

Section 7: Diversity

A [Diversity Vision Statement](#) frames the efforts of Sonoma State University to establish and maintain a diverse and welcoming campus for students, staff and faculty. The statement expresses a campus wide commitment to pluralism and inclusive excellence, social justice and equality, diversity in the curriculum, and realizing human potential through overcoming fear, prejudice and discrimination. In order to enhance the educational and social growth of all of its students, Sonoma State University considers the fostering of tolerance, mutual understanding, and cultural competence to be among its primary institutional goals (1.5).

Context

The campus has united in a spirit of cooperation and collaboration around the topics of diversity and cultural competence. What is perhaps most striking is that this collaboration has emerged organically, simultaneously top-down and bottom-up, as crisscrossing constituencies have taken on the complex task of how best to understand and promote diversity for the students, faculty and staff. In 2008, three diversity-related committees took shape: the [President's Diversity Council](#) (PDC), the [Ad Hoc Academic Senate Committee on Diversity](#), and the California Faculty Association Affirmative Action Committee. The principal charge of the first is to spearhead and coordinate work on diversity for the campus overall with the ultimate goal of producing a Diversity Strategic Plan. The principal activity of the Ad Hoc Academic Senate Committee is to gather facts on and provide a systematic analysis of diversity for the faculty under the aegis of the Academic Senate. The California Faculty Association Affirmative Action Committee works to focus efforts on hiring and retaining a diverse faculty and staff.

There is ample overlap in membership amongst these committees. They have co-sponsored campus forums as well as sponsoring their own workshops and events. The committees coordinate their work and share a commitment to the Diversity Mission Statement.

In addition, the Management Development Academy (MDA), an ongoing year-long workshop to promote leadership skills for administrators, chose the topic of diversity as its principal focus for the academic year 2008-2009. Although the MDA does not include faculty, it does include administrators from Academic Affairs, such as the Academic School Deans, the Provost and Vice-Provost, and Academic Affairs administrators, who belong to some of the aforementioned committees. The MDA also is coordinating and aligning its work in support of the PDC.

Three reasons explain these recent positive developments in planning and execution on the topic of diversity. First, the University Strategic Plan prioritizes diversity as one of its central elements, and there is widespread agreement among faculty and administration on its commitment to diversity. Second, following the CPR Visit, the WASC Commission issued its letter of June 25, 2008. An important item of concern in their letter was a need to strengthen efforts to promote diversity across the campus community, focusing on realistic strategies for tangible improvement. And third, the [Academic Senate Resolution](#) of March 6th 2008 called for an enhanced institutional commitment to diversity, resulting in creation of the Ad Hoc Committee on Diversity.

Structure and Function

Diversity is an assessment category in [program review](#) (CFRs 1.5, 2.7). An academic unit must explain 1) how it addresses the cultural, ethnic and social diversity of

the student body in its curriculum, 2) how it accommodates differences in student preparation and access to educational opportunities, 3) how it shows leadership in recruiting and retaining a diverse faculty and students, without reliance on discriminatory preferences and 4) how it addresses diversity in advising, mentoring and career development. Academic units undergo program review on a five-year cycle. Academic Affairs and the Academic Senate work collaboratively on the review process, which culminates in a MOU between the Provost and the academic unit. Program review enables the university to stay abreast of curricular and related issues of diversity at the grassroots level.

Seven academic departments or units make diversity a prime focus of their mission and curriculum: [American Multicultural Studies](#), [California Cultural Studies](#), [Chicano and Latino Studies](#), [Foreign Languages](#), [Global Studies](#), Native American Studies (a minor program), and [Women's and Gender Studies](#).

Diversity is also a primary concern of the administration. [Career Services-Diversity Resources](#) provides career support for women, students of color, disabled and LGBT students. [Disabled Student Services](#) supports disabled students through providing for their needs in the areas of testing, registration, note-taking, technology and advising. The [Education Opportunity Program](#) supports low-income students who are first in their family to attend college. The [Center for Culture, Gender and Sexuality](#) promotes activities that create an environment of mutual respect and appreciation. It offers support services for women, the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community and ethnic minorities. [International Services](#) offers services for international students. The [Office of Disability and Compliance](#) addresses complaints of sexual assault, harassment and

additional types of discrimination, though Campus Police remain the principal avenue of recourse for students who report incidents of sexual assault and harassment.

