

# Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Strategic Plan



**STEVENSON CENTER**

FOR COMMUNITY AND  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

*Illinois State University*

Fall 2023

## Introduction

The pandemic and racially biased hate crimes perpetrated in the summer of 2020 offered an opportunity for many individuals and organizations to consider their relationship to EDI practices. These events also offered space for activism and advocacy and the opportunity for transformative change to occur around these issues at the Stevenson Center and ISU broadly. Students in the ACED Masters programs approached Stevenson Center staff with concerns about their experience in the program at that time. While the individualized and informal responses may (or may not) have been sufficient at the time, such feedback prompted a deeper reflection and a desire among the Stevenson Center community to take this opportunity for change seriously and spend significant time and resources on reflection and planning to improve belonging and access in our program.

The first such opportunity for the Stevenson Center to formalize this commitment was through the Diversity and Inclusion section prompts for Program Review completed in the Fall of 2022. The information requested in that review was specific, but it allowed us to take the first steps in the right direction. After completing the Program Review, we strongly felt the need for a more robust plan to tackle EDI issues in our program and so we created this EDI Strategic Plan.

At the onset, our main goal was the finalization of this strategic plan by Fall 2023 which we believe we have achieved, and other formal steps toward integrating leadership and concern for EDI issues into our department. We hope to continue this transformative work as outlined in the following plan with implementation goals occurring prior to 2026. We intend to continue to amend this document and otherwise monitor goal progression annually, with more robust reviews occurring in line with either Program Review or Strategic Planning processes. So far, we have spent over 100 collective hours engaging in concrete work which is documented in this plan in addition to creating a roadmap for our future success. The continued dedication of staff time and departmental resources toward the goal of achieving these ends is a top priority for us and we hope this plan communicates as much.

Per the University's request in the Program Review document, we want share that underrepresented people pertinent to our department could have marginalized identities that may include but are not limited to: race, ethnicity, color, nationality, visa and citizenship status, geographic location, language/linguistic ability, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, class and economic status, spirituality and religion, disability and neurodiversity, age, military status, and marital status.

## Goals

Each goal provides the reader with a higher-level overview of what we hope to achieve and is followed by at least one objective which is an actionable step we intend to take to meet that goal. For each objective, we have also included a timeline status that helps us track information and maintain expectations about activity consistency and regularity. We have also mapped each of our goals to the Pillars of Progress (notably, the creation of this document itself is a clear commitment to most if not all the pillars) set forth by the University. Please note that the Pillars of Progress are themselves only marked by whole numbers and any decimal points I have added here coincide with a following bullet point in the Pillars of Progress document and are included for clarity sake. We have, in most cases, also provided some commentary at the end of each goal's section for clarity and context which we hope will aid the reader.

*1) GOAL: Actively recruit and admit diverse students into our Graduate Programs:  
Build incoming cohorts of which 25% (minimum) represent racially diverse experiences*

1. Objective: Increase targeted outreach through LinkedIn Premium searches to prioritize communication with diverse applicants  
Status: Ongoing, Annual
2. Objective: Hold at least 5 online and/or in-person recruitment events (e.g., advertised through/with Service Year Alliance, Peace Corps, Serve IL), and include EDI support information in our presentations  
Status: Ongoing, Annual
3. Objective: Move podcasts to streaming service to increase accessibility  
Status: Initial upload: complete; Ongoing, Annual
4. Objective: Inquire/meet with the Graduate School to learn about how to effectively collect data about our applicant pool and recreate Applicant Tracking Page to mirror the application  
Status: Finite, Complete by Fall 2024
5. Objective: Request that students include information in their personal statement about their work with social justice and EDI topics  
Status: Finite, Complete by Fall 2024
6. Objective: Seek and consume resources to learn how to market more effectively to diverse groups  
Status: Ongoing, Annual

Pillars of Progress: 4.2, 5.1, 5.2,

*Comments*

This goal has been in place for two consecutive years prior to writing this plan. We have been successful in achieving a 25% minimum racial diversity average over the last three years. In future plans, hope to consider increasing our goal as it relates to attracting racially diverse applicants and will consider adding goals around recruitment of students from other marginalized identity groups.

