evolving concept whose actualization touches every student, faculty member, staff member, alumni/a, and neighboring community member in the UIC family.

UIC’s role as the urban campus of a land-grant institution, with a prominent college of medicine and medical center that train the most diverse medical student body in the country, and a connection with Jane Addams’ Hull-House, Chicago’s first social settlement and a place where a diversity of immigrants gathered to learn, provides the context of our reach for broad and deep diversity. Impelled by its history and its environment, UIC has evolved into an institution that mirrors and is immersed in the diversity of our neighboring communities and region.

UIC’s mission, described in the 2006 Strategic Plan, is to “provide the broadest access to the highest levels of intellect.” This means that UIC must provide: a high-quality education to the widest range of individuals, including under-represented minorities, vulnerable groups, and the economically disadvantaged; opportunities for knowledge making to a diverse faculty and student body; and opportunities for advancement and engagement in the educational enterprise to a diverse staff.

UIC’s history of supporting a diverse student population is significant. A sizable fraction of UIC’s total budget is committed to providing access to students less able to afford college and to support programs for a range of stu-
Examples of UIC's positive approach include:

- UIC’s Urban Health Program (formerly the Medical Opportunities Program) extends back 42 years and has made UIC one of the nation’s leaders in graduating minority health care providers. The program recently was named the best of its kind by the Coalition of Urban Serving Universities.

- The efforts of the Latin American Recruitment and Educational Services (LARES) and other groups serving Latino/a students enable UIC to graduate more Latino/a math majors than all other Chicago-area colleges and universities combined.

- The Summer Research Opportunity Program (SROP) provides students from historically under-represented groups with faculty mentors to encourage their retention and to help create a pathway to graduate school.

- The Asian American Resource and Cultural Center was established in 2005 to provide leadership, mentoring, and education on Asian American issues, and to acknowledge the asserted self-identity of the group of students that constitutes approximately 20 percent of the student body. An Asian American Studies Program and Minor were approved at UIC, effective Fall 2010.

- Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning students are served by the Gender and Sexuality Center. The GSC also provides education, outreach, research and support services to the entire campus.

- The Disability Resource Center works to ensure that students with disabilities have full access to UIC, and educates the campus on accessibility issues and disability culture.

- UIC also supports a roster of distinguished faculty engaged in scholarship and teaching related to LGBTQ and disability issues. It is widely recognized that LGBTQ students, faculty, and staff and UIC community members with disabilities bring important and diverse experiences and sensibilities to the campus.

Our good-faith efforts notwithstanding, access and success for some groups at UIC remain much less than acceptable. For example, the low rate of success of African American students at UIC leads many within Chicago’s African American community to view UIC as a “revolving door”: students are granted entry for purposes of enhancing our image as a diverse campus but quickly exit because they are neither expected to succeed academically nor valued.

- UIC has a responsibility to encourage and enable meaningful participation by all who come to UIC to study, teach, create knowledge, and/or work.

Social Action

- UIC has a responsibility to provide education, health care, and leadership to our diverse internal and external communities.

- UIC has a responsibility to learn from the diverse communities in which the campus is embedded.

Social Justice

- UIC has a responsibility to help create an egalitarian society through education, knowledge-making, and employment practices.

- UIC has a responsibility to continually monitor the demographics and expressed needs and aspirations of our students, faculty, staff, alumni, and external communities so we can make educated and informed decisions about recruitment and services consistent with the campus’s commitment to breadth and deep diversity.

Creating Knowledge

- UIC has a responsibility to use every available ethical approach to creating knowledge.

- UIC has a responsibility to create knowledge that serves our diverse off-campus communities.

Accountable Leadership

- UIC has a responsibility to create mechanisms that increase access to decision-making and power to all groups that constitute the university.

- UIC has a responsibility to assure that those in positions of decision-making and power actively advance positive institutional transformation.

Trust

- UIC has a responsibility to promote and foster a climate of trust based on respect for individual identities, shared values, and our shared vision of the university.

- UIC has a responsibility to create a safe climate that allows us to honestly and fearlessly discuss building and embracing a stranger, more diverse campus community.

We must never fail to acknowledge the roles of power and empowerment in diversity and justice. Concealed mechanisms of power can invisibly shape agendas, determine participation, and inflict powerlessness on the excluded. Intentional strategies that involve all constituencies and strengthen all voices can create shared and equitable formal structures that supplant or limit hidden power structures.

We hold to the fundamental principles that inspire us to ensure and increase participation of individuals from groups that historically have been denied access to institutions such as universities. However, these commitments, like many others asserted throughout this text, will ring hollow unless we set goals, permanently commit human, temporal, and financial resources, and institute assessment and accountability mechanisms.

Leadership

Recognizing the significant work of the Strategic Thinking Initiative, in 2009 Provost Michael T. Zimmer established an Office of Diversity and appointed a Special Assistant to the Provost for Diversity. In Spring 2011, the Chancellor and Provost announced that the Office of Diversity would have a permanent role in campus leadership, with reporting lines to both the Provost and the Chancellor. This action decisively and clearly signals the position of top-level campus leadership on diversity issues. Dual reporting gives the Office of Diversity a voice in both academic and administrative decision-making.

Critical responsibilities of the Office of Diversity are: drive collaborations across academic and administrative units; consult on methods for incorporating diverse perspectives in curriculum and campus administration and policy-making; research critical diversity issues specific to UIC; serve as a resource and/or clearinghouse for diversity initiatives; guide campus efforts to assess the campus climate and the impact of diversity programs and efforts; and incubate new programs and initiatives by providing resources, including intellectual support. A priority of the office will be to define appropriate benchmarks that gauge our progress toward achieving true diversity. There are many and varied opinions about what these benchmarks should be and how they should be decided. Nonetheless, it is incumbent upon UIC to support or develop appropriate programs to achieve our diversity goals, set benchmarks for those programs, and establish accountability measures.
Diversity and Excellence  

Diversity brings concrete advantages as UIC faces a future replete with complex environmental, social, economic, religious, and political challenges. Furthermore, many of humanity’s most pressing problems are global. New and different perspectives and ideas that direct actions rooted in synergistic wisdom will be needed to solve our problems. Research has shown that diverse teams of people imagine and consider a wider range of solutions to problems than homogenous groups, and more often come up with better, more durable solutions. We often think of diversity in terms of visible characteristics associated with particular groups, but the unique life experiences that constitute personal histories and shape individual identities are equally powerful.

