JMU Learning Centers

Annual Report on the Learning Centers' Antiracism Efforts

Academic Year 2022-2023

The Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee
Lucy Bryan Malenke, UWC, Chair
Rodolfo Barrett, UWC, Chair
Beth Cochran, SMLC
Yang, Liu, PASS
Matt Trybus, PASS

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I.   Introduction

This year, the Learning Centers (LC) continued prioritizing and pursuing the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion as a department, as programs, and as individuals. The DEI Committee recognizes that its work is one way that the LC honors its [Committment to Antiracism](#), but it is certainly not the only way.

At the outset of this academic year, the DEI Committee, in conversation with LC Executive Director Laura Miller, decided to prioritize its work on researching, developing, and piloting an antiracism training for student employees. That initiative (described in greater detail below) is an extension of work we began in 2021. It reflects our committment to [antiracist best practices,](#) to departmentwide collaboration, and to the value, wisdom, and potential of our student employees. We are proud of the training plan we have developed and plan to implement next year. We are also proud of what this training reflects—a willingness on the part of department faculty and staff to have difficult and vulnerable conversations, a recognition of our own limits and the need to continually grow and learn, and genuine care for the LC community and all of the students it serves.

We recognize the dynamic and ever-changing nature of this work, and we also recognize the progress that we have made as a department since the fall of 2020. Below, we share our reflections on this progress, specifically as it relates to each of the pledges in our Committment ot Antiracism.

II.   Reflection: How are we fulfilling the pledges in our Commitment to Antiracism?

In the revised Commitment to Antiracism, the LC put forward eleven action-oriented pledges. This section will review our efforts and progress (or lack thereof) in each area.

1. Adopt antiracism as a lens for all of our work, rather than relegating it to a sporadic discussion topic.

The DEI committee thinks that integrating antiracism/DEI practices and habits of mind into the daily operations of the department is essential to sustaining long term organizational change. To further this goal, the LC has continued to allot time for DEI discussions through informal guided conversations in each LC department meeting and has allowed time and space for continued individual professional development related to DEI topics.

Individual programs have incorporated DEI topics into their operational structure, such as PASS during Leadership Team meetings and the Multilingual Student Services Center during staff meetings.

The antiracist lens has also been applied to committee work outside of the DEI Committee, with the Assessment Committee organizing and soon analyzing client demographic data from AY 2021-22 to consider how the LC is (or is not) serving different populations and identities. The PASS program began collecting demographic information for participants this year and revised questions related to belonging in the semester survey.

2. **Provide our peer educators, student and professional staff, and faculty with ongoing antiracist training and professional development.**

Student Employee Training

In AY 2021-22, the DEI Committee had developed learning objectives for this student employee training and proposed a multimodal delivery model—an asynchronous online instructional module followed by an in-person follow-up training. Given the limits of time and expertise within the department, the DEI Committee recommended locating a pre-existing online antiracism training, and the department endorsed this decision. After an exhaustive search, the DEI Committee opted to take a closer look at two options:
- DEI Foundations Training—a series of video modules produced by the company Academic Impressions
- Implicit Bias Module Series—a series of video modules produced by the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity at Ohio State University (this option was recommended to us by Malika Carter, JMU's Chief Diversity Officer)

Ultimately, the DEI Committee recommended using the Kirwan Institute's Implicit Bias Module series. It's content was engaging, aligned with our goals, and free.

Our next step was to pilot the module series among a group of student employees from across the department and to hold focus groups to get their feedback on the modules as well as what might be helpful to cover in an in-person follow-up training. Ultimately, the students had very positive responsees to the module series and offered a number of helpful suggestions. A detailed summary of the focus groups can be found in Appendix A. The PASS Leadership Team also participated in the online training and had multiple discussions during meetings related to the implicit bias.

Based on focus group feedback and the previously developed learning objectives for the training, the DEI Committee developed an outline (see Appendix B) for an in-person follow-up training. It also developed scenarios illustrating ways that bias could be present in the Learning Centers for use at that training, and it workshopped those scenarios with LC faculty. Currently, the plan

is to require all LC student employees to take the modules in the fall 2023 semester and to attend the in-person follow-up training.