University programs that concern themselves directly with diversity include the following: [Educational Opportunity Program](#) awards grants to economically and educationally disadvantaged Educational Opportunity Program students; the [Music Department](#) supports a Gospel Choir and an Indian Singing Ensemble; the English Department has created two new section of English 99 (developmental writing) expressly designed for multi-lingual learners; the [MESA](#) program (mathematics engineering science achievement) supports educationally disadvantaged students to attain science degrees; [National Student Exchange](#) facilitates study at U.S. or Canadian colleges; the [Precollege Programs](#) supports low-income and first-generation college families; [Learning Skills Services](#) (LSS) provides tutorial and skill based support to first generation, disadvantaged and disabled student; the NoGAP McNair Scholars Program provides first generation and educationally disadvantaged students with support in pursuing graduate education; the [Safe Zone Program](#) supports students, faculty and staff who identify themselves as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender; the [Sonoma State American Language Institute](#) supports international students to study English or students who wish to teach English as a second language; and [Study Abroad](#) enables qualified students to study outside the United States.

The three year [EnACT Grant](#): Partnerships, Technology, and Dissemination, whose project director is SSU Associate Professor Emiliano Ayala of the School of Education, is a \$1 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education. Funding provides faculty at 8 campuses (including five faculty members at SSU) with the training

to redesign their courses according to principles of Universal Design for Learning, which will enable students with learning disabilities to better access course content. In the area of community engagement and service-learning, SSU has a partnership with Roseland University Prep (RUP), a high school serving a predominantly Latino community nearby. Various groups at SSU are involved in a number of service learning projects: SSU students tutor RUP students after school, and faculty serve as judges for the school's Portfolio Day. A Discovery Day and Shadow Day have been implemented that allow RUP students to explore the campus with EOP Academy students who serve as their guides and mentors. One eligible RUP student is admitted to SSU, academic advisors ensure that they experience a smooth transition to the university. The American Multicultural Studies Department has created a new Jewish Studies minor which offers students the opportunity to study the cultural and political contexts of world religions, with a focus on Judaism.

For students who live on campus, the university has numerous [clubs](#) that address ethnic, spiritual and international themes. These clubs range from Black Scholars United, to Raza-Native American Council, to various language clubs, to the queer straight alliance, to women in computer science, and to religious clubs such as Hillel and the Newman Catholic Center (CFR 2.13).

The Office of Student Outreach and Recruitment, [Student Affairs and Enrollment Management](#) (SAEM), strives to attract a more diverse student body without relying on discriminatory practices. It has adopted various initiatives. For instance, SAEM partners with the Northern California District AVID program, which targets first generation

college students, helping them to meet CSU/UC admission requirements. SAEM offers in-class presentations, group tours of SSU, and training for AVID teachers.

Outreach and Recruitment also identifies college fairs, presentations and programs of relevance to diversity. It attends National Hispanic College Fairs, the Chicano/Latino Youth Leadership Conference and the East Bay Consortium College Fair. The East Bay Initiative is an effort to reach schools in the East Bay area, including Oakland, Richmond, Hayward, San Leandro and Solano County, all with student populations underrepresented on our campus. It also collaborates with local community agencies to promote higher education to students of color and/or first generation college students. These agencies include the Life Academy, Downtown College Prep High School and Summer Search.

The Outreach and Recruitment Office also makes bilingual presentations at Napa Valley College's annual Latino/a student conference. The office advertises in the local Spanish language newspaper, *La Voz*, and admitted students from underrepresented groups are contacted by SSU students to answer their questions and concerns and encourage their matriculation. Finally, during Seawolf Day, an all-day orientation for admitted students, a special reception for underrepresented students and their parents is held.

Regular campus events offer opportunities to develop an appreciation for diversity amongst the student body. Recently, the university supported Asian Heritage month with lectures, films and discussions. The Associated Students Productions have sponsored a series of presentations by social justice advocates, socially committed musicians, and

other civically engaged individuals, which various faculty members integrated into their spring semester courses.

