

CEGSAC Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Panel

January 29, 2024

Panelists:

- **Renee Thomas:** Associate Vice Provost for Diversity and Inclusion, previously the director of Purdue's Black Cultural Center with over 30 years at Purdue
- **Lowell Kane:** Director of Purdue's LGBTQ Center

Questions for the Panelists:

Q: Do you have any responses to those who think that minorities have better chances of university acceptance, e.g. females in engineering?

A: Purdue has a holistic and racially blind admissions process with over 78,000 applicants this year. In general, diverse work forces make better products and teams, so there are efforts to increase the number of women in underrepresented fields. As an example, Ford Motor Company 15 years ago looked at seatbelt development and brought a prototype to campus, but had not considered women wearing dresses with the racecar type seatbelt.

Q: What were your biggest challenges regarding Diversity and/or Inclusion and how did you overcome them? Have you faced issues at Purdue?

A: Recent diversity and inclusion initiatives have been under a microscope with a changing landscape and legislation. A large responsibility of the cultural centers is to promote inclusivity through educating those at Purdue to overcome and explain any incorrect stereotypes. Purdue has 5 cultural centers that all students are welcome to visit and connect with online; there are many upcoming programs and activities.

Q: Any comments on the tenured professor system where students bring up concerns with tenured faculty members, but the university does not always take action?

A: If you witness concerning behavior from faculty as a TA or observer, file a hate and bias report so it is officially documented. There may also be action taken that is not publicized. Many trainings for DE&I are optional for faculty. Cultural centers will work with students and reach out to the faculty member in question, so that they can provide resources to help improve their classroom environment. When someone makes a comment of this nature, you can respond with "ouch" and bring to their attention why this is problematic.

Q: Suppose a student (DRC, LGBTQ, etc.) is involved in a malpractice in a class, such as cheating, how would centers voice for these students?

A: If it is an academic based violation, the cultural centers are often not involved. Sometimes cultural members will stand by the side of a student for emotional support and to help understand the situation when the student is dealing with university proceedings.

Q: For anonymous documentation and reporting, is there a way to ensure student anonymity when the situation is specific and clear who the reporter was?

A: There are policies to prevent retaliation, and working with a cultural center or staff member can help with these concerns and navigate the situation. There could also be a different way to approach the topic instead of going directly to the faculty member, such as giving a general overview to the manager of the faculty in question. A lot of the reports are also not malicious in intent, but most of the time those in question are not educated.

Q: How does Purdue filter faculty hiring applications on the basis of DE&I and community service?

A: Faculty applications used to have a required diversity statement at Purdue, but no longer do. Across universities and departments, it is not consistent how these answers were/are evaluated, but generally there is a trained hiring committee who evaluates applications. When writing a diversity statement, you can include how you have broadened participation, been involved in communities different from your own, or participated in different workshops.

Q: Do you have experience dealing with people with religious struggles? Ie. feeling unsafe to be open about their religion?

A: Varying acceptance of different identities in different religious organizations, student groups, and houses of worship. Cultural centers can help connect students with religious centers that would be more welcoming. The cultural centers also hold different events that broadcast resources and welcoming organizations to help facilitate the connections the student is looking for. It is also generally important to be open, welcoming, and curious. College provides a unique opportunity to experience diversity in a setting you will not be in again, so be curious and interact with different individuals with an open mind.

Q: Purdue and West Lafayette are a bit of an isolated island in Indiana, what does Purdue do to persuade leaders of the state to be more inclusive?

A: There is a variety of community engagement work to build relationships and have conversations with people holding different perspectives in the state. Purdue is a land grant institution with the responsibility to engage with the state at large, so the cultural centers work with a lot of community based spaces and educational settings. Purdue hopes to role model expectation of inclusion and belonging.

Q: What are the most frequent issues that cultural centers have experienced with faculty treatment of students?

A: Sometimes faculty have low expectations based on a student's appearance, we should asset-frame students and have high expectations for anyone accepted to Purdue. Students also have issues with faculty not putting in the effort to pronounce their name correctly or learn their name. The cultural centers are putting in effort to reduce stereotyping and bias across campus, and also reminding faculty to be welcoming and open-minded. Faculty members should also affirm students for who they are and what they can bring to the classroom.