The 2010 Strategic Thinking document (released 2005) states:  

Undergraduate education at UIC is an entry point for access to excellence, a commitment that begins with the recruitment process. UIC must not rely solely on class rank and standardized testing as measures for acceptance. Rather, we need to evaluate each student’s potential, based on his or her promise for contributing to the intellectual community at UIC and to the larger world after graduation. As such, admission to UIC is not an end in itself, but rather a significant stage in a student’s intellectual and professional journey — one that commenced many years before college, during their K-12 education.

This means we must hold ourselves accountable for contributions made by UIC graduates to “the larger world.” Our most important benchmark is the nature and quality of the work of our alumni in their home communities, the city, the state, and the world.

There are some who suggest that UIC’s focus on diversity contradicts or hampers our quest for undergraduate academic excellence. One comment posted to our Web site suggests:  

“Shouldn’t the goal of UIC be to continually bring in the best teachers and students? Stressing diversity in the classroom and affirmative action in admission practices is most likely counter-productive to that goal. Admitting students who are less qualified... does not help the cause.”

All the effort, goals, and scholarship that surrounds the campus’s diversity reject the notion that diversity and academic excellence are mutually exclusive. In fact, our continuing quest to ensure a thoroughly diverse UIC emphasizes the richness that diversity brings to our conversations in the classroom, our scholarship, and the work we do every day.

In the Supreme Court’s findings in Grutter v. Bolinger (2003), Justice Sandra Day O’Connor asserted that the benefits of diversity “are not theoretical but real, as major American businesses have made clear that the skills needed in today’s increasingly global marketplace can only be developed through exposure to widely diverse people, cultures, ideas, and viewpoints.”

Some would critique Justice O’Connor’s position as indicating how thoroughly the original, political impetus of diversity has been commodified. On the other hand, the marketability of diversity is a positive phenomenon, enabling many to acquire incomes and positions that would have been denied them just a few decades ago. We argue, then, that we cannot afford to marginalize any student or faculty or staff member but must make certain that everyone is equipped to make the greatest possible contribution in every sphere of life. Individuals come to UIC to learn and to work, and their daily interactions teach lessons about diversity that have value in the off-campus world. Besides basing our commitment to diversity on a desire for pragmatic advantage, we have an ethical obligation to ensure that our campus reflects the composition of the larger society and world in which we live.

I’ve been here for 22 years and from the first day when I (drove) the bus I thought, ‘Wow, what a diverse group of students. Here we are with people from China, India, the Middle East, South America and Central America all on one bus, and they’re all talking to one another and studying the same classes, and I thought, ‘Wow, this is a beautiful, beautiful environment. I love this.’

— Zeferino (Nino) Guerrero
Driver, Physical Plant, Administrative Services
I come from a student conduct background and discipline so diversity wasn’t on the radar of my job description per se. But when I first saw the retention and graduation rates for black men here (at UIC) I was flabbergasted at one point, and I was saddened to have landed in what I guess you would refer to as the West Loop of Chicago, a place where the population is heavily black and brown, and here’s a university that was built to serve this city — and Black and Latino men were not doing well at all. There were efforts all over the place to try to help that, but they seemed to be more of the same and they seemed to be more of what had not succeeded. I thought about the definition of insanity…we keep doing the same things and expecting different results, what does that make us? So I thought, ‘Let’s do something different,’ and that’s when we started the Black Male Leadership group; we started Brothers Reaching Out and the Black Male Retreat.

I think it’s been mostly effective…I think that there are things that other people can learn from it; there are things that we can learn from it, not only for that specific population but also for other populations. I think they’re transferrable. We’ve done that especially with the black women. I understand there’s some movement on campus with Latino men as well. Whether I’m instrumental or not I guess only history will tell I suppose, right?

J. Malcolm Smith
Assistant Dean of Students/Student Conduct
Office of Student Affairs

UIC is framed by historical, economic, social, political, and demographic forces. As the only public research university in Chicago, we play a special role in the metropolitan area. Our history is a complex narrative, not only of neighborhood displacements, whose legacies linger, but also of providing education and health care to the families of Chicago. Like the relationships within the UIC community, those between the campus and its neighboring communities must be based on honesty and directness if we are to build trust and cooperation.

We cannot separate ourselves from the city, but it is frequently easy for individuals, departments, colleges, and other units to operate as if they were isolated from the urban environment. This may be because faculty and staff do not connect their research to the city or because they have little experience with community engagement. Yet, whether they practice engaged scholarship or not, all members of the university community must understand the relations between the campus and the larger community in which it is embedded, between our internal climate and external environment.

Located on 300 acres on Chicago’s Near West Side, UIC has positive impact on the city’s economy and culture and on the health of and educational opportunities available to its residents. Easily reached by foot, car, or public transportation, UIC provides higher education to students from across Chicago and its suburbs. Because of its location in a major city that is a national and international transportation hub, UIC can be accessed by students from all across the state and nation, and, indeed, from anywhere in the world, creating a truly global university. The presence of a public research institution in a convenient urban environment ensures that students from every economic stratum, as well as from almost any place on Earth, have access to a college education.
Diversity in Action: Building a Positive Campus Climate

On April 26, 2007, the UIC Faculty Senate endorsed diversity ideals in a Statement of Support:

The people of UIC embrace the diversity of our campus community, believing that it contributes vitally to the fulfillment of our mission. In promoting equal opportunity, mutual respect, fair treatment and the elimination of barriers to the achievement of excellence, we seek to create a supportive academic, social, and physical environment for all. In planning our programs and developing our policies, we remain mindful of the need to consider their impact upon all members of the UIC community.

Yet, individual groups have voiced the desire to be understood as distinct populations whose needs are not always met. At times, tension emerges between members of the trio of historically underrepresented minorities (i.e., African Americans, Latinos/as, and Native Americans) and other constituencies such as: women; people with disabilities; members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning/ queer community; Asian Americans; and members of our international community. These “other” constituencies often feel that their particular needs and experiences are misinterpreted or are ignored. Intergroup tensions must be openly and directly addressed in order to promote better understanding and clearer articulations of diversity goals and benefits, and to strengthen the coalitions needed to support diversity measures. Each identity group has a specific history and experience in the U.S. and at UIC, and understanding the different populations of our campus comprises and the intersections among them will foster increased communication and collaboration. Better understanding and communication will help UIC balance issues of access across all constituencies and create alliances among groups whose needs often are perceived as competing.

As an institution that values diversity, UIC must ensure that all members of our community have outlets, including venues in which diverse constituencies may interact, socialize, and build relationships. As a predominantly commuter institution, UIC is challenged to build community among students, faculty, and staff in the limited on-campus hours available for work, study, or social interaction. If we are intentional about diversity then we need to be intentional about providing places in which we may build relationships.

