

# Academic Affairs

## Anti-Racist and Anti-Discrimination Agenda

### *Established Fall 2020*

Academic Affairs is expanding and deepening its Diversity, Equity, and Inclusivity (DEI<sup>i</sup>) programs. A commitment to **inclusive excellence**<sup>ii</sup> is central to how the division functions, and this mindset will drive our strategies for the future.

Beyond our division, JMU recognizes it cannot sustain what we think of as our excellence without authentically embracing inclusivity. Recent actions, such as [renaming campus buildings named for Confederate leaders](#) and formation of the [University Task Force on Racial Equity](#), are indicators of the bold and proactive initiatives we all acknowledge are needed. The lack of diversity and equity are not limited to JMU. As an institution of higher education in the Commonwealth of Virginia, we have a responsibility to address these inequities. Using the guidance provided by the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia, we acknowledge that it is way past time to “move the conversation to action” and “look instead to provide access, a seat at the table, power, and real change.”<sup>iii</sup>

Beginning with the 2020-21 academic year, Academic Affairs leadership is committed to adopting an explicit, proactive **anti-racist and anti-discrimination agenda**. We are approaching these initiatives with a focused urgency, acknowledging that we can no longer be satisfied with institutional gradualism. JMU's future depends on implementing this anti-racist and anti-discrimination agenda with the unwavering support of the entire division.

The following tangible actions, undertaken over the summer, lay the foundation for our transformation to a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive environment:

- Increased funding for African, African American, and Diaspora Studies (AAAD), increasing its visibility through a centrally located office and providing administrative support
- Increased funding for Latin American, Latinx, and Caribbean Studies minor
- Created roles for SGA and NAACP student representatives who will join select Academic Council meetings

Most significantly, the provost appointed three Black Faculty Advisory Associates (BFAA), with expertise across a range of disciplines and intersectionalities:

- Dr. BJ Bryson, Professor, Social Work
- Dr. Bayo Ogundipe, Interim Department Head and Professor, Engineering
- Dr. Besi Muhonja, Professor, English

These associates will work regularly with the provost and Academic Affairs leadership to guide and advise on communications, climate, initiatives, and other pertinent matters. Their responsibilities will evolve over time, driven by the needs and opportunities identified by the BFAAs, Academic Affairs leaders, and the provost.

This agenda has five broad goals, for which specific, measurable outcomes will be developed.

1. Identify and correct practices, structures, and policies that contribute to oppression and that reflect structurally racist or discriminatory practices.
2. Achieve a critical mass of Black and Brown intellectual thinkers among the divisional administrators, faculty and staff sufficient to sustain intellectual discourse that acknowledges the vitality of intersectional identities and expertise in the academy.

3. Create academic communities that celebrate interconnections and recognize intersectionalities among racial and other identities, including gender, sexual identity, religion, and national or ethnic origin. Celebrate critical scholarship that identifies structural intersectionalities pertaining to research of Black and Brown scholars.
4. Diversify, with deliberation, the university's formal and informal curricula and pedagogy to sustain inclusive excellence across intellectual traditions now and in the future. Create a space in Academic Affairs where these issues are acknowledged and discussed openly.
5. Strategically allocate resources—money, space, and personnel—to dismantle racist and discriminatory practices and presumptions and build structural support for equitable and inclusive practices that sustain the diverse institutional culture we need.

Budgets are moral documents. From this point forward, all existing and new initiatives, programs, projects, and faculty development activities will be approached, and resourced, through an anti-racist and anti-discrimination lens, including:

- Recruitment and retention of students, staff, and faculty
- Advising and mentoring of students
- Leadership development and professional advancement of faculty and staff
- Revision and development of curriculum
- Engagement with external communities, alumni, and donors
- Communications and marketing materials that portray our image and identity
- Policy development and revision for policies involving faculty, related to employment and advancement, and involving students, related to academics
- Faculty assignments and workloads, including service on committees and task forces
- Faculty recognition, including evaluation, promotion, tenure, and awards
- Student recognition, including service on committees and task forces, scholarships, and awards

Moving this agenda ahead requires building trust, among each other and throughout each unit within AA. Members of Academic Council are committed to their own development work as leaders – to their own examinations and deeper understandings, as individuals and as a group, of their own biases and blind spots.