*2) GOAL: Actively recruit and hire diverse staff*

1. Objective: Include statement in job posting encouraging diverse applicants to apply  
Status: Ongoing, Irregular
2. Objective: Post positions to a wide variety of sources both locally and globally  
Status: Ongoing, Irregular
3. Objective: Include at least one supplemental question in job application regarding EDI comfortability  
Status: Ongoing, Irregular
4. Objective: Ask multiple questions in the interview process about applicant's EDI comfortability  
Status: Ongoing, Irregular
5. Objective: Communicate in job interviews that EDI is a high priority at the Stevenson Center  
Status: Ongoing, Irregular

Pillars of Progress: 3.1, 3.3, 3.4, 4.2

*Comments*

Due to the nature of HR designated hiring processes which is determined, in part, also by the State of Illinois, it is impossible for us to statistically measure the diversity of our applicant pool, especially for Civil Service position for which we are provided top three applicant names and are not privileged to any information about

other applicants (unlike in AP searches). HR will not provide demographic information due to non-discrimination law. For us, the next best way to “determine” if our applicant pool is diverse is by attempting to recruit diverse applicants and screen all applicants for EDI understanding as we have outlined above. We can track those efforts as well.

Over the past 5 years, the Stevenson Center has hired two new staff. Those hiring pools were diverse in gender but not in race. However, asking EDI questions allowed the opportunity to screen the applicant pool for comfortability and hiring choices have reflected desired commitment to this work. In the Fall 2022/Spring 2023 search for a new Office Manager, steps A & C were added intentionally to the hiring process and we improved upon practices with steps D & E to be more explicit and intentional.

*3) GOAL: Create an inclusive classroom environment by actively engaging inclusive faculty and offering curricula that is generated by diverse scholars and practitioners who displaying a diversity of thought while accurately representing the experience of diverse communities*

1. Objective: Collect student feedback regarding experiences with curriculum, coursework, and faculty at the end of the first and second years as it relates explicitly to issues of diversity and inclusion in the classroom\*  
Status: Process is Ongoing, Annual; Addition of explicit questions is Finite, Complete by Fall 2023
2. Objective: Communicate our interest in/provide information about the benefit of integrating diverse scholarship into required classes for ACED students in Core Course and their respective sequence to partner chairs and grad advisors. We will specifically consider how to use the Framework of Teaching Excellence to communicate this perspective/need.  
Status: Finite; Present at Annual Fall 2024 or 2025 Board Meeting
3. Objective: Through the curriculum committee, request EDI statements/plans as well as diversity-related curriculum data (frequency of works by diverse author, etc.) from partner departments to remain aware of their practices and to respond with desire for change as needed  
Status: Ongoing, Initial Request to be deployed Spring 2024 with hopes for review at Fall Board Meeting 2024
4. Objective: Invite all partnering professors to engage in any coordinated EDI trainings  
Status: Ongoing, Regular

Pillars of Progress: 1.2, 5.4, 6.3, 7.1, 7.5

### *Comments*

We recognize that our ability to influence curriculum is limited considering academic freedom and our position as an external, administrative body rather than a degree granting, academic department. Therefore, our focus must be on providing information and communicating our commitment to this work in hopes that our desire for change and perpetuation of EDI content be shared or absorbed by our partners. Similarly, we can only hope to be advocates for students in the event that they share a negative experience regarding a professor, course, or curriculum decision. It is our duty to be stewards of this information and act on it understanding our limitations.

\*While questions in our surveys on the topic of curriculum, coursework and faculty do not explicitly mention EDI issues, students have, over the past several years, reported concerns and those concerns have informed this document.