Diversity “by the numbers” does not, in itself, create a positive and welcoming environment. UIC faces several significant challenges to achieving broad and deep diversity, such as the inclination to emphasize failures while ignoring areas in which we succeed. Further, some members of the UIC community see diversity issues as tangential rather than fundamental to our core mission. If diversity is to be driven into our core mission in a meaningful and lasting way, our campus climate must support diversity-conscious teaching, learning, research, and work. If students, faculty, or staff feel unsupported and/or marginalized, universal confidence in UIC’s success-for-all model will be impossible. UIC must continue to strive to provide a welcoming and supportive campus environment for all, must assess that climate on a regular basis, and must address problems aggressively and effectively.

Communicating about Diversity

Diversity often is a difficult topic for social and scholarly conversations. Many are uncomfortable talking about differences, others deny that diversity is a viable route to a better society. At the very least, to fully realize diversity’s challenges and benefits, we must be able to engage in open and honest discussion. The campus must provide safe places for both structured interactions and informal conversations about diversity in all its forms.

Important and necessary coalitions can be built to strengthen UIC’s diverse community and to educate our on and off-campus communities about our view of diversity without falling prey to the meaningless idea that everyone is different and, therefore, we all are diverse.

Our Centers for Cultural Understanding and Social Change, which represent some of the diverse groups on campus, should educate about diversity and provide safe spaces for conversation and coalition-building. These centers also should serve as two-way conduits of ideas and information between campus and our external community partners.

UIC’s interdisciplinary academic departments and programs that focus on specific cultures and identities potentially are avenues for providing education about diversity to the campus and beyond. Similarly, research institutes, such as the Institute for Research on Race and Policy and the Great Cities Institute, are resources for thinking and learning about diversity.

UIC must use all these resources not only to support our diverse communities, but also to educate the campus and our external communities about diversity’s benefits and challenges. UIC’s centralized Office of Diversity should coordinate activities aimed at such educational initiatives and scholarship.

Scholarship and Research on Diversity

At a number of academic units (e.g., African American Studies, Asian American Studies, Disability and Human Development, Gender and Women’s Studies, Latin American and Latino Studies) and research institutes (e.g., Institute on Disability and Human Development, Center for Research on Women and Gender, IRRPP, Great Cities) award winning faculty engage in research and teaching that focuses primarily on some aspect of diversity. Our scholarship ranges from a study of health disparities between African American and white women, to a study of gay Chicago, to ethnographic studies of Latinos in the immigrant rights movement. The collective body of knowledge about diversity developed at UIC can aid the university in assessing, mapping, and articulating its stance on diversity and shaping the policies and practices necessary to decisively enact our commitment.

Diversity scholars also are vital links to the communities in which they conduct their research while providing service, forging collaborative partnerships, and earning community trust. We cannot frame informed policies on diversity without consulting and enlisting the expertise of our academic colleagues. Continual consultation with campus experts in areas that address issues of equity, race, gender, sexuality, class, disability, and other facets of diversity is essential as UIC crafts and implements its diversity strategic plan.

“Asian American Studies is seeking to provide a more inclusive and hence more accurate history of our country and who Americans are. This information would enrich everyone.”
— Ronald Takaki, historian and ethnographer
I served in the military for eight years and I served under Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell. I had to be very closeted even though I entered into the relationship that I’m in now while I was still in the military. I had to make sure that nobody found out, but as soon as I finished my service in the military, I wasn’t in the closet anymore and that was around the time we moved here to Chicago. UIC was the first place where I was able to be out in the workplace in an official way. My co-workers would know, but I wouldn’t be able to tell Human Resources or that kind of thing because I didn’t know what would happen. It was a very different experience for me, especially when I became a mother, and I’m the non-biological mother, and getting benefits for my partner and getting benefits for my son. Every time I had to make a phone call, I would be nervous because I would think, oh, you know, “What are they going to say? Are they not going to understand?” And I was really shocked and refreshed that nobody even batted an eye. They were just like, “Oh, sure. This is what you need. This is what you need to do.” Nobody asked me any kind of awkward questions. It was all very professional and it was clear that they had done this before, even though I had never done it before. And that was really nice. That was probably one of the happier moments I had here at UIC — with diversity in a personal way — because I felt like it was okay. You know, it’s okay to be gay.

Sarah Rothberger
Department of Physical Therapy
Assistant to the Head for Administration

Our campus essentially is a small city. We produce our own steam and much of our own electricity; we are responsible for several hundred buildings and city streets. We have neighbors, our own transportation system, and a police department. We have stores and eateries. But most of all, we have people. Our campus community comprises approximately 25,000 students and more than 21,000 employees, including 2,200 faculty and 18,800 staff. The diversity among our “citizens” is remarkable but, at the same time, limited. Regardless of how the ranking is constructed or which parts of our community are counted, UIC is among the top five most diverse U.S. campuses. Yet, we fall short of achieving the broad and deep diversity in all our activities to which we aspire. We also continually face the challenge of deciding to what degree our surrounding communities should influence our definition of diversity.

Our committee has heard many different opinions about how to set appropriate benchmarks for faculty, student, and staff recruitment; faculty and staff hiring; and all other campus activities. Clearly, UIC must set benchmarks against which to gauge our efforts and activities and establish appropriate programs to reach those benchmarks. UIC also must establish valid and reliable diversity assessment programs and determine who is accountable for achieving diversity benchmarks and goals. A permanently centralized Office of Diversity should oversee the establishment of benchmarks, assessment systems, and lines of accountability.

Determining the specifics of how we can achieve broad and deep diversity across campus has proven to be among the most challenging and, at times, most infuriating, complex, and frustrating problems we face as a community.
Need for Mutual Respect

The 2010 UIC Strategic Thinking document declares, “In 2010, UIC’s academic professionals and staff will be clear partners in the mission of UIC, sustaining a culture of mutual support with students and faculty.” As a diverse campus, we always need to be aware of issues of class and power. We also must be mindful that an individual rarely succeeds without the support of others, but too often credit is attributed only to a project leader. Graduate assistants, facilities workers, renewable-term faculty members, and administrative and clerical staff members all deserve acknowledgment of their contributions to UIC’s success, but sharing credit depends on mutual respect.

UIC has a responsibility to put in place for all UIC personnel and, to the greatest extent possible, all UIC student programs, that build understanding of our philosophy of and commitment to diversity. UIC also must include in its orientation programs a dialogue about diversity to ensure that new employees and students understand UIC’s commitment to, dependence on, and respect for diversity.