All levels of the division have a role to play in advancing this agenda. We recognize that it is crucial for unit-specific decisions be developed by those who are the most involved rather than dictated from above. Academic Affairs leadership will advance this anti-racist and anti-discrimination agenda by clearing the way, empowering colleges and academic units to develop their own detailed plans and specific documents in ways that benefit them most. Deans will develop timelines that articulate and account for the actions, plans, and goals for their colleges. Academic unit heads will facilitate processes that engage the faculty, creating their internal goals and action plans.

With this charge comes responsibility: All areas must articulate their planned actions and accountability measures, and they will be regularly assessed. Where possible, plans should reference previous goals and recommendations based in the outcomes of COACHE surveys, as well as in any other unit-specific surveys, datasets, or studies.

Our areas operate in their own idiosyncratic ways, and we will embrace those differences as well as our commonalities. We are aware of work that is ongoing within academic units and colleges, and we offer the following examples and actions as additional options:

1. Be transparent about the complexity of making changes in large bureaucratic organizations. Acknowledge that even when there is support and enthusiasm, good intentions aren't enough to affect real change.
2. Set explicit goals with timelines and measurable outcomes that are relevant to your programs and disciplines. Establish how, and by whom, you will be held accountable.

3. Empower DEI leaders to be primarily accountable for establishing priorities, articulating goals and developing mechanisms for accountabilities.
4. Consult with external organizations that have expertise in immersive, anti-racist and anti-bias training relevant to your disciplines and programs.
5. Engage in internal trainings with programs such as DEEP Impact, Intergroup Dialogue, Wake Up, etc. for leadership teams, academic units, programs, and other affiliated groups.
6. Hold regular meetings with student groups, including the Student Government Association Diversity committee and representatives from the [Black Student Alliance](#), [Center for Multicultural Student Services](#), the [JMU NAACP](#), the Student Coalition Against Racial Injustice (SCAR), and others to identify priorities and goals.
7. Study effective models for change at departmental or institutional levels and adapt and implement strategies for addressing systemic change. Efforts at [Johns Hopkins](#), [Cornell](#), and other institutions can and should serve as inspiration for intentional actions at JMU.

Each area reporting to the provost has established a leadership position to identify and articulate goals and priorities specific to their college or program, in consultation with their dean. These leaders will work closely with the Provost Faculty Diversity Council, Academic Unit Diversity Councils, the Associate Provost for Diversity, deans, and academic unit heads. To date, these appointments have been made:

- CAL: *Karina Kline-Gabel*, Lecturer, Spanish
- COB: *Dr. Demetria Henderson*, Visiting Assistant Professor, Management
- COE: *Dr. Oris Griffin*, Professor of Education
- CGE: *Dr. Felix Wang*, Associate Executive Director
- TGS: *Briana Gaines*, THRIVE Coordinator
- CHBS: *Dr. BJ Bryson*, Professor, Social Work
- Honors: *Dr. Fawn Amber Montoya*, Associate Dean for Diversity, Inclusion and External Engagement, Honors College
- CISE: *Dr. Kyle Gipson*, Associate Professor, Engineering
- Libraries: *Dr. Yasmeen Shorish*, Associate Professor, Special Adviser for Equity Initiatives
- PCE: *Shonta Sellers*, Director, Communications & Marketing
- CSM: *Dr. Marcus Davis*, Associate Dean; Diversity Council Chair
- University Programs: *Dr. Meg Mulrooney*, Associate Vice Provost, University Programs
- CVPA: *Dr. Susan Zurbrigg*, Professor, Art, Design and Art History

The work of the BFAAs, academic units, and colleges will be shared via the [Academic Affairs Diversity website](#) each month throughout the academic year.

This is a living document: It will change as JMU changes. We welcome the findings of the [upcoming climate study](#) and of the [President's Task Force on Racial Equity](#) and expect that this document will grow in response to their inquiry.

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<sup>i</sup> Diversity, Equity, and Inclusivity (DEI) is used by the Commonwealth of Virginia (<https://www.governor.virginia.gov/diversity/>)

<sup>ii</sup> AACU defines inclusive excellence here: <https://www.aacu.org/making-excellence-inclusive>

<sup>iii</sup> SCHEV [Advice and Recommendations to Address Current Social Unrest and Racial Injustices](#)