



Task Force on Diversity & Inclusion

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Prologue

In Spring 2015, a group of marginalized master's students in the MS-LIS program began to hold regular meetings with the Dean of SLIS to discuss their concerns related to inclusion at SLIS. Joyce Gabiola continued working with the Dean in the fall, as did other student leaders, to ensure that the momentum continued. Joyce approached the Dean with the idea of having a diversity committee.

The Dean formed a task force that consisted of faculty members and student representatives from the SLIS degree programs: BS in Computer Science, MS in Library and Information Science, MA in Children's Literature, and MFA in Writing for Children. The Dean asked Joyce to serve on the task force as a representative of the MS degree program. Students for the other programs were recommended by the program directors.

After an initial meeting with the Dean, the task force began having weekly meetings. In the first year, the task force hosted listening sessions to address issues related to campus climate and microaggressions. They also decided on future goals and priorities including

Starting in the fall of 2016, the task force began meeting every other week, continuing the work from the previous academic year. The Dean's Fellow for Diversity and Inclusion was brought onto the Task Force and together the priorities able to be addressed by the task force were concluded.



Charge of the Task Force

The charge of the School of Library and Information Science (SLIS) Task Force on Diversity and Inclusion at Simmons College is to advise Dean Abels on providing a safe, inclusive, and anti-oppressive environment for all students, staff, and faculty of SLIS, including the Children's Literature, Computer Science, and Library and Information Science degrees and programs.

Our working definition of diversity takes into account the intersectionality of social and cultural identities, including race and ethnicity, class, gender identity, sexual orientation, ability, faith community, political identities, and age, among others. Inclusion is representative of the intentional engagement we all create to understand these identities within our educational and institutional environment. Furthermore, the Task Force aligns its values and vision with that of the College.

Our values: "We honor the inherent humanity, dignity and worth of each member of our community.

Our vision: "Simmons College will be a welcoming, vibrant, inclusive community that appreciates, values, and respects the humanity, dignity, diversity, and contributions of all its members. We are committed to engage one another to address the dynamic, evolving issues of our community and our world."

During the fall of the 2016 school year we explored ways in which diversity and inclusion initiatives across the SLIS could be improved by:

- building on the ongoing efforts of the task force the previous year;
- organizing two listening sessions to engage with student concerns, experiences, and ideas;
- provide resources to introduce and explain the Bias Response Protocol to students to provide understanding of the grievance process for students, staff, and faculty to address bias incidents at SLIS;
- advocating to increase diversity of the student body by being a part of the search process for the Dean's Diversity Fellow and working closely with the Admissions office;
- promoting increased attention to diversity and inclusion within the SLIS curriculum; and
- communicating with the SLIS community regarding the Task Force's efforts.

Task Force Members

Dr. Nanette Veilleux, Professor, Director of Computer Science and Informatics Program
 Cathryn Mercier, , Director of the Children's Literature Program
 Rebecka Sheffield, Senior Lecturer
 Luisana Duarte
 Jazzmine Marie White
 Lena Gluck, Dean's Fellow for Diversity and Inclusion

Priorities

The task force prioritized advising the Dean in issues relating to Diversity and Inclusion. To this end we discussed issues relevant to marginalized students on campus and recommended courses of action.

Communication

The task force communicated with students through the established slisdiv@simmons.edu account.

The task force requested that the language of the annual eCard sent out after the fall semester be changed from “Holiday eCard” to “End of the Semester Card” as the previous phrasing implicitly centered Christian holiday tradition rather than being inclusive to students of all faith traditions.

Support for DIAC

The SLIS task force supported Diversity and Inclusion Action Council (DIAC) in the establishment of the Bias Response Protocol to address student, staff, and faculty grievances and to address bias incidents on campus. Additionally, the task force advised DIAC to consider introducing new community advocates who would be more familiar to students to avoid intimidation preventing anyone from seeking help.

The task force also supported the initiative DIAC has taken to educate faculty on diversity and inclusion related issues through training seminars.

Post-Election Response

The Diversity Fellow, with the support of the task force, surveyed SLIS students on what sort of programming and resources students needed and wanted following the election.

60% of surveyed students requested bystander intervention and self defense workshops. The Diversity Fellow, Lena Gluck, began work with a small group of grad students and Gina Capra, Violence Prevention and Educational Outreach Program Coordinator to bring self defense and bystander intervention workshops to campus. These programs were presented by Impact Boston, an organization that is trauma-informed and specifically centered on self defense for marginalized people. Three workshops were hosted on campus during spring 2017.

30% requested mental health resources, which was a need addressed by several other organizations and student groups on campus, so the task force did not feel the need to prioritize their creation.

10% requested listening sessions. The task force held two listening sessions— one for graduates and another for undergrad students— in the spring semester, focused on curriculum and faculty hiring.

Revisiting the 10 Demands

The task force discussed each of the 10 Demands, how they were previously addressed, and what might be done to further address concerns in the future.



Concluding Thoughts

The task force concluded its work at the end of the spring 2017 semester. The task force was created at a critical moment in SLIS to address an urgent campus need, and over the course of two years acted as a catalyst to the creation of needed structures to address the needs of marginalized students on campus.

As we move forward as an academic community, we can continue to improve our campus climate, curriculum, and faculty understanding of diversity related issues. The channels of communication have been opened and the infrastructure to address bias incidents and problematic language has been constructed. Faculty are receiving training on diversity issues so that they can responsibly facilitate conversations and introduce additional perspectives into the curriculum.

Students have been offered opportunities to learn self defense and bystander intervention so that they are better able to defend themselves and each other, and ultimately feel safer in their day to day lives.

Each member of the task force will move forward and continue work to improve SLIS independently and with other existing groups and in the upcoming semesters. Though the task force has come to its conclusion, the SLIS community remains committed to continuous improvement in areas of diversity and inclusion.