A culture of diversity will take hold only if it is nourished in a climate of professionalism. In the classroom, instructors must develop the ability to recognize students’ different backgrounds, perspectives, and skill levels while helping students recognize standards of academic excellence. The classroom always must be a safe place for the frank, yet respectful, expression of all points of view: this is the essence of academic freedom, and this freedom is best exercised in a setting in which diverse points of view are heard and conventional wisdom is challenged so new knowledge can be made. In a diverse and safely tolerant classroom atmosphere, tension may arise as a teacher struggles to avoid censuring strong opinions that border on the hateful while guiding the class toward productive assessment of potentially explosive material.

In terms of the workplace, when we act professionally we treat each other first and foremost with the respect and dignity that should be afforded all human beings, and we understand and acknowledge that each of us is an integral part of UIC’s mission.

We must recognize that each person in a diverse community brings to campus his or her own strengths and biases. As we capitalize on the strengths, we also must find ways to recognize how and when biases work at cross-purposes to our mission and develop best practices for enabling all members of our community to come to terms with their biases.

We must embrace ascribed identities (based on employment classification, race or ethnicity, socio-economic status, gender or sexual orientation) as contributing to the richness of our campus community. Our community of diverse people, sharing the mission of educating students and creating knowledge, can promote trust and enhance cooperation. Strengthened by shared values, goals, and respect for individual identities, every member of our campus community can help create a vision that enables success by opening the doors to the many possibilities and choices available in a competitive global society.

Staff

UIC’s upper administration is perhaps the most diverse among research-intensive universities and the Coalition of Urban Serving Institutions. This diversity is important for both symbolic reasons and for the operation of the university; upper administration embraces responsibility for leading on diversity issues, which includes the review and administration of campus diversity policy affecting staff.

University employees are broadly classified as either staff or faculty. “Staff” commonly is thought to include Academic Professionals, Civil Service employees, and unionized trades workers. But staff also includes Graduate Assistants and other student workers. Our staff contributes to every activity at UIC in an array of jobs extending from undergraduate student recruitment, admission, and registration. Therefore, the diversity of our student body partly is the result of conscious decisions by staff. All the processes involved in matriculation are supported by the Office of Admissions and Records (OAR), a staff-only unit of 70 employees. For the largest college, Liberal Arts and Sciences, OAR reviews undergraduate applications, and makes recommendations based on college guidelines.

Diversions of other units and programs essential to building and supporting our student body are run exclusively by staff. These include the Office of Student Financial Aid, Latin American Recruitment and Educational Services (LARES), the African American Academic Network (AAAN), the Native American Support Program, Project CHANCE, the Disability Resource Center, the Urban Health Program, the UIC Orientation Program, the Office of International Services, and our religious centers. In addition, students receive important services from college and academic unit staff, and from staff working in the campus bookstore, shops, and eateries, driving the commuter and intercampus buses, and providing parking services.

Consistently recognized as one of the country’s most diverse medical schools, the University of Illinois College of Medicine serves Chicago at more than 30 sites, and Illinois at three other locations: Peoria, Rockford, and Urbana. The University of Illinois Medical Center at Chicago, through its hospital, outpatient facilities, and community outreach clinics, provides health care to 65,000 patients annually, most of whom belong to minority groups and almost half of whom receive free health care. (UIC provides more than $30 million in charitable health care every year.) At all these sites, the staff members constitute the public face of the university. The College of Medicine, Medical Center, and clinics depend heavily on staff serving as nurses, receptionists, and lab technicians, to name just a few positions. In health care and other areas, our staff is crucial to building strong relationships with community partners, and staff diversity is important to this effort.

UIC is responsible for employing, training, and engaging in our mission a diverse staff. In most Civil Service and Academic Professional classifications, UIC, on average, equals or exceeds the percentages of historically under-represented minorities in the Chicago labor pool (Incumbency v. Estimated Availability, Office for Access and Equity, 2008). However, in some units, diversity still is lacking. Different campus units have expressed different opinions about how benchmarks for various staff populations should be set, but, as diversity planning advances, clear and appropriate benchmarks, and methods for achieving and assessing progress toward them, must be defined.

UIC should identify and change university policies that hinder staff diversity, taking a holistic view of how these policies intersect and collectively affect staff and the university. Our staff needs clear paths for career advancement and career development, which will have a direct impact on our ability to recruit and retain talented and diverse staff, supervisors, and administrators. As in the case of faculty, UIC should make an effort to attract qualified applicants from under-represented groups, especially for positions where under-representation is grounds for affirmative action in hiring. Assessment and the use of accurate and adequately detailed data at the macro- (i.e., institution, college) and micro- (i.e., departments and programs) levels will enable improved decision-making, especially in regard to diversity.

Students

Who are our students? Who should be a UIC student? What are our responsibilities to the students we admit? What opportunities exist for our current and future student population? How should the demographics of our student populations relate to the demographics of our communities?

UIC students come from almost every imaginable background; their presence on campus provides the richness of the UIC experience. UIC has a responsibility to meet and even exceed the expectations and aspirations of its students.
Because we soon will depend upon today’s students to meet the challenges facing the city, the nation, and the world, assuring student excellence is crucial to humanity’s future as well as a fundamental goal of diversity at UIC.

Choosing meaningful criteria for admission is difficult for every university, and especially challenging for a university aiming to create and maintain a diverse student body. At UIC, each college defines its own admission criteria; there is no campus-wide policy. As each college considers who our students should be, among the considerations are: To what extent, if any, are we accountable for reflecting the demographics of the Chicago metropolitan area or Illinois? To what extent should traditional measures of academic accomplishment influence admission decisions? Do we admit students from the “top down” and what, in fact, is the “top”? Is our mission to provide access to talented students from a variety of communities? How do we understand and value the whole person when making admission decisions? How might the colleges and our various minority group support programs coordinate recruitment activities to provide access to socio-economically disadvantaged (not deficient) students, and provide appropriate support should those students decide to matriculate at UIC?

“The freedom of a university to make its own judgments as to education includes the selection of its student body.”
— U.S. Supreme Court Justice Lewis Powell, 1978

UIC offers a unique place for diversity. A major thing that I like about UIC is the language program, especially the Spanish program. UIC has a whole floor dedicated to helping you out with what you want to do, study abroad, jobs in other countries after you graduate and their conversation clubs. I always get emails about German conversation, Japanese, Spanish, so I think that’s a big plus. I feel that’s UIC’s biggest asset as far as diversity goes. Conversation clubs should either continue to improve or expand more.

Julio Rodriguez
Recent Graduate 2012,
Criminology, Law & Justice

...
I think it’s important to recognize diversity as more than just racial diversity and cultural diversity; it’s about a diversity of thinking. And from that diversity of thinking you get a better outcome and I think that’s a proven model here at UIC and it’s something that comes out in different parts of the campus, but it’s really important that we focus on it and try to home in on it and make it better as the years go on.