Work in Progress: Gathering Facts, Achieving Consensus

The mission of the President's Diversity Council (PDC) is to identify initiatives that promote diversity in the areas of curriculum, recruitment and retention of students, staff and faculty, and campus civility. The PDC is developing a Diversity Strategic Plan for the university, which it can recommend to the President in the fall semester of 2009.

Membership in the PDC represents apposite campus constituencies. It includes the Provost, Academic Senate Chair, President of Associated Students, Vice-President for Student Affairs and Enrollment Management, Assistant Vice-President for Student Affairs and Enrollment Management, one School Dean, a faculty member from each of the five Academic Schools, a faculty member from the University Library, two students, two staff members and two community members.

The PDC began its work with an intensive workshop on diversity sponsored by the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AACU). The workshop helped to educate the council on the meaning and value of diversity for higher education. Such thinking appears to be coalescing around the concept of "inclusive excellence," which positions diversity as central to educating the whole student for success in a multicultural and global society. The PDC met regularly during the 2008-2009 academic year, dividing its work into five areas, creating a subgroup for each of them: 1) outreach; 2) retention for faculty, staff and students; 3) curriculum; 4) tolerance and civility on campus; and 5) infra-structure support. The PDC time has been spent brainstorming and gathering information to produce a Diversity Strategic Plan.

The PDC sponsored a university forum on the topic of diversity as inclusive excellence in spring 2009. The event was well attended with over a hundred participants. The heart of the forum consisted in lively break-out sessions centering around four themes: pedagogy and content; relating across differences; infrastructure feedback; and future scenarios. Sample excerpts from these break-out sessions are as follows:

- Pedagogy and content: improve mentoring and student development; provide permanent and accessible information on campus diversity activities; inventory courses that address diversity; build assessment tools for diversity that include students in the process; engage the community outside SSU; provide additional funding.
- Relating across Differences: empower students to discuss contentious topics in the classroom; create unity in the campus community; involve students in First Day planning; create conversations to promote change; celebrate inclusive excellence; train peer mentors in handling difficult situations concerning diversity; emphasize multicultural competence in the learning outcomes of a SSU liberal arts education; reform the teacher evaluation forms to include greater sensitivity to diversity issues.
- Infrastructure Feedback: create more places for students to meet and socialize on campus; create opportunities for faculty and students to connect; improve civility of campus police; create more affordable housing; create more diverse campus events;
- Future Scenarios: increase the diversity of faculty, staff and students; improve the climate on campus; increase sense of safety to discuss difficult topics; lessen

hierarchy and increase civility; increase interaction with nearby communities; provide multicultural education for all members of the campus; engage in community dialogues on diversity issues; provide awareness training around ‘white privilege’; have all student clubs and organizations present on First Day; accept more male students; provide opportunity for students to study abroad; increase the number of low income students and students of color.

The forum on diversity was successful in generating ideas, enthusiasm and building consensus on pragmatic ways to increase and celebrate diversity on campus. The PDC will use the feedback it generated from the event in its effort to design a Diversity Strategic Plan for the University.

The Academic Senate passed a resolution to create an [Ad Hoc Diversity Committee](#) in spring 2008. The charge of the committee is to review comprehensively the history and current status of diversity on campus in such areas as curriculum, staff and student activities, recruitment, retention and promotion, institutional programs, funding and administrative support. The committee understands diversity to include race, color, religion, national origin, sex (including sexual harassment and sexual assault), sexual orientation, marital status, pregnancy, age, disability, medical condition, veteran and socio-economic status. It is the expectation that the Ad-Hoc Diversity Committee will develop a coherent assessment of Diversity, including an action plan with priorities.

Membership in the Ad Hoc Diversity Committee and the President’s Diversity Council overlaps. The co-chair of the former is a member of the latter, and the chairs of the Ad-Hoc Committee, the PDC and the CFA Affirmative Action committee have met twice to coordinate their work. Membership of the Ad Hoc Diversity Committee includes

two students, one staff representative, one member from Extended Education, the Vice-Provost of Academic Affairs, the Vice President for Student Affairs and Enrollment Management, the Director of Employee Relations and Compliance and a CFA Affirmative action representative.