Programmatic Initiatives

Each of the programs within the Learning Centers pursued antiracist training and professional development for peer educators and faculty members, detailed below:

- The Communication Center offered professional development on linguistic justice within communication and public speaking.
- The Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS) program incorporated professional development activites with outcomes related to creating inclusive sessions and cross-racial mentoring.
- Multillingual Student Services offered professional development on implicit bias in TESOL pedagogy.
- The SMLC incorporated DEI focused activities into August orientation training and other training workshops. It also offered opportunities each semester for tutors to complete DRIEP anti-racism training; 21 of our 39 tutors completed this.
- The UWC focused all-staff meetings and professional development groups on DEI-related topics, including voice as a craft element, identity and inclusion, and implicit bias.

3. **Ensure that peer educators, staff, and faculty receive feedback and recognition for their efforts related to diversity, equity, and inclusion (e.g., these topics should be addressed in client satisfaction surveys, Faculty Annual Reports, and in peer educator evaluations of faculty).**

Since the Personnel Advisory Committee (PAC) did not meet this academic year, no DEI-related changes have been made to the LC's Policies and Procedures document or the templates for the Faculty Anticipated Activity Plans (FAAP) and the Faculty Annual Review (FAR). Future changes might include the goal to (1) ask faculty to articulate antiracism goals (personal and/or professional) as part of the FAAP, (2) report on those goals in their FAR, and (3) add descriptions of justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion work in examples of satisfactory/excellent teaching, service, and administration in the Policies and Procedures for Annual Performance Evaluation. Currently, faculty do often report on DEI initiatives within the documents, and they may be considered by the executive director when reviewing them, but this process has not been formalized.

At the program level, the Communication Center, Science and Math Learning Center, and the University Writing Center each include questions on client feedback surveys related to their program's ability to be inclusive of learners from diverse backgrounds and/or to embody the values of the commitment to antiracism. The PASS Program utilizes session observation forms with areas related to the ability of the leader to create welcoming and inclusive sessions.

4. Review and revise our recruiting and hiring practices, including the ways that meritocracy and affinity bias limit the diversity of our faculty, staff, and peer educators.

Little progress has been made on formalizing or standardizing inclusive hiring practices on the department level. However, the department has been particularly mindful of recruitment and retention of faculty, staff, and student employees with a variety of identities and lived experiences during a year with many active and upcoming searches. For example, the LC Commitment to Antiracism was included in the job postings and application processes for the following positions: Administrative Assisant: Payroll Specialist and Office Manager, PASS Coordinator, and Senior Associate Director. Additionally, the search committees for the PASS Coordinator and Senior Associate Director each followed the Academic Affairs Guidelines for Recruiting and Hiring Instructional faculty, which involved participating in online training on hiring guidelines, recruitment laws, and bias. Applicants for these two positions had to submit a written diversity statement along with their other application materials. The department filled these positions from a diverse applicant pool.

Within individual programs, the UWC and the Communication Center have specifically used the Commitment to Antiracism in the interview and hiring processes for GAs and writing contultants, while the SMLC directly recruits from many relevant student organizations including those with cultural affiliations. The PASS Program required, in the search for PASS Coordinator and GA, applicants to include a diversity and equity statement as part of hiring documentation

While more can be done to formalize these initiatives, the department and individual programs have been valuing the lens of antiracism and of diversity in hiring in their hiring processes.

5. Revisit departmental decision-making processes to ensure that BIPOC voices and perspectives are heard, considered, and valued.

This is another action step which has not seen specific formal attention this academic year. As part of standard operation, the executive director often meets with individual faculty and incorporates their perspectives. The executive director is also responsive to faculty perspectives within strategic planning and department meetings, and BIPOC voices are present among them.

6. Review and revise the language of our department's "inclusive" value, with a focus on making it actionable and justice-oriented.

The primary focus of the DEI Committee this AY was to research, develop, and pilot an antiracism training for student employees, so work has still not begun on revising the "inclusive"

value. This could be a charge to the Planning Committee (which has done mission, vision, and values work in the past) or a sub-charge of the DEI Committee in the coming academic year. Alternatively, the agenda for a department meeting could be turned over to work on this goal, so it could be achievable within the next academic year if made a priority.

