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- [A-Z](#)
- [Calendar](#)
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UMaine News



UMaine names President's Council on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

July 17, 2020

University of Maine President Joan Ferrini-Mundy has appointed a 30-member Council on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion to advise campus leadership and report on institutional efforts and actions to ensure inclusive excellence.

The President's Council on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion is co-chaired by Kimberly Whitehead, chief of staff to the President, and Susan McKay, founding director of the Maine Center for Research in STEM Education and professor of physics.

"The University of Maine is committed to the core values of inclusion, diversity, equity and anti-racism," said President Ferrini-Mundy in her appointment letter to the inaugural council members. "We must further and operationalize that commitment now. Inclusive excellence is foundational at the university. This is perhaps the most important activity that the University of Maine can undertake at this time."

The President [announced her intention to form the council](#) on June 10, following the death of George Floyd, and in the context of protests nationwide and global reckoning on racism. In a [May 30 community message](#), President Ferrini-Mundy and Robert Dana, vice president for student life and inclusive excellence, and dean of students noted that "this act of violence must rally us to continue our fight to eliminate racism, inequality and violence in our society. We are defined by our humanity, and the actions of the perpetrators were unnecessary, unacceptable and abhorrent. Bigotry, out of control power, and cruelty are vile reminders of why we must continue to work together as antiracists and as a community where inclusivity and respect define us."

The response from UMaine community members was immediate, heartfelt and strong, with many people requesting to be on the council and many more ready to support its efforts, says Whitehead.

"I am honored to co-lead the President's DEI Council and excited about engaging with this distinguished cadre of colleagues from UMaine and UMM," Whitehead says.

The standing committee of the President's Office will advise the President and members of the President's Cabinet on matters of diversity, equity and inclusion at the University of Maine. The council will provide an annual report on the status of the university's efforts and actions, will identify major challenges and problems, and propose solutions. The annual council report will subsume UMaine's longstanding Diversity Action Plan.

An interim status report with recommendations will be made Dec. 1.

Council members, who will serve terms ranging from one to three years, were asked by the President to begin by considering the following questions:

- What are areas of systemic racism and other structural impediments to diversity, equity and inclusion at the University of Maine, and what policies and practices must be changed to dismantle and reform those structures? In particular, what positions, realignments of responsibility, and other changes are most urgently needed?
- Are major university planning documents and processes, including the Strategic Vision and Values Framework and the Define Tomorrow initiative, sufficiently focused on advancing the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion?
- What data should the university be collecting and reviewing to guide its progress and identify problems and priorities in advancing diversity, equity and inclusion?
- Is UMaine's current portfolio of committees, offices, organizations and activities that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion well aligned and adequately resourced to move us into a transformed future with inclusion at the core?

Supporting the work of the council will be vice president Dana; Anila Karunakar, UMaine director for diversity and inclusion; Sara Hammond, assistant director of the Office of Equal Opportunity at UMaine; and Megan Clough, University of Maine System director of learning and organizational development.

Other members of the President's Council on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion are: Orlina Boteva, Office of International Programs; Alan Cobo-Lewis, Center for Community Inclusion and Disability Studies; John Bear Mitchell, Native American Programs; Denise Skonberg, School of Food and Agriculture; Hannah Carter, University of Maine Cooperative Extension; Mary Gresham, College of Education and Human Development; Lauri Sidelko, Division of Student Life; Mike Scott, School of Computing and Information Science; Silvestre Guzman, Admissions; Alyssa Anaya, Human Resources; Lenard Kaye, Center on Aging; Kevin Roberge, Department of Mathematics and Statistics, and the Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Program; Marnie Kaler, University of Maine at Machias Admissions and Student Life; Gayle Zydlewski, Maine Sea Grant; Sandra Caceres Tijerina, Maine Educational Talent Search; Mary Freeman, Department of History; Meredith Kirkmann, School of Engineering Technology; Judith Josiah-Martin, School of Social Work; Margo Lukens, Department of English; Marcus Librizzi, UMM Division of Arts and Letters; Marwa Hassanien, alumna and graduate student; MJ Smith, undergraduate student; Deshawn Stevens, student-athlete; Abdou Hagenimana, UMM undergraduate student; Suriya Lakshmi Balasubramaniam, graduate student.

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