— Ken Thomas
UIC Student Trustee

These approaches are not mutually exclusive and should not be viewed as being at cross-purposes: services to some and services to all should be balanced to serve all students effectively.

The fact that some support services are aimed specifically at under-represented students may lead to the impression that these are the only resources such students should use. Reinforcing this view, under-represented students often feel that specialized support services are more sensitive to their needs than campus-wide services. However, both specialized services and campus-wide services, particularly discipline-specific ones, are critical elements of a support network that helps students succeed. UIC must forge effective partnerships among targeted support services, campus-wide services, and discipline-specific services to realize full benefit to students from these supports. Additionally, we must encourage all support service to share the lessons learned. All UIC students must have full access to the best possible academic, social, and cultural supports and services.

The student population of UIC’s health science programs is extremely diverse, driven to a significant extent by mandates to increase the number of health professionals working in urban communities. The Urban Health Program, for example, has succeeded in recruiting, supporting, and mentoring through graduation health professionals from under-represented racial and ethnic minorities and in addressing the needs of under-served communities in Illinois. But the diversity does not extend to all of the programs. The other professional programs (e.g., engineering, business, architecture, public policy and administration, and social work) have not been shaped by mandates, and can benefit from the lessons learned from the directed effort to establish diversity in the health professions.

For more than five years, UIC’s graduate programs have been ranked for diversity among the top three of the top 50 research universities (based on federal expenditures). UIC consistently ranked number one in diversity among the members of the Committee on Institutional Cooperation (i.e., the Big Ten, plus UIC and the University of Chicago). We are positioned to seize unique opportunities for achieving diversity in other areas by means of efforts to increase the number of under-represented faculty. The extent to which we recognize and actualize such opportunities will help define UIC.

Graduate students come to UIC to be an asset to gain broader and deeper expertise in their disciplines and frequently to prepare for academic careers. Our graduate students represent the future of academia, and we have the opportunity and responsibility to increase faculty diversity by actively preparing them for academic careers. Many of our graduate students support their educations by serving as teaching assistants. To undergraduates, who often do not distinguish teaching assistants and faculty members, the diversity of TAs in specific disciplines serves as a corrective for the lack of under-represented minorities among faculty. This situation is a temporary stopgap that should be addressed campus-wide.

In addition to providing a diversity model for undergraduates and greater access to graduate education for under-represented groups, a diverse graduate student population brings other advantages to UIC. For instance, a state program, Diversifying Higher Education Faculty in Illinois, provides graduate program tuition and stipends with the ultimate aim of increasing the diversity of faculty at Illinois universities. UIC has been a leading recipient of this external support. In the biomedical sciences, greater diversity among graduate students makes UIC more competitive for training grants and large projects that have in common the mission of increasing the diversity of the scientific workforce.

While there are many other opportunities to garner resources based on our graduate student diversity are extremely important, we must move beyond mere representation towards realizing the full transformational potential that this distinguishing characteristic affords.

In most disciplines, our graduate student population is far more diverse than that of our faculty. Graduate student diversity therefore could be a model for how to create a more diverse faculty, but for that to happen, we need to understand how graduate programs are or could be connected to larger institutional objectives.

It is clear that student diversity and the multiplicity of academic programs related to diversity enrich UIC and are appreciated, but more intentional and transparent articulations of UIC’s diversity definition, vision, mission, and goals must build on our existing potential.

Faculty

For purposes of this report, we consider “the faculty” to include both tenure-track and tenured faculty (the so-called professoriate) and renewable-term faculty (e.g., lecturers, instructors, adjuncts, clinical, and research faculty).

It is important to note, at this point, that by using the traditional terms, “non-tenured faculty” and “non-tenurable faculty,” universities — including UIC — signal a hierarchy whose disparitizing effects include the facts that renewable-term faculty (a preferred term for those who teach at UIC with no guarantee of continuing employment) tend to be offered little or no opportunity for professional development, and generally are not involved in a formal process of review, reward, and advancement, regardless of the length of time they have been associated with UIC. In addition, the offices, supplies, and computer equipment provided to renewable-term faculty too often are substandard, and renewable-term faculty have little or no voice in unit decision-making, even in an advisory capacity. While other professional programs have created rewards for experienced and especially capable renewable-term faculty by, for example, granting multi-year contracts and increased compensation, the contribution of this large segment of UIC faculty to the excellence of under-graduate education is not generally recognized or honored. Changing our language to a positive, rather than negative, descriptor of these essential faculty members is only a first step toward conferring the respect upon which our commitment to diversity depends.

When employing faculty, UIC is required to follow affirmative action laws designed to correct past inequities toward African Americans, Latinos/as, and Native Americans. Local programs also address these issues, such as the Under-represented Faculty Recruitment Program, which provides $20,000 to $50,000 in permanent salary support to colleges that hire under-represented faculty and up to $50,000 in research funding to the faculty members themselves. While this program has been in place for more than 20 years, its effectiveness in providing an incentive to departments and colleges to hire under-represented faculty must be assessed more rigorously.

The tenure-track and tenure faculty define and deliver curricula, conduct research, and provide the scholarly engine that drives the university, and brings continuity to the campus. In these roles, faculty members potentially are able to contribute diversity to all aspects of academia. Renewable-term faculty, postdoctoral fellows, and teaching assistants have day-to-day interaction with students and thus are important sources and examples of the excellence associated with diversity.

There’s going to be incredible new learning and new knowledge generated as a result of the convergence of tangible ways that I see the university moving that makes diversity have a unique role in this campus that’s very much in line with its urban mission, its mission to be connected with socially, with communities economically, politically and so forth, to care about the city of Chicago and the global community beyond.

— Cheryl Nakata
Professor of Marketing and International Business
Department Head of Managerial Studies
**Representation**

While simple representation is not the sole reflection of campus diversity, UIC does have a higher percentage of tenured and tenure-track faculty of color (60.5 percent), Black (4.7 percent) and Hispanic faculty (5.8 percent) than the other CIC institutions with health science centers, as well as the highest percentage of faculty of color among all 11 Illinois research universities. While these numbers are encouraging on a relative scale, they are shameful on an absolute scale: under-represented faculty continue to be excluded. Equally disturbing, our African American and Latino/a faculty are disproportionately found in two departments in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences: African American Studies and Latin American and Latino Studies. Fully a third of our academic departments lack any African American or Latino/a faculty members.

UIC currently has two Native American faculty members. Asian American faculty, though their number is rising, largely are skewed toward the natural and health sciences, engineering, and business administration. If we are to be a truly diverse campus, significant diversity must be manifest throughout the faculty, both in terms of discipline and faculty rank.