The Ad Hoc Diversity Committee held four open forums on diversity for students, faculty and staff during the 2008-2009 academic year with approximately 65-75 attendees at each of the events. The purpose of the forums was to collect feedback from the campus community on a wide-range of topics related to diversity, such as, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender, marital status, pregnancy, parenting, disability, medical conditions, economic status, classism, and white privilege. A sampling of concerns and recommendations follows:

- Bring the best academically prepared students to SSU—of any race or ethnicity—should be the campus’s first priority.
- Improve the social climate at SSU, particularly the lack of awareness of one another.
- Need to prepare all students for the world a very diverse workplace.
- Support all people and all experiences and not view Diversity as a “problem.” although it is often treated as one.
- Improve attendance, support and information about attend cultural events put on by the various student groups by faculty, staff and administrators.
- Need to “walk the talk” on diversity, not just put up a few banners for Black History Month.

- Support the comfort zones provided by BSU, MeCHa, and encourage all students on campus to join.
- Train faculty members to work with students from a wide variety of communities.
- Interrogate the elitism that permeates academia: social, class, and intellectual hierarchies that devalue student contributions and the contributions of those with less education in general.
- Teach students to learn to speak comfortably about race.
- Respect everyone as individuals, not as members of a particular race or community.

The Ad-Hoc Diversity Committee approved and submitted a comprehensive list of recommendations to the Academic Senate regarding the Center for Gender, Culture and Sexuality (CCGS) in spring 2009. Recommendations include: (1) locating CCGS in the division of SAEM (Student Affairs and Enrollment Management) so that funds from that division can support it; (2) establishing an advisory board with broad campus representation; (3) creating a private office for confidential meetings and establishing identifiable physical spaces for all the various constituencies it serves; (4) consolidating services based upon gender; and (5) creating a prominent leadership role for CCGS in promoting multicultural awareness, knowledge and skills.

The California Faculty Association (CFA) has created an Affirmative Action Committee, which focuses on recruitment and retention among faculty and staff. A workshop in Fall 2009 included over 38 faculty, staff and students and highlighted the impact of Proposition 209 on affirmative action policies. A number of caucuses have been formed that deal with affirmative action issues for various groups. A town hall

meeting attended by over 50 participants presented the progress made by all three committees and provided an opportunity for questions and comments.

The Academic Senate dedicated its spring 2009 semester opening faculty retreat to the topic of diversity. The Director of Inclusive Excellence from San Jose State University provided an overview of the work done at SJSU in the development, design, and implementation of an Inclusive Excellence/Diversity (IE/Diversity) Master Plan for the campus.

The Divisions of Academic Affairs and Administration and Finance have collaborated to create the Management Development Academy (MDA), the aim of which is to promote leadership among top tier administrators across all the university's divisions. The MDA meets monthly for a four hour intensive workshop and involves over 125 managers from all divisions of the campus. The MDA chose to focus its efforts on the topic of diversity for the 2008-2009 year and engaged the services of a nationally recognized consultant, who led discussions on issues such as white privilege, accountability, personal change and making the university a welcoming environment for all employees. Feedback from participants included the following comments regarding the outcomes of the MDA: stronger awareness of how the university is seen by all groups of people; greater awareness of diversity; expanded idea of multiculturalism beyond ethnicity; deeper awareness of bias and privilege; greater willingness to participate in diversity workshops; increased understanding of what diversity means; greater comfort level discussing diversity; renewed commitment to diversity; understanding of how one's work can advance diversity on campus.

Moving Forward

At the conclusion of the MDA, participants began developing action plans for implementation of specific initiatives in their areas that can promote diversity at the university. These action plans will be refined within individual units. The Division of Academic Affairs has adopted several diversity related initiatives. First, it will create 50% time base faculty position for an Inclusive Excellence Coordinator. Once the Diversity Strategic Plan is in place, the coordinator will help implement its initiatives and serve as a member of the PDC. The coordinator will also develop a series of professional development workshops for faculty, such as how to incorporate multicultural competence into the curriculum. The Academic Senate has asked the Ad Hoc Senate Committee on Diversity to extend its mandate through the fall of 2009 and will report to the Academic Senate at the close of the semester. The PDC will produce a Diversity Strategic Plan over the summer and submit it to the President approval in the fall of 2009.