

**INSTRUCTIONAL FACULTY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT  
WORKING GROUP**

**WORKING GROUP MEMBERS:**

- Melissa W. Aleman - Communication Studies
- Marcus Davis - Interim AUH, Mathematics and Statistics
- Gilpatrick Hornsby - Interim Executive Director, CFI
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**Recommendation Title:** Academic Unit Head Leadership Development

**Problem Statement/Issue**

The role of the academic unit head (AUH) can be considered one of “the most important, least appreciated, and toughest administrative positions in higher education” (Buller, 2012, 3). They serve in a mid-level leadership position that often acts as a conduit between the faculty within the department and higher levels of the university administration. While they are tasked with ensuring the smooth operation of the department, they are also well positioned to provide leadership in creating an inclusive and supportive culture for faculty, staff, and students. As JMU focuses on increasing the recruitment and retention of BIPOC faculty on the campus, one of the significant components to retention may be how welcomed the faculty member feels within their department.

It is well documented in research and publications like Inside Higher Ed and The Chronicle of Higher Education that BIPOC faculty feel less included at their institutions. “Many faculty of color feel both invisible in their departments and hyper-visible simultaneously. Exclusionary norms, interactions, and values translate into an unwelcoming environment, which may lead some faculty members to leave their institutions or exit academe altogether” (Mickey, Kanelee, and Mirsa, 2020)

With all these pressures placed upon the AUH, the lack of professional development to create an inclusive environment is concerning. AUHs are asked to either draw upon their own experiences as faculty members who may or may not have been in an inclusive environment or find time in their already busy schedule for professional development in this area. JMU’s commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion must also allow those in these pivotal positions to be developed appropriately to lead effectively.

*Recommendation, Rationale and Success Measures continue on following pages.*

**WORKING GROUP  
LEADERSHIP**



David Owusu-Ansah,  
Leadership Council



Cynthia Bauerle, WG CC



Cara Meixner, WG CC

**Recommendation:**

To lead equitable reform efforts within academic units—arguably *the* locus of change for faculty evaluation, promotion, and overall satisfaction—AUHs need ongoing professional and leadership development opportunities with an equity focus not currently offered by the institution. We recognize that the office of the Vice Provost for Faculty, Curriculum, and Policy provides monthly development opportunities for AUHs. However, these development opportunities do not appear to have an intentional focus on DEI, nor do all AUHs attend due to scheduling or other factors. As such, we recommend the following steps to achieve this recommendation:

Dedicate time during the AUH Retreat where participants can create a collaborative environment to address and solve issues related to DEI. These sessions would also provide the opportunity for specific development opportunities and create an anchor for future AUH meetings to be viewed through a DEI lens.

Promote higher levels of collaboration between the Associate Provost for DEI's office and the Associate Vice Provost for Faculty and Curriculum in creating these sessions. This may also be done in partnership with the Center for Faculty Innovation.

Explore new professional development programming and support existing programming specifically geared towards cultural competency and creating a welcoming environment.

Bolster AUH mentoring groups to also focus on promoting equitable and welcoming environments within individual departments.

We recommend that Academic Affairs coordinate mechanisms for AUH professional development that bring to the fore racial equity and justice. Such mechanisms should not be considered additive (e.g., intermittent DEI-focused training) but should infuse all facets of AUH development; topics like budgeting, supervision, and crisis intervention should all be developed through lenses such as decolonization, critical race theory, and equity-mindedness.

Further, we recommend that equity-focused professional and leadership development activities be rendered central, and not relegated under other matters of priority. Accountability measures (e.g., performance evaluations, faculty feedback) should also be considered. Ultimately, this recommendation aims to ensure that the academic unit is one in which BIPOC faculty report fair treatment, feel successful, and belong.

**Rationale:**

As stated, the goal of this recommendation is to ensure that the academic unit is one in which BIPOC faculty report fair treatment, feel successful, and belong. Additionally, creating an environment in which BIPOC Faculty feel they belong benefits all faculty staff and students within the department. In a recent meeting with President Alger, he remarked that we want to build a culture that promotes and values diversity for the entire community's benefit. This recommendation to provide leadership and professional development to AUHs that is intentional and equity-minded will help further that vision. AUHs that are provided tools to create welcoming environments can have a positive impact on the culture of their department. Departments with healthy and responsive cultures may lead to a higher level of BIPOC faculty retention. Higher levels of BIPOC Faculty retention promote a more enriched community to work, live, and learn in.

*Success Measures and Supporting Research on following pages*

**Success:**

The success of this recommendation can be measured in two ways. First, this recommendation will be successful if BIPOC faculty feel welcomed into a healthy departmental atmosphere where they can be their true self. All parts of their culture and identity are valued. This recommendation will also be successful if AUHs are provided with tools that will allow them to feel competent and confident in addressing DEI and multicultural situations as they arise in the department.

To evaluate these measures of success:

- DEI leaders within the colleges should regularly check in with BIPOC faculty to assess the perceived climate of the department
- AUHs should provide feedback to the Associate Vice Provost for Faculty and Curriculum on the sessions dedicated for DEI and their impact. This feedback can be gathered through several different methods with the goal of limiting the labor on AUH to increase participation.
- AUHs should reflect DEI within the department and identify areas for growth that could lead to greater engagement in DEI. This should be a part of the STAR Reporting or annual leadership plan with their Dean.

Proposed Timeline for success

1. Spring 2022: Collect baseline data from BIPOC faculty and AUHs to determine perceptions of departmental culture and areas for growth.
2. Summer 2022: Using data collected, the Associate Vice Provost for Faculty and Curriculum, the Associate Provost for DEI, and the CFI should collaborate to design DEI-focused sessions during the 2022-2023 academic year.
  - a. Data may also identify other ways for the AUHs to promote an inclusive environment such as cross-college curriculum development collaborations
3. Spring 2023: Evaluate the impact of AUH development on culture and receive feedback to augment the program for the following year.

*Supporting Resources for the Rationale are shown on Page 4*

Supporting Resources for the Rationale:

Bystydzienski, J., Thomas, N., Howe, S., & Desai, A. (2017). The leadership role of college deans and department chairs in academic culture change. *Studies in Higher Education, 42*(12), 2301-2315.

Eager, J. (2011). Development of leadership skills in community college department chairs. *The Community College Enterprise, 17*(2), 46-60.

Evans, A., & Chun, E. (2015). Department chairs as transformational diversity leaders. *The Department Chair, 25*(3), 1-3.

Gaubatz, J. A., & Ensminger, D. C. (2017). Department chairs as change agents: Leading change in resistant environments. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 45*(1), 141-163.

Kruse, S. D. (2020). Department chair leadership: Exploring the role's demands and tensions. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 1741143220953601*.

Riley, T. A., & Russell, C. (2013). Leadership in higher education examining professional development needs for department chairs. *Review of Higher Education & Self-Learning, 6*(21).

Wolverton, M., Ackerman, R., & Holt, S. (2005). Preparing for leadership: What academic department chairs need to know. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management, 27*(2), 227-238.