A major challenge facing the campus, especially in light of chronic budget cuts and a shrinking professoriate, will be the issue of how best to diversify our faculty. Should we seek to achieve broad diversity, focusing current or new resources on recruitment efforts in units of low diversity, such as the so-called “zero representation” departments? It could be argued with equal force that UIC would gain greatest value by growing diversity in areas where we have an opportunity to build competitive strength consistent with our urban research mission. One example might be an urban social science institute, which could include subdisciplines currently unrepresented at UIC, such as urban anthropology. An effective way to approach the challenge of increasing faculty diversity might be through cluster hiring (hiring aimed at bolstering capacity in targeted disciplines), which could have immediate impact on both diversity and our strength in key areas. UIC must consider these and other ideas as it develops strategies to increase faculty diversity.

There is an immediate need for the campus to arrive at consensus on how to assist diversification of zero-representation departments and implement hiring practices that correct for the historical exclusion from the faculty of African Americans, Latinos/as, Native Americans, and women, and assess and continually improve our efforts.

**Challenges to Diversifying Faculty**

In some disciplines, faculty who have been employed at UIC for a long time soon will be considering retirement. In some disciplines, faculty who have been employed at UIC for a long time soon will be considering retirement. New positions will provide opportunities to consider candidates who will increase faculty diversity, particularly because the number of Ph.D. applicants is larger than ever, and recent Ph.D.s are more diverse than ever.

Traditional practice embraces the belief that tenure-track faculty should be recruited primarily from other campuses. Individuals drawn from outside UIC certainly bring fresh perspectives that contribute to diversity of thought within a department or college. However, are the perspectives gained by “importing” faculty more valuable than the institutional knowledge and commitment of the “home-grown”? Ironically, while our successful efforts have made us a leading university with respect to the diversity of our graduate and professional school populations, our reluctance to hire our own students has made us a provider of diversity to the professoriate of other universities, as urban anthropology. An effective way to approach the challenge of increasing faculty diversity might be through cluster hiring (hiring aimed at bolstering capacity in targeted disciplines), which could have immediate impact on both diversity and our strength in key areas. UIC must consider these and other ideas as it develops strategies to increase faculty diversity.

There is an immediate need for the campus to arrive at consensus on how to assist diversification of zero-representation departments and implement hiring practices that correct for the historical exclusion from the faculty of African Americans, Latinos/as, Native Americans, and women, and assess and continually improve our efforts.

**Access to Power**

In a university, power resides largely with the tenured faculty, the academic structures they populate, and the administrative roles they occupy. For under-represented minorities and women, access to positions of power on campus is constrained by the lack of diversity among our faculty, especially among full professors.

Given that power structure, even in the best situation, the processes of broadening the diversity of the faculty will take some time. Generally, diversifying the faculty will be accomplished by hiring people of color and women as junior faculty, who then will need to rise through the ranks to become full professors. In the meantime, we must be creative in developing processes that accord decision-making power or consultative rights to junior faculty so UIC may gain more immediate transformative benefit from the diverse faculty it seeks to build.

The UIC Faculty Senate has a special role as well. The senate must diversify its leadership structure and assure meaningful representation from under-represented minority groups and women, both on senate committees and on university committees whose members, by statute, must be nominated or appointed by the senate.

The university needs to end the practice of expecting female and other under-represented faculty to provide excessive service because of their identities. These faculty are scarce and thus in high demand by committees, task forces, and other groups that wish for broad representation. The university must continually assess the service burden of all junior faculty to assure an even distribution, and periodically survey junior faculty members to ensure they are not in situations in which they perceive they have no choice but to take on an extra burden if they are to remain in good professional standing.

**Postdoctoral Fellows**

Postdoctoral fellows are future faculty members. These individuals have declared their intention to join a faculty, yet there is no campus-wide effort to train them for faculty responsibilities, and, with rare exceptions, no unit-level training programs. Post-docs have no official campus representation and no office is charged with assuring the content or quality of their experience at UIC. Instead, the post-doctoral experience at UIC almost always is limited to conducting research for faculty supervisors. Because of our experience with junior faculty in general and, specifically, with the efforts of the Under-represented Faculty Mentoring Program, we are acutely aware of the training needed to help under-represented postdoctoral fellows make the successful transition to junior faculty status.

The experience of being Interim Provost last year and living on the other side of campus also shaped my thinking rather dramatically and abruptly, not only with regard to diversity, but the role of a large public university in general. It would be a great experience for all of the health science deans to spend some time on the east side (and perhaps vice versa). There are noticeable cultural differences across the two sides of campus: you get to interact with a broad array of faculty who may think very differently about issues within education and the university.

— Jerry Bauman
Dean, College of Pharmacy

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I've been a part of the University of Illinois community for a while now. I started as a chemistry major in Champaign in the late ’80s. I graduated from UIC College of Medicine in ’94 and after a brief time away to do a residency, I came back in 1999, and joined the Department of Emergency Medicine faculty full time. As an emergency medicine physician, we see people from all walks of life, from various backgrounds and so in a practical respect, I see the importance of diversity both from a patient and provider aspect all the time.

A couple of years ago, we started an annual diversity conference. We named it the Vera McKovin to Diversity Conference and that was named after the first woman chair for our department here at UIC. This is typically a two-hour conference that we have at the end of the academic year for our residents. When we started this conference we decided to invite guest lecturers to come in and present on different aspects of diversity. We've had leaders in the field such as Meena Rao, William Walden, Javette Orgain, and Jorge Giorti just to name a few. A lot of the residents approached us and said, they would like to be a part of the program. We opened it up to the residents and their presentations were excellent, but what was most memorable about that was the dialogue that was started from there.

It was a very respectful, meaningful, eye-opening experience for residents and faculty alike. I can recall at this particular conference feeling that we had pushed past the stereotypical definition of ‘diversity’ just being about numbers and really moved into the realm of understanding the true essence of diversity.

When I think about an experience that really gave me a good sense of diversity, I think back to that particular conference and how it seemed like the barriers had come down and people were more accepting of each other and appreciated the strengths of individual diversity.

Heather Prendergast
Associate Professor
Vice Chair of Academic Affairs, Department of Emergency Medicine

Teaching and Learning

The traditional view of learning is that students must master existing bodies of knowledge. Key measures of an excellent education, however, are how well the acquired knowledge equips the recipient for success in the “real world” and whether education has fostered critical thinking. Critical thinking is stimulated and enhanced by diversity and diverse experiences because diversity exposes students to ideas and options that might remain hidden in a non-diverse environment or in one in which diversity is not intentionally included in teaching and learning.

