

To: Oakland University Senate Steering Committee

From: George Sanders and Anne Switzer Zacharias, Co-Chairs of Faculty Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee (FDEI)

Subject: End of Academic Year 2023-24 FDEI Committee Report

Date: April 12, 2024

**Below is a year-end summary of the Faculty Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (FDEI) committee's work. This report was distributed to all members of FDEI on Monday, April 8, 2024. Eligible voting members were asked to indicate either yes, no, or abstain, as to whether they were in favor of submitting the report to the Senate Steering Committee. The final tally was 9 to 0 in favor of submitting the following:*

The members of the Faculty Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (FDEI) committee wish to express their appreciation for the opportunity to participate in one of OU's many efforts toward fostering a more just and inclusive community. The committee met throughout the academic year and worked to address the committee's stated charge:

- to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion in an environment of mutual trust and respect at all levels of the institution
- to facilitate opportunities and success for all community members
- to develop and refine metrics that will be used to monitor and evaluate OU's performance on faculty-related diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives
- to develop and implement training
- to research and promote best practices in faculty recruitment and retention
- to regularly conduct policy audits and recommend changes necessary to support a diversity, equity and inclusion in faculty recruitment, hiring, promotion and tenure and opportunities for leadership

While we were able to reach consensus on some matters, the committee struggled to define its appropriate role and purpose amidst the university's broad network of DEI-related programs and organizational units. The tasks and responsibilities outlined in FDEI's charge have significant overlap with the work of other departments, committees, advisory boards, and task forces within the institution—often more than one concurrently.

The Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, DEI Council, the Division of Student Affairs and Diversity, Center for Multicultural Initiatives, and OU's Employee Resource Groups, are just a few examples. Furthermore, there are various offices and positions that implement and enforce DEI-related policies such as those in Human Resources, Academic Human Resources, and OUWB's Faculty and Staff Affairs, among others. The commendable efforts of these organizational units are evidenced by a variety of initiatives, not least of which include Diversity Advocate Training, the Diversity Challenge, DEI Common Learning Experience, SAFE Training, and programs on implicit bias.

Thus, a common concern among committee members is that FDEI's efforts are largely redundant and reiterative. As a result, some members shared concerns that their efforts would be perceived as performative rather than substantive, thereby undermining the value and effectiveness of the many, worthy DEI-related policies and initiatives taking place across campus. To be sure, the committee members are unanimous in their support of creating a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive community. At the same time, discussions with individuals in various offices and committees related to DEI, led many FDEI members to conclude that their work would be duplicative or even at odds with that being done in other areas across campus.

FDEI aims to amplify the voices of Black, Latinx, Native American, and faculty members of other underrepresented minorities. At the same time, members sought to avoid the perils of adding to the "invisible labor" that is part and parcel in many institutions, academic and otherwise. Many faculty members struggle with inordinate service demands and this can be particularly excessive for minority faculty who are frequently called upon to serve as "representatives" of their ethnic or racial community. Some of FDEI's members pointed out that not only does this add to the work of others on our campus but can easily devolve into a form of tokenization, raising the risk of alienation at the expense of inclusion.

There was also widespread agreement on some additional issues. The recruitment of a more diverse makeup of faculty might be better accomplished through streamlining the approval process in order to closely align with the academic job market beginning in late summer or early fall. Department chairs often submit requests for faculty lines well in advance of this timeframe but fail to receive approval until after the peak hiring season. This results in a depleted job market that severely diminishes the opportunity to attract our most qualified candidates.

Furthermore, some members of FDEI noted the tendency to devote university resources to hosting, hiring, or contracting with external individuals or agencies. This frequently comes at substantial cost. Some of these resources might be allocated internally, thereby easing, to some extent, an already strained budget. Given the number of OU faculty whose scholarship is squarely positioned in all matters DEI-related, and whose expertise is frequently called upon by national organizations, individuals in the media, and other scholars, some in FDEI felt it worthwhile to consider soliciting partners in the OU community as opposed to subsidizing external interests.

Finally, members of the committee shared worries about the future of DEI (broadly speaking) given the recent surge in the current legislative proposals and the bills already in place that attenuate or eliminate DEI offices and initiatives across the country. As a consequence of these ongoing developments, members discussed the possibility of requesting that Faculty Senate consider modifying FDEI's charge. Though no consensus was reached, the proposals included the following:

- 1.) The typical purview of DEI has focused on race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual identity. The committee discussed a broadening of the number of categories (e.g., economic

background, citizenship status, mental health, bodily capacities, and/or neuro-divergence) in an effort to engage a wider segment of the population.

- 2.) Work related to DEI often addresses one identity-based classification in isolation of the others (e.g., programs related to discrimination based on gender identity *or* ethnic heritage). Such an approach lacks an intersectional perspective. Members felt it is equally important to address ways in which these categories are not mutually exclusive but function in interlocking systems (e.g., race *and* sexual identity). Thus, another proposal was not only to expand some of the categories identified in the examples listed above, but to seek ways to address the varying confluences of those categories.
- 3.) Members also discussed a re-branding of DEI by drawing attention to the intent of DEI-related programs and initiatives. For example, rather than relying on language that is increasingly perceived to be divisive by some segments of the population, committees like FDEI could be modified to highlight the university's shared values of opportunity, mentorship, accessibility, engagement, belonging, and/or care.
- 4.) Still other members proposed requesting that Faculty Senate disband FDEI altogether. The rationales are twofold: to pre-empt potential punitive legislative attacks on DEI while at the same time avoiding the reiterative overlap that exists between FDEI and other campus offices.

To be clear, no consensus was established on these aforementioned issues and the committee understands that further guidance from Faculty Senate is requisite.

FDEI wishes to reiterate its values and also to acknowledge that the institution of academia does not exist apart from the wider social and cultural environment. The historical legacies of racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, colonialism, and ableism continue to profoundly affect present circumstances at OU as elsewhere. Extant forms of institutionalized discrimination, marginalization, and oppression, alongside irrational fears of favoritism, reverse racism, and other forms of bigotry compound social inequalities.

This is not to suggest that the university is absolved of its impacts. Indeed, we feel that the university has ongoing responsibilities toward redressing and remedying inequalities. Our university community continues to make great strides in this regard, though more can obviously be done.