7. **Use our spaces to promote the accomplishments of BIPOC students, scholars, innovators, experts, authors, and creators.**

One of the goals of the DEI Committee this AY, in addition to developing the peer educator training, was to commit to the initiative to beautify the LC space with signage and decoration that communicates our value of inclusivity. The department created a living document with a pool of potential decorative items from online vendors and locations that they might be placed.

Additionally, the DEI Committee began exploring the idea of collaborating with Libraries and the College of Fine and Performing Arts to create a micro-gallery for the display of diversity-minded student artwork on two walls in the LC. The DEI Committee secured interest from a graduate-student artist who creates self-portraits that remix Chinese traditional art with found objects and began measuring the dimensions of the space to put in a work order for the installation of lighting and re-usable, re-configurable art display tracks to form this micro-gallery. The DEI Committee plans to submit the work order during the summer or early fall so that the first exhibition of the micro-gallery can occur in the Fall semester.

To concentrate on the micro-gallery work, the initiative to procure signage and decoration from individual vendors was paused.

Additionally, the University Writing Center has ordered fidget toys and manipulables to offer to to students and staff who visit the center with a particular goal of supporting neurodiverse individuals who may benefit from them. If this initiative proves succesful as well, the DEI Committee believes it can be expanded to other centers or perhaps branded and used for the LC as a department. This is an action step in which little immediate visible progress has been made, but, ideally, the planning and behind-the-scenes initiatives are preparing to bear fruit in the next academic year.

8. **Ensure that our BIPOC peer educators, staff, and faculty have clear-cut avenues for support and processing, potentially in the form of a closed discussion group.**

Little to no progress was made on this commitment this year. Given the administrative and legal setbacks discussed in our previous annual report, the BIPOC caucus structure remains disbanded. An open affinity group structure has been posited, but not yet implemented.

A major hurdle to any opt-in programming will be attendance. Participation in the LC's Peer Educators of Color Online Caucus (before it was disbanded) was low. National studies indicate

that lack of student engagement in extracurricular activities is an issue across institutions of higher education. While the most recent National Survey on Student Engagement shows that [more students are participating in collaborative activities](#) like clubs and study groups than in 2021, levels of student engagement still are lower than they were before the pandemic. The department must consider these trends as it considers how to meet the needs of BIPOC peer educators, staff, and faculty.

9. **When appropriate, share anti-racist reflections, pedagogies, and practices beyond the Learning Centers via resources, conferences, symposia, and workshops.**

Several Learning Centers faculty contributed to this goal:
- Beth Cochran of the SMLC led a Participant Idea Exchange on Inclusivity in the Classroom at the National Organization for Student Success annual conference in March. As part of this she created a [Google Doc](#) of ideas for inclusivity that can be implemented in the classroom. This document was also distributed to all faculty in the College of Science and Mathematics.
- Paul Mabrey of the Communication Center facilitated conversations at the School of Communicaiton Studies retreat on linguistic justice within communication education. He also presented "Evolving from Equality to Equity: Cultivating Community at the Center so all feel at Home" at the National Association of Communication Centers Conference. Additionally, Paul and co-authors published "Applying a Responsible Innovation Framework in Developing an Equitable Early Alert System: A Case Study" in the *Journal of Learning Analytics*. Paul will present "Developing and acting within equitable student success system: An ethos of care" at the Commision on Information, Measurement, & Analysis (CIMA) summer meeting.
- Lucy Malenke of the Writing Center spearheaded an effort in Coshocton, Ohio to memorialize Henry Howard, the victim of an 1885 racial terror lynching. The racial justice organization Lucy co-founded collaborated with the Equal Justice Initiative to install a historical marker in front of the Coshocton County Courthouse telling Howard's story and providing context about racial terror in America. The marker was unveiled in June 2022.
- Kristen Kelley, Rudy Barrett. Matt Trybus, Laura Miller, Paul Mabrey, and Mary Tam delivered a panel presentation at JMU's May Symposium entitled "Unlocking the Black Box of Student Learning: Collaborating with the Learning Centers to Improve Student Outcomes" in which they shared ways faculty can collaborate with each program area to improve student learning and address learning gaps.