*4) GOAL: Institutionalize EDI responsibilities to ensure long-term sustainability*

1. Objective: Integrate EDI Coordinator responsibilities into Program Coordinator Position  
Status: Complete
2. Objective: Assess progress of items outlined in this document in tandem with Program Review  
Status: Ongoing, Every 4 years
3. Objective: Create and maintain EDI Statements (Mission, Vision, Strategies, Philosophy)  
Status: Initial creation complete; Maintenance is ongoing, annual
4. Objective: Assess all program materials with EDI lens  
Status: Ongoing, annual
5. Objective: Create EDI monthly calendar of events  
Status: Ongoing, Semesterly/annually
6. Objective: Apply for funding to redesign student conference room space which will include considerations of universal design and a budget for the purchase of culturally relevant and inclusive art to provide lasting, inclusive physical space for students to gather  
Status: Create plan by and apply for funding in Fall of 2024
7. Objective: Develop a student-alumni mentorship program where matching can be based on service experience, degree area and/or cultural identity  
Status: Ongoing, assess interest and implement program by Fall 2026 if appropriate based on assessment
8. Objective: Engage staff in professional development activities (reading articles, attending talks and workshops, etc.) to learn about, discuss and consider the implementation of best practices into daily Stevenson Center Operations
9. Status: Ongoing, Monthly

Pillars of Progress: 1.6, 2.1, 2.4, 5.4, 5.8, 6.2, 9.1-4

*5) GOAL: Promote student's and staff's cultural competence to create space where students can live authentically and feel supported*

1. Objective: Provide staff professional development funds to engage in EDI activities (reading articles, attending talks and workshops, etc.) that promote learning about different groups of people and to consider the student success implications of working with these groups of people  
Status: Ongoing, Regular
2. Objective: Staff will strive to complete 5 hours of EDI Professional development activities (minimum, as listed above) to demonstrate commitment to learning and growth  
Status: Ongoing, Annual
3. Objective: EDI Coordinator will plan and implement Stevenson Center-specific EDI training and professional development opportunities during Staff Meeting times as described above  
Status: Ongoing, Monthly (minimum)
4. Objective: Collect student feedback regarding experience with Stevenson Center staff and program regarding EDI issues and belonging  
Status: Ongoing, Annual; implemented in Spring 2023
5. Objective: Provide 400\$ in professional development funds per student for the purchase of books, trainings, etc. that promote learning around issues of anti-racism  
Status: Ongoing, Annual

Pillars of Progress: 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 2.2, 6.2

## *Comments*

Staff have been actively focusing on this work over the past year (22-23 school year) and have been successful in the creation of set of EDI statements that have been integrated into the Program Manual. Staff have collectively engaged in nearly 100 hours of EDI training in the past year that has led to creation of new programmatic plans and policies that were be implemented in the 22-23 school year to promote EDI, for example Listening Circles and conflict resolution policies.

In the Spring of 2022, the Graduate Program Coordinator undertook the additional role of EDI Coordinator. This not only exemplifies our commitment to EDI to our students and other stakeholders, but it has facilitated leadership and prompted accountability around this work to ensure that time and resources are dedicated to its proliferation.

Since offering students anti-racism funds beginning in Fall 2020, 14 students have used approximately \$2,500 in funds to buy books, trainings/access to courses, and registration to both attend events and speak at events on anti-racism.

Staff engaged in an LGBTQ+ sensitivity training on 7/13/22 and reported an increased sense of confidence in talking about these issues and engaging students in this community.

While students have approached us and requested special meetings about EDI concerns in the past, the surveys are and will remain safe places for students to offer feedback on their satisfaction with and experience in the program. Our annual review of this data has informed EDI decisions in the past including some of those discussed in this document. We added questions in the Spring of 2023 that specifically asked students to reflect on their experience with belonging, inclusivity, and acceptance in the program itself and when interacting with our staff to more directly address future student EDI concerns.