Diversity is a subject area and more: diversity extends to instructors’ approaches and methodologies, and how course content is selected and prescribed. Both notions — teaching directly about diversity and diversity as a lens through which teaching is understood — are critically important. Those who teach and guide our students must develop the ability to recognize and accommodate the different learning styles that students bring to the classroom while impressing on students standards of academic excellence. The classroom always must be a safe place for discourse on all points of view: this is the essence of academic freedom, which guarantees the airing of different perspectives so as to challenge conventional wisdom and make new knowledge.

Essential to an excellent education is learning in a diverse environment as opposed to learning in an environment dominated by a majority of any kind. In a majority-dominated environment the values of the majority are reinforced and replicated, and the values inherent in a minority perspective are stifled or even lost. Learning in a diverse environment allows each student to recognize and value his or her own identity and the identities of others and the unique contributions every individual makes to education at UIC.
The diversity of the UIC student body ensures that students will experience diversity among their peers in many classroom situations. Achieving faculty diversity would satisfy the representational component of a diverse education at all levels, but representation alone is not enough. The infusion of diversity into the curriculum broadens the scope of learning.

The Need for Ongoing (Re)Evaluation

UIC looks diverse but UIC must act on that diversity so that students may enjoy a full measure of enrichment. Ensuring the benefits of diversity calls for design and implementation of valid and reliable assessment methods. For maximum impact, we must coordinate our efforts to conduct effective assessment and enhance diversity in teaching and learning. The lack of coordination between assessment and practice may exacerbate the belief among some groups that the university is not serious about diversity, either in terms of increasing access, improving outcomes, or optimizing benefits. Efforts to broaden and deepen diversity should be assessed via follow-up studies and institutional data collection and analysis should include demographic patterns.

While UIC supports and encourages many efforts to enhance educational outcomes, the extent to which these efforts are coordinated in respect to diversity is not clear, nor is the issue of whether data are collected to enable assessment of educational practices and outcomes. A definition of the criteria to be used to measure practices and outcomes and ongoing analysis of data on diversity and of diversity’s effects on teaching and learning are essential.

Learning in a Diverse Environment

Students would benefit from courses that emphasize meaningful cross-cultural interaction and explore ways to talk about topics related to diversity. Topics often viewed as sensitive and difficult to discuss.

Besides the variety of programs to recruit and retain undergraduate, graduate, and professional students and promote positive educational outcomes for them, efforts must be made to offer courses that explore the challenges facing society today: for example, courses on immigration, housing, crime, child care, and marital law. Study and discussion of such topics, which affect many students personally, will promote educational interactions among peers.

In addition, students should learn how to assess their own progress as learners, and self-assessment must include much more than test scores. Students also need much more encouragement to participate in the many and varied opportunities to conduct research at UIC. Without this encouragement, many opportunities to increase the diversity of scholarship at UIC will be lost.

Access to off-campus learning experiences (e.g., domestic or international internships, study abroad, and undergrada research and volunteerism in domestic and international settings) for credit or to fulfill a requirement should be enhanced. These experiences broaden students’ academic and personal development opportunities, and combat current attitudes that the responsibility for providing under-represented students with off-campus learning experiences to offer a range of courses that might qualify as a diversity requirement. More often than not, such a course is taken during a student’s first year. To the best of our knowledge, no analysis has been made of the successes or failures of such a requirement. But on the surface, one possible consequence is the shunting of diversity into a small corner of students’ learning experiences.

This was the case at UIC when students were required to take two courses from a list of more than 70 that fulfilled a “Cultural Diversity” requirement as part of the general education program. The current general education program eliminated this course category, along with the humanities, social sciences, and natural science categories, in favor of a program of core courses that are clustered around six themes and sets of proficiencies. Under this new model, diversity has been integrated into courses across the general education curriculum and students have increased opportunities to reflect upon diversity topics and their intersection with multiple disciplines.

A further step along this continuum might be described by metaphor: what would happen if each discipline placed diversity in dialectical relationship to its body of knowledge? Our initial answer remains hypothetical because this document is but a component of the first iteration of a strategic plan, and each department or discipline can provide its own answer to the question. Answering the question would entail a serious review of each department’s course offerings and might require significant curricular changes. Departments in the humanities and social sciences generally explore diversity and its meanings quite extensively, but other departments do not. Such a review might strike these departments as a peculiar exercise, in that there is little, if anything, that the subject matter has little to do with diversity when diversity is narrowly conceived as an aspect of social relations. But courses on the anthropology of housing, the economics of immigration, the politics of child care and marital law, the chemistry of gender, the genetics of race, or the teaching of geology (or mathematics or physics) in urban settings are examples of courses that might be developed were we to make a campus-wide commitment to infusing diversity into all disciplines. If all disciplines are heavily invested in the promotion of critical thinking, might they also explore staking an investment in diversity?

An assumption underlying these suggestions is that it is worthwhile to think of diversity as more than a social good (as in courses that use diversity to challenge hate and bias) and more than an enhancement of the learning experience (as in courses that challenge majoritarian perspectives with diverse, multiple views). These types of courses certainly have their place, but a further educational experiment might consist in putting the very subject matter of the different disciplines in dialectical relationship with diversity. Such actions may be difficult, disruptive, and controversial, but the struggle can be worthwhile. In the humanities and the social sciences, for example, the disciplines have been changed by that relationship and have made new knowledge. The transformations occurred over many decades and were deeply controversial, and, to an extent, remain so. We are hoping that this document will encourage further conversation and experimentation along the same lines.

Development of Curricula at a Truly Diverse University

Among the more challenging issues facing the DSTDPC Committee during its deliberations was how to integrate diversity into teaching and learning. One solution at many universities has been to ask Colleges of Liberal Arts and Sciences to offer a range of courses that might qualify as a diversity requirement. More often than not, such a course is taken during a student’s first year. To the best of our knowledge, no analysis has been made of the successes or failures of such a requirement. But on the surface, one possible consequence is the shunting of diversity into a small corner of students’ learning experiences.

Diversity should not solely be incorporated into a university’s mission statement. All functioning units must work together and work hard to give it meaning. I think that’s what’s happening with the strategic planning—all units are embracing diversity by being actively involved.

— Evelina Ayrapetyan
Office of Development

Research and Creating Knowledge

Diversity Through the Lens of Research and Creating Knowledge

Diversity’s relationship to and impact on research and creating knowledge is the most complex of the areas we have considered. Currently, there is little understanding of how diversity impacts research, and scholarship in this area is almost non-existent. Yet diversity impacts and is impacted by research, and it is important to understand this relationship at UIC. We recognize that the question of who is empowered to engage in research is especially important, the answer is a powerful statement about an institution’s commitment to diversity.
Diversity Helps UIC Achieve Its Research Mission

As a research university, UIC engages in three activities: creation, dissemination, and application of knowledge. It is easy to understand how faculty, students, staff, alumni, and external communities are involved in the dissemination and application of knowledge. It is equally important that we recognize everyone’s role in the creation of knowledge.