10. **Seek out collaboration and feedback on this work from outside sources, such as the Office of Access and Inclusion and Center for Faculty Innovation.**

The DEI Committee has worked hard to enact this committment this year, particularly in its work to develop an implicit bias training for student employees. At the beginning of AY 2022-23,

committee members reached out to other major student employers on campus—including Student Affairs, the Libraries, and U-Rec—to find out if they had offered any DEI training to their employees that we might use or model ours after. While we did not find a model that work for our purposes in the LC, we did learn that JMU has started requiring all incoming freshman to take an online DEI training. We also reached out to Malika Carter, VP of DEI and Chief Diversity Officer at JMU, who recommended the Kirwan Institute Implicit Bias Modules that we ultimately ended up using in our training. We are hoping to meet with Dr. Carter again to get her feedback on the scenarios we have developed for our in-person follow-up training.

The Assessment Committee also initiated conversations with various campus groups and departments that serve specific populations (e.g., first generation college students, CMSS/cultural affinity spaces, transfer students, etc.). The goal was to discuss learning needs of these students and ideas for future collaboration. One result of these conversations was the November LC/CMSS pizza meet-and-greet event that allowed student employees from both areas to socialize and learn about each other's work.

11. Reflect on and annually assess our antiracism efforts, allowing them to evolve as we make progress.

This document and other year-end reports (within LC programs and the department as a whole) allow us to reflecting on and assess our progress in enacting our antiracism action steps. Additionally, every semester we update our progress on our website, as a means of holding ourselves accountable to our pledges.

III.   Conclusion

The DEI Committee looks forward to providing leadership as the Learning Centers continues making progress on this committments next year. It also recognizes that the department is in a time of transition. Longtime LC faculty Jared Featherstone, Paul Mabrey, and Lucy Malenke (who chaired and co-chaired the LC's DEI efforts over the last three years) concluded their final semesters in the Learning Centers. Dr. Audrey Robinson will join the department in a new position—Senior Associate Director of the Learning Centers—this May.

The 2023-24 academic year will bring about many changes in the Learning Centers and also many demands as faculty adjust to a new department structure and participate in searches to fill vacancies within the department. Still, the work of antiracism in the department can and must go on—and we believe it will benefit from the fresh perspectives that new faculty and administrators bring to the table.

In the coming year, we recommend that the DEI Committee and Learning Centers as a deparment undertake the following:

- In fall 2023, pilot the Kirwan Insititute's Implicit Bias Module Series and the follow-up training designed by the DEI Committee among all student employes in the department.
- Undertake a review of the LC's Committetment to Antiracism and make revisions as needed.
- Create a plan for retaining and providing necessary and/or desired support for faculty, staff, and student employees with minoritized identities within the department.
- Continue pursuing a micro-gallery that will display the work of students in the LC.
- Incorporate DEI work and lens into the department's PAC documents.

Implicit Bias Modules Focus Group Summary

On February 17, 2023, the DEI Committee held two focus groups for student employees of the Learning Centers who had agreed to pilot the [Kirwan Insititute's Implicit Bias Module Series](#). Ten students, representing all areas of the Learning Centers, took part in the focus group. All had completed the module series within the previous week and provided a certificate of completion to the DEI committee. We intended the focus group to serve two purposes:

1. We wanted to find out students' thoughts and opinions about the Implicit Bias Module Series—in particular, if they thought it would be useful to onboarding student employees in the LC.
2. We wanted to develop ideas for an in-person follow-up training that we hope to use in tandem with the module series.

In the following document, we summarize our key takeaways from the focus groups.

