

**Task Force on Racial Equity campus climate and safety
recommendations: President's response**

January, 2021

An important acknowledgment precedes recommendations from the Task Force on Racial Equity's working group on campus climate and safety: Immediate actions alone won't remove systemic barriers to effectively advancing diversity, equity and inclusion, or DEI. But I appreciate the working group's willingness to recommend a series of short-term steps to hone MSU's ongoing and long-term commitment to being a safe, welcoming and inclusive campus for all.

The working group provided several sets of recommendations focused on doing so through broader awareness, communication, inclusiveness and, as I see in more than one of them, building trust. Many of those recommendations will be further developed in the pending report of the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Steering Committee and implemented through the engagement of campus units and our new vice president and chief diversity officer.

Dr. Jabbar Bennett, our new vice president and chief diversity officer, will be pivotal in ensuring DEI responsibilities are acknowledged and embraced by all colleges and administrative units. I am asking Dr. Bennett to begin immediately convening representatives from each unit to discuss DEI initiatives within their areas. Even if someone does not hold a title such as associate dean for DEI, each unit should immediately identify a liaison who can fulfill that function and convene with Dr. Bennett and other unit-based DEI leaders on a regular basis while working toward more long-term staffing systems.



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Communication

Internal institutional communications channels have been employed in the past year as never before at MSU to keep students and employees informed of responses to the evolving safety requirements during the COVID-19 pandemic. The campus climate and safety working group recommends several measures to employ university-wide channels for timely DEI-focused information, and I agree that MSU can do more in this area.

Consolidating DEI resources on a central website, as recommended, is an early step we can take, and we're fortunate that the DEI Steering Committee's recently conducted inventory can provide a solid starting point for such materials.

Campus units, in many cases, currently use their websites to communicate their commitment to DEI. The Division of Residential and Hospitality Services includes [Our Pledge and Promise: Diversity and Inclusion, Equity and Social Justice](#) on its website to draw attention to the need to embrace a staffing

model reflecting student demographics, as each RHS department is charged with seeking ways to increase and support DEI.

The [Infrastructure Planning and Facilities website](#) highlights its approach to DEI and includes a commitment to supplier diversity, career opportunities, outreach and engagement to support DEI. IPF won MSU's Excellent Progress Toward Diversity Collaboration Award in 2019 for its innovations in using data, internal and external review and inclusive practices at all levels to change its culture meaningfully.

Incident awareness

The task force working group recommends more focus on reporting racial incidents, even those not in violation of the Anti-Discrimination Policy. It is worth noting MSU currently is drafting a new policy, and input from the campus community will be solicited.

MSU's Office for Civil Rights takes all reports of discrimination seriously and evaluates reports of bias in the same manner as reports of discrimination. Changes to collection and reporting of racial and other bias incidents, as the working group proposes, started in the summer of 2020 with capturing data for racial subcategories for all discrimination reports. The OCR 2020-21 report will include an aggregate breakout, as long as data is abundant enough to protect the identities of those involved, including the status of the reporting parties, claimants and respondents.

Building trust

Keeping campus groups informed about DEI progress is another area of concern that I share, and the working group specifically mentions the Black Student Alliance, Council of Racial and Ethnic Students and Council of Progressive Students. Relevant MSU leaders and I meet regularly with CORES and COPS to discuss issues of concern. Historically, these groups met with the president once per semester, but during the past year we have been meeting monthly.

I am pleased to report MSU has or is addressing most of those groups' 10 demands. These include launching a search for the director for the Office of Cultural and Academic Transitions, mandatory anti-bias training for all university community members, the addition of reflection rooms and gender-inclusive housing and restroom options in campus neighborhoods, and a designated support fund for COPS. Very significantly, MSU also is conducting a multicultural center feasibility study after many years of advocacy by students, who have and will continue to play an influential role in its development.

Keeping trust with our undocumented student population has been a subject of increased attention over the past year. MSU already follows many [practices called for by the sanctuary school movement](#), choosing to focus on supportive policies more than claiming a designation. A [website](#) was launched and a staff member was designated to support it, with direction to convene unit stakeholders with relevant knowledge to inform the website's content.

Another recommendation touching on matters of trust relates to the relationship between diverse student groups and the Division of Student Affairs and Services. I recognize this has been an issue of concern. That unit is now in a leadership transition and undergoing a program review. Interim leadership is conducting a comprehensive internal and external assessment of the broader student affairs portfolio at MSU to ensure optimal alignment across various student-serving offices on campus.

Trust in law enforcement, specifically how the MSU Police Department handles campus protests to guarantee freedom of expression together with safety, is a recommendation that is covered in detail in my response to the task force working group on policing's recommendations.

Supporting DEI

The working group recommends ensuring our graduate student community is included in DEI conversations. I am charging the dean of the Graduate School, vice president for student affairs and the vice president and chief diversity officer to help graduate students form one or more groups similar to COPS and CORES. I am willing to meet with such a group regularly, as I do with its undergraduate counterparts.

The university's evolving DEI ecosystem will be a critical part of implementing supportive policies and procedures, and will be informed by the work done by the DEI and Strategic Planning steering committees. Campus units currently gather information broken down by racial and ethnic groups for institutional planning and awareness, including the impact of COVID-19 on employee groups subject to furloughs. Legal restrictions and collective bargaining agreements, however, often govern how such information can be used.

It could be, as this task force working group suggests, that a multiplicity of campus climate surveys conducted by the university and its units in recent years creates a bewildering array of views of MSU's DEI environment. This is an area where I will rely on the vice president and chief diversity officer to help determine the most effective and efficient use of such tools.

Spartans can be justly proud of our shared commitment to expand our awareness and sensitivity to DEI issues, as demonstrated by our recently instituted DEI Foundations online training requirement for all members of the MSU community. Broadening, deepening and extending such opportunities is an ongoing job, and an [inventory of such programs](#) shows an impressive array already at hand. These include offerings from academic departments, the Office for Inclusion and Intercultural Initiatives, Student Affairs and Services, Human Resources' elevateU online modules and other educational resources, and MSU Police Department inclusion and anti-bias programs.

Finally, recommendations relating to acknowledging current and past inequities and healing racial trauma merit consideration by the university and relevant units and stakeholders. I view the [statement acknowledging MSU's occupation on ancestral Anishinaabeg land](#), which is read at some MSU events and included in various communications, as a noteworthy example of how the university can continue to raise such awareness.

Maintaining a campus culture strongly supportive of DEI values requires ongoing attention and care. I'm pleased with the actions we're taking and optimistic for continued activity supporting this vital purpose on top of the foundations we are laying today.

We will continue to update you on progress made toward the implementation of these recommendations as we work to support, promote and nurture a truly safe, welcoming, diverse, equitable and inclusive campus community.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "S. L. Stanley Jr.", written in a cursive style.

Samuel L. Stanley Jr., M.D.
President