A close look at faculty, staff, and students engaged in research reveals a lack of under-represented minorities and a skewing of race and ethnicity among the disciplines. For example, African Americans and Latinos/as are poorly represented in research in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. This lack of diversity in research has two effects. The first is that it erodes excellence. The second is that a lack of diversity tends to perpetuate a lack of diversity because race and ethnicity frequently influence the choice of junior researchers. Thus, the less diversity among the research faculty, the less diversity there will be among trainees; and the more diversity among the research faculty, the more diversity there will be among trainees. Research faculty diversity, or lack of diversity, has a multiplier effect.

Ensuring a diverse population of researchers requires that the campus recruit faculty on a holistic basis, valuing personal history, collegiality, and scholarship, as well as expertise in a narrowly defined area of research. Promotion and tenure requirements must recognize all forms of research: basic, translational, applied, and engaged.

It is important to recognize that all research is unavoidably shaped by the researcher’s life history. Our unique life histories influence our choice of research topics, our insights, and innovations. That is, each faculty member’s research agenda is shaped by the confluence of social and personal, academic, and research identities. As a diverse university we have a responsibility to impress this concept upon our students and acknowledge and respect the role that personal passion plays in one’s research career.

In similar fashion, we must advance and value engaged scholarship and research. Engaged research, whether known as “translational,” “innovation,” “entrepreneurship,” or simply “engaged,” is scholarship that cuts across teaching, research, and service. How engaged work is valued and evaluated in consideration of one’s contribution to the discipline and the university during academic review processes is an issue that must be articulated in our promotion and tenure guidelines.

UIC must commit to increasing and maintaining a diverse research faculty, with each member recruited as a whole person and judged for tenure with full understanding of the individual. Paying competitive salaries to researchers who poorly represent the disciplines. For example, African Americans and Latinos/as are poorly represented in research in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. This lack of diversity in research has two effects. The first is that it erodes excellence. The second is that a lack of diversity tends to perpetuate a lack of diversity because race and ethnicity frequently influence the choice of junior researchers. Thus, the less diversity among the research faculty, the less diversity there will be among trainees; and the more diversity among the research faculty, the more diversity there will be among trainees. Research faculty diversity, or lack of diversity, has a multiplier effect.

Ensuring a diverse population of researchers requires that the campus recruit faculty on a holistic basis, valuing personal history, collegiality, and scholarship, as well as expertise in a narrowly defined area of research. Promotion and tenure requirements must recognize all forms of research: basic, translational, applied, and engaged.

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UIC must commit to increasing and maintaining a diverse research faculty, with each member recruited as a whole person and judged for tenure with full understanding of the individual. Paying competitive salaries to researchers who bring diversity of thought is vital, because they have the power to increase our present excellence in research, and to influence and encourage the diversity of future researchers. Our tenured research faculty bespeaks UIC’s excellence, the continuity of UIC, and, through the students they train and the junior faculty they mentor, the future of UIC. Clearly, the excellence, continuity, and future of UIC depend upon the diversity of the tenured faculty.

Through the Lens of Diversity

University of Illinois at Chicago

Diversity Strategic Thinking

Closing Message From the DSTP Committee

Thinking about diversity as the core of UIC’s mission has taken many months of participation by representatives from all parts of campus. This document reflects our discussions, observations, and passions about the topic and guide the next stage, Diversity Strategic Planning.

Establishing a structure that allows a consideration of diversity to permeate every policy, procedure, program, workshop, discussion and activity at UIC will create an environment in which each member of the UIC community can potentially grow intellectually, culturally and personally. Solutions to the challenges we face will come from every sector of the campus. Creating a culture of sharing, acceptance and trust, in which community members value the contributions of all, is one of the greatest challenges we face. UIC must develop programs, and venues for meaningful interaction and conversation that promote the concept of diversity as integral to our core mission.

In closing we share the following thoughts about diversity:

1. We have not moved far enough in hiring under-represented minorities and women for faculty positions.
2. Merely hiring diverse people according to a formula will not make diversity a part of our core mission.
3. Academic Professional and Civil Service staff need to be considered in diversity planning because they make substantial contributions to the life of the campus and have been overlooked.
4. As part of their education on a diverse campus, students need to learn subject matter that includes thinking about diversity in traditional courses. Every course can be expanded to include an awareness of UIC’s core mission.
5. A permanent Office of Diversity, reporting to the Chancellor and/or Provost, will ensure that the diversity initiative and on-going assessment of progress become an integral, permanent part of UIC culture and our creation of knowledge.
6. UIC should aspire to be a leader — in practice and in scholarly activities — on issues of diversity in higher education. As such we should be actively engaged in scholarship that explores the impact and benefits of diversity on the UIC community and on the nature and quality of our research, teaching and learning, and service.
7. Coordination among the various offices, programs, committees, departments, and other units that work to support our diverse populations and to connect diversity to our core activities will have profound effects on the campus climate and in ensuring that UIC becomes a truly diverse campus.
8. Leadership on every level is an integral part of this effort, but it is essential that all UIC community members understand our institutional diversity goals, their rationales, and their intersections with our core mission.
The most memorable day for me was the day I landed in Chicago. It was so different than what I had imagined it to be, a cultural shock: the way people greeted you — their warmth and smiles were so welcoming. I felt like I was home. It was pleasant, but at the same time homesickness sank in.

I remember my first day in class. I was so nervous to go into the classroom but I happened to meet another person who made me feel very comfortable and easy. He helped me with my studies and told me he knew about the Indian culture and the educational system there. I realized the importance of knowing other cultures and how they can help us help one another. You have to judge people by their true color inside and not by the color outside.

Diversity is all about appreciating your similarities and respecting the differences. Realizing this has helped me to be more conscious of the people around me. I imagined the U.S. to be more like what I saw in the movies, but it was far more special than that. Coming to this country was a learning process for me.

From that first day of class, I was not homesick. I realized the cure for homesickness is learning how to move along with people around you and how to get comfortable in that place.

Anupama Hariharadas
Graduate Student, Electrical Engineering, Class of 2013

Diversity Strategic Thinking

University of Illinois at Chicago

Acknowledgements

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Please visit the Office of Diversity website for a PDF version of
Through the Lens of Diversity, including appendices.

We would like to thank the participants in our UIC Diversity Portrait Project. Many of their portraits were featured throughout this document.
Additional portraits from UIC students, staff and faculty can be viewed on the Office of Diversity website.

The Office of Diversity website: www.uic.edu/depts/oaa/diversity/