Reactions to the Implicit Bias Module Series

Generally, LC student employees had positive reactions to the module series. In particular, they appreciated:

- Being able to watch the modules in their own time.
- The fact that the videos were short, so they did not have to watch everything all at once.
- The integration of science and research findings into the modules.
- The non-judgmental tone.
- The opportunity to take implicit association tests (IATs) via [Project Implicit,](#) which provided an opportunity to do something interactive and to connect the concepts in the modules to their own lives.
- The chance to identify and reflecting on some of their own biases.
- The way that the leaders of the series shared their own IAT results and modeled how to process and respond to that information

Students in the focus groups also mentioned the following weaknesses of the series:

- Videos are not the most interactive form of content delivery.
- Module 4 is somewhat redundant / doesn't contain quite enough original content.
- Not enough depth about intergroup contact—presented as a solution to bias, but could spur people to seek out interactions as a means to an end, which seems problematic.
- Some videos lacked closed captioning, which creates an accessibility issue.

Ideas for In-person Follow-up Training

[Best practices for antiracism training](#) indicate that such trainings are most effective when they use multiple instructional methods and when they are tailored to the specific context (e.g. linked

to organizational goals and specific behaviors). For these reasons, we think it's important to have an in-person follow-up training to the module series, in which students have the opportunity to connect what they learned to the work they will do in the Learning Centers. Students in the focus group were very enthusiastic about this event. They made suggestions, and we also shared some possibilities. The following ideas emerged during discussion:

1. Ideally, we would bring together all onboarding student employees from all areas for this training, but certain aspects of the training might involve splitting into small groups based on area/program.
2. It would be good to open with an activity that emphasizes the complexities of our identities (rather than reducing them to a set of categories). We all want to be seen for the complex people we are, and we should be willing to see everyone who walks into the LC the same way.
   - Possible activities: [Step Inside this House](#) from Essential Partners or [Identity Tree](#) from Academic Impressions
3. Students requested more discussion of and unpacking of IAT results.
   - A faculty member could share their results, how they processed those results, and what actions they took afterward (similar to the modeling that took place in the modules).
   - Small group discussions/sharing might be helpful.
   - Important to discussion of what to do with/how to move forward with results. In other words, how do we mitigate bias in ourselves? And how do we interrupt bias when we encounter it in others?
     - o Maybe this is a place to talk more about intergroup contact?
4. Students loved the idea of talking through scenarios in which bias could affect interactions in the LC (e.g., PASS leader encountering bias toward faculty with an accent).
5. It might make sense to involve veteran student employees as discussion group leaders.

APPENDIX B

Preliminary Agenda for In-person Follow-up Training (after Implicit Bias Modules)

1. Intros / welcome / agenda [~5-10 min]

2. Identity-based activity (e.g. Step Inside This House from Essential Partners or Identity Tree from Academic Impressions) [30 min]
   - Objectives:
     - To learn more about other student employees
     - To emphasize the complexities of our identities (rather than reducing them to a set of categories). We all want to be seen for the complex people we are, and we should be willing to see everyone who walks into the LC the same way.

3. Scenarios: [~45 min]
   - A revised draft of the scenarios can be found here.
   - In small groups (area based?), students discuss ~3 scenarios. (assign unique scenarios to each group)
   - Questions to consider:
     - Why is this interaction potentially harmful? What broader cultural or systemic trends does it illustrate?
     - What emotions or feelings might the people in this situation experience?
     - What biases might be at play in this interaction?
     - Is it possible for an LC employee who witnesses this situation intervene to limit the harm that might have occurred? If so, how might that happen?
     - Envision a better reality. How would this interaction ideally have gone? What needs to change for that reality to happen?
   - Large group reporting back/recap

4. Unpacking the IAT: [~30 min]
   - LC faculty member discusses their IAT results (why they think they got the results they did, how they processed/understood those results, what actions they took in response
   - Small group discussion/sharing

5. Where to? [~30 min]
   - Strategies for mitigating bias in yourself
     - Intergroup contact
       Resources to consult:
         - What Makes a Good Interaction Between Divided Groups
         - 8 Keys to Bridging Differences
         - What the Struggle for Gay Rights Teaches Us About Bridging Differences

- o Consuming media/entertainment with self-awareness
  Resources to consult:
  - How to avoid picking up prejudice from the media
- Strategies for interrupting bias/macroaggressions when you witness it.
  - o Calling out vs. calling in