

11/10/2022

Dear President Robbins and Provost Folks,

As the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee of the Faculty Senate we are writing to you as a follow up to the brief statement that the Chair of this committee made during the Faculty Senate meeting on November 7, 2022. We are here expressing our concerns more fully about the events of September 30, 2022, and the impact that this and similar events in recent years have had on Black faculty, staff, students, and Allies at the University of Arizona. We also want to highlight and offer recommendations about the broader structural and institutional problems related to DEI that we believe have had a detrimental effect on the manner in which conflicts are addressed at the University of Arizona.

At the time of its last meeting on October 26, 2022, the Committee did not have the full set of facts of what happened on September 30 other than that the police were called on a Black Disabled Queer student at the MLK Building. Despite not having the exact facts about the event, Committee members agreed that there are ongoing and still as yet unaddressed structural issues with respect to racial and social justice on our campus, which this recent incident underscored. The incident of September 30th is just one of many worrisome events affecting our marginalized and minoritized students in the last 10+ years. The President's recent message to the UArizona community on November 1 acknowledges there are problems, which is a first step, but we believe more should be done to address the underlying problems we face as a community.

In the summer of 2020, President Robbins issued a strong statement condemning the police violence that resulted in the tragic death of George Floyd. President Robbins expressed support for racial and social justice, and pledged a renewed commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion at the University of Arizona, acknowledging that diversity, equity, and inclusion are embedded values of both our land grant institution and our current Mission Statement. Upon consideration of the event of September 30, 2022, as well as prior events in which our marginalized and minoritized students have highlighted grievances negatively affecting their progress, success and achievement at this institution, the DEI Committee believes that there is an unacceptable gap between our University's stated goals and commitments and the actual experience of many of our most vulnerable students, staff and faculty members.

The Committee has identified the following 8 key points of concern and offers corresponding solutions:

Key Point # 1: Routinely involving the University of Arizona Police Department (UAPD) does not build trust between students and the university or its administration.

Solution: The Senior Leadership Team needs to be accountable and transparent regarding when UAPD will be involved in events on campus.

Key point #2: The use of Interim appointments for DEI leadership positions that are fundamental to the health of our institution. Interim means “not stable”; the position can turn over multiple times without advancing the mission or addressing the needs of students, faculty, and staff on our campus.

Solution: The Senior Leadership Team must make permanent appointments to DEI leadership positions, restructure the ODI and Cultural Centers, and incorporate stakeholder input in this process. The stakes for marginalized and minoritized students, faculty, and staff in our campus community are too high. We cannot afford another “experiment.”

Key Point # 3: The length of time the administration has taken to respond to the event on September 30th (and previous events) has caused additional harm to the students and the campus community. We must recognize that this incident affects many people of different backgrounds who are situated in very different ways relevant to the genuine DEI on our campus.

Solution: More timely communication from the SLT and opportunities. For open dialogue with them about incidents that affect our community.

Solution: Let us also re-examine Policy 5-403 concerning disciplinary procedures related to academic Integrity and Code of Conduct as to avoid a circular trajectory that creates potential conflicts of interest and risk breaching “the intent ... to provide adequate procedural safeguards to protect the rights of the individual students and legitimate interests of the University” per policy P-401-B

Key Point # 4: The over-policing of students must be addressed. From a safety and a moral perspective, we should never treat our students in the manner that occurred on September 30. Because the structure around use of UAPD on campus is unclear and there are structural barriers regarding accountability in the use of police force on campus, the police have become the first “go-to” for every issue.

Solution: To successfully address the over-policing of students, especially our BIPOC students, there needs to be a fundamental change in thought and in action. The SLT needs to invest resources in de-escalation and cross-cultural miscommunication training for everyone on campus.

Key Point # 5: The University community does not know where/how problems and conflicts are handled due to recent changes in multiple departments that are trained to handle these issues: OIE, Ombuds, ODI, Dean of Students, or HR? As a result, UAPD seems to have become a “catch all” for incidents that would have previously been reported to and mediated by specific offices on campus.

Solution: Structural breakdowns that have led to these incidents must be addressed. The SLT must take concrete practical steps towards accountability by providing clear and easily accessible maps of the reporting structures in place for DEI issues around the university. This includes clear explanations of the roles and responsibilities of each office trained and equipped to handle these issues, as well as creating a process for faculty, students, and staff to report DEI concerns safely and anonymously

Key Point # 6: Many are still trying to find out exactly what happened on September 30, and all sides must be heard. The safety of faculty, students and staff need to be taken into account from different perspectives. There is a deep-rooted feeling on campus that BIPOC students are not being supported, and that the positions and policies intended to support DEI are all performative. Similarly, the Climate Surveys and BEST reports are not reflective of these deeply rooted issues affecting students of color.

Solution: We must not just focus on the event, but instead do an introspective review of the university structure as a whole. We will lose sight of bigger issues if we focus exclusively on what happened on September 30 (or on previous incidents). Fixing and clarifying DEI and grievance reporting structures is fundamental to addressing the institution and systematic problems.

Key Point # 7: In the midst of the information gaps related to the September 30 incident, students and staff who have disabilities have expressed strong concerns that they are being targeted by able-bodied people at much higher rates than their able-bodied peers.

Solution: There should be a serious discussion, as well as revision of official procedures, when faculty members feel threatened. This includes de-escalation and cross-cultural miscommunication training as mentioned above.

Key Point # 8: From a student perspective, the September 30 incident speaks to a larger trend of lack of administrator accountability and lack of an urgent response by administration to long-standing issues.

Solution: Our collective goal should not be to protect the institution, but the people who are within it. The institution serves the students and it needs to listen, honor and respond to the narratives of what these students are experiencing in a timely manner. This includes being more attentive, responsive, and accountable, especially to issues affecting marginalized students. The SLT needs to provide immediate leadership to AASA to help students with the support they need to thrive and succeed. They are currently without tangible leadership and are lacking vital support systems.

Conclusion: The DEI Committee believes that there is an unacceptable gap between our University's stated goals and commitments to diversity, equity and inclusion, and the actual experience of many of our most vulnerable students, staff and faculty members.

Recommendations:

- The members of the DEI Committee of the Faculty Senate call upon our University's Senior Leadership Team to take immediate practical action to remove the structural barriers outlined above that are harming our University community.
- The University should be held accountable for its commitments to diversity, equity and inclusion and it should act with transparency as it contemplates future policies and undertakes enforcement actions to fix the broken structure and ensure excellence.
- The Senior Leader Team must uphold its stated commitment to ensure the success of Black and marginalized and minoritized students.
- We call upon our University's Senior Leadership Team to address these issues in a timely and effective manner in order to put to rest more than a decade of written student demands for institutional accountability.
- The University should refrain from excessive reliance on law enforcement and over-policing of minoritized and marginalized students and invest in de-escalation and cross-cultural miscommunication training for everyone on campus. There should be clearly spelt out alternative channels and pathways to report and resolve issues that apparently do not warrant police presence, involvement or intervention.

The Faculty Senate Standing Committee on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion is committed to fostering and promoting an equitable and inclusive environment by identifying DEI-related problems and working with all stakeholders, including the Senior Leadership Team, towards solutions will improve our campus-wide community. We welcome the opportunity to discuss our concerns and recommendations with you, and to be part of the solution.

Sincerely,

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee of the Faculty Senate