*6) GOAL: Ensure that we offer safe and inclusive host site option for the professional practice requirement in year two and an equitable placement process.*

1. Amend the Host Organization Application to include a question regarding the organization's EDI philosophy and policy  
Status: Complete (Summer 2022)
2. Amend Program Handbook to include resource information like OEOA  
Status: Complete (Summer 2023)
3. Gather ongoing feedback from the students through rankings and debrief meetings to assess student comfortability with applicants  
Status: Ongoing, Annual
4. Hold Listening Circle shortly after the start of the interview phase of the placement process and at the end of the placement process to reduce feelings of competition and create space for group dialogue  
Status: Implementation in Spring 2022; Once implemented - Ongoing, Annual
5. Explore implications of a cost-of-living stipend increase for students in high-cost areas  
Status: Finite, Complete by Fall 2026

Pillars of Progress: 1.1, 1.2, 5.4, 6.3

## *Comments*

We added an EDI philosophy question to our host application in Fall of 2021. Several host organizations noted an appreciation for the question. New students were made aware that this was a recent revision and seemed to approve of the addition. Students were, in general, satisfied with their final placement sites in 2022 and, unlike in previous years, did not voice any initial concerns about host applicants from an EDI perspective.

It was difficult to meet regularly with students during covid, but regular placement check-ins were more common in the 2017-18, 18-19 and 2021-22 school years. Any concerns with initial host applications were minor and in the occasional event that there was a concern, check ins allowed us to ensure students they would not be placed at an organization with which the student was uncomfortable.

While we have heard the request for an increase in stipend due to location of the professional practice, we have foreseen barriers to complete this work, however we feel an assessment attempt can be made in order to legitimize the extent of these concerns and we will complete that assessment by the next program review cycle.

### *7) GOAL: Increase transparency with stakeholders regarding EDI Practices*

1. Objective: Add EDI Statements to Program Manual  
Status: Complete
2. Objective: Create and maintain EDI tab on Stevenson Center webpage where we can continually update stakeholders, provide resources, and promote professional development opportunities  
Status: Implement by Fall 2026; Once implemented: Ongoing, Regular
3. Objective: Provide information regarding anti-racism funds during Orientation including process for requesting funds and examples of how the funds have been used in the past to increase participation in the program  
Status: To implement Fall 2023; Once implemented – Ongoing, Annual

Pillars of Progress: 8.1

## Timeline

While the plan currently groups items by topic and includes action steps we've already taken, it feels valuable to outline tasks based on determined due dates and to assign a primary point person to each task. This section of the plan is organized as such, though, notably does not consider ongoing tasks.

### *Fall 2023 Focus*

7.3: Objective: Provide information regarding anti-racism funds during Orientation including process for requesting funds and examples of how the funds have been used in the past to increase participation in the program (Paige)

### *2024 Focus*

3.3 Objective: Through the curriculum committee, request EDI statements/plans as well as diversity-related curriculum data (frequency of works by diverse author, etc.) from partner departments to remain aware of their practices and to respond with desire for change as needed (Dane)

1.4 Objective: Inquire/meet with the Graduate School to learn about how to effectively collect data about our applicant pool and recreate Applicant Tracking Page to mirror the application (Dane)

1.5 Objective: Request that students include information in their personal statement about their work with social justice and EDI topics (Dane)

3.3 Objective: Through the curriculum committee, request EDI statements/plans as well as diversity-related curriculum data (frequency of works by diverse author, etc.) from partner departments to remain aware of their practices and to respond with desire for change as needed (Dane)

4.6 Objective: Apply for funding to redesign student conference room space which will include considerations of universal design and a budget for the purchase of culturally relevant and inclusive art to provide lasting, inclusive physical space for students to gather (Amy)

### *2025 Focus*

3.2 Objective: Communicate our interest in/provide information about the benefit of integrating diverse scholarship into required classes for ACED students in Core Course and their respective sequence to partner chairs and grad advisors. We will specifically consider how to use the Framework of Teaching Excellence to communicate this perspective/need. (Dane)

### *2026 Focus*

4.7 Objective: Develop a student-alumni mentorship program where matching can be based on service experience, degree area and/or cultural identity (Paige, Amy)

6.5 Objective: Explore implications of a cost-of-living stipend increase for students in high-cost areas (Paige, Amy)

7.2 Objective: Create and maintain EDI tab on Stevenson Center webpage where we can continually update stakeholders, provide resources, and promote professional development opportunities (Amy)