



RICE UNIVERSITY
STUDENT ASSOCIATION



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GRADUATE STUDENT ASSOCIATION

January 11, 2020

To The Members of the Rice University Faculty Senate:

The Presidents of the Rice University Student Association and Graduate Student Association, Grace Wickerson and Hannah Pearce, respectively, are jointly proposing a resolution to address significant areas of need we have identified in the Rice University community during our terms. We have jointly surveyed the existing offices on campus recognized by the University through the Council on Diversity and Inclusion (CODI) that provide resources related to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts including the Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI) and the Multicultural Center (MCC), the Office of Multicultural Affairs (OMA), the Office of Multicultural Community Relations and the Office of Equal Employment Opportunity Programs and Affirmative Action. Our survey began due to our realization that only one of these offices, the Office of Multicultural Affairs, explicitly serves students on campus. In particular, the OMA is a significant resource for Black and Latinx students.

Currently, the Office of Multicultural Affairs (OMA) serves our Black and Latinx undergraduate student clubs by offering mentorship, leadership development, and club advising. However, student organizations often do most of the programming for their student populations, taking on a role that is often done by staff at other institutions. This is due to that fact that the OMA does not have the staff capacity, resources or spaces to program for these student populations. This negatively impacts student quality of life, particularly the students who utilize the office the most: Black and Latinx students. Historically, through surveying performed by Dr. Roland Smith, the satisfaction and overall happiness of Black students at Rice has been lower than all other student populations. Black undergraduate students also move off campus in greater numbers than other students at Rice and this statistic has not improved in the last decade. This is often attributed to students not finding communities of peers like them in the residential college system as only a small number of Black students are accepted to Rice each year and that small population is divided amongst 11 residential colleges. While Latinx students have shown greater levels of satisfaction in terms of belonging on campus surveys, there are still identified issues such as a lack of Latinx faculty, no Latinx program of study, and no OMA or ODI staff member of Latinx descent. Many of these issues are outlined in the [Latinx Working Group Recommendations](#) made in November of 2019 after the incident on Halloween where several undergrad students wore ICE costumes to Willy's Pub. It is concerning that even with a particular focus on enhancing the experiences of Black and Latinx populations, our DEI offices are not given enough resources to fully support these populations.

Furthermore, this list of DEI resources on campus is not inclusive of all the diverse members of our Rice student body. Several offices that support diverse student populations are not even on the list of DEI resources. Several populations do not have an office with staff oversight, in contrast with our peer institutions. Namely, the offices on this list do not encompass:

- **International, DACA and Undocumented, and Refugee Students**. International students are one of our largest growing student populations at Rice. This is due in part to concerted efforts in President Leebron's V2C2 to increase our recruitment of international students at Rice. Nearly 12% of

undergraduates and 50% of graduate students are international students and are served largely in part by the Office of International Students and Scholars (OISS). OISS serves nearly 1,700 students and scholars in the Rice community including refugee and DACA students. DACA students are a new group to be supervised by their office, and this expansion was done without adding additional staffing or resources to support this population. In addition, the only resource for DACA students right now is daca.rice.edu, in contrast to our peers that have built out far more extensive support infrastructures for DACA and undocumented students, such as legal support, opportunities open to DACA and undocumented students, student organizations, advising, and emergency grants for legal support. While Houston is home to a significant refugee population, we have yet to set out an admissions policy that is inclusive of these student populations as well as set up refugee student advising and support. While the students that OISS serve are largely marginalized populations, they are not recognized as a DEI resource on campus.

- **First Generation and Low-Income Students.** First generation and low-income college and graduate students are another growing population of our Rice community. Like international students, our first generation student numbers have grown largely in part as a result of intentional efforts outlined in President Leebron's V2C2 to increase campus diversity. Our first generation college students at Rice are served largely by Student Success Initiatives (SSI) which ensures students' successful transition, retention and graduation from the university, yet they are not recognized as a DEI resource. In addition, SSI is a resource oriented only to undergraduate students, leaving first generation and low-income graduate students outside of the umbrella of their office and without a comparable support system in place. First generation graduate students are a population at Rice that has not been previously supported through any office. In response to first generation graduates reporting their ability to be supported through SSI or SSI food pantry being minimal to none and the social, socioeconomic, and academic disparities they have experienced at Rice, students have begun advocating to raise awareness for the need to create a comparable support system for first generation graduate students. Recently, food insecurity has become a growing concern both for undergraduate and graduate students. Without recognition as a DEI resource, we feel that SSI will not be staffed and supported appropriately to meet the needs of the students their office is serving. The Student Association released the findings of a [year-long study](#) into the experiences of first generation and low-income undergraduate students in December of 2019, and found many disparities in particular related to undergraduate students' academic, co-curricular, and social experiences at Rice. The recommendations made would require intensive efforts and financial investment to make experiences more equitable for first generation and low-income students.
- **Students With Disabilities.** Rice students with disabilities are served by the Rice Disability Resource Center (DRC) and they currently represent 5% of our graduate and undergraduate student population yet the DRC is not recognized as a DEI resource. In addition, the Fall 2019 Undergraduate Survey of all Students found that 31% of undergraduates with disabilities receiving accommodations were too intimidated to ask their professors to meet these accommodations. Even more concerning is that 18% of students receiving accommodations experienced reluctance from professors to meet these accommodations, while 6% had their recommendations refused by professors. A small number of students also expressed that they had to drop a class or academic program because of their disability as they could not access their classrooms. While a commitment to meeting accommodations from the DRC is included in every syllabi, there is clearly some need to ensure that students with disabilities are fully supported by the University.
- **LGBTQ students.** At Rice, nearly 20% of undergraduates and 30% of graduates identify as members of the LGBTQ community yet there is no staffed center for LGBTQ students at Rice. Internationally, nationally, and here at Rice, historic marginalization of the LGBTQ community has led to initiatives being taken up to create resources and programming for LGBTQ students, however, at Rice, these are

solely student-run initiatives. The undergraduate Rice PRIDE group and Queer Graduate Student Association (QGSA) groups serve as the primary resources for LGBTQ students on campus. Undergraduates run the Queer Resource Center, which cannot remain open consistently due to a reliance on student volunteers. In the most recent Association of American University (AAU) Campus Climate surveying that was released in 2019, transgender, non-binary and gender nonconforming students at Rice reported the highest incidences of unwanted sexual contact and penetration (20+%), sexual harassment (60+%), and responded with the lowest confidence that the University would take their report seriously and the lowest confidence in the fairness of investigations regarding the misconduct. Such data is concerning, and indicates a need for LGBTQ-specific resources to be built on campus.

- **Women.** Rice University does have a Women's Resource Center, however, this Center is student-run. In the academic setting, women have historically been underrepresented and are still underrepresented in STEM fields. The primary resources for women on campus can be found through the Women's Resource Center, or through a variety of student-run women's groups such as Women in Physics, Wiki Women, etc. The AAU Campus Climate Survey found that women still face high rates of sexual violence and harassment on campus, meaning spaces are still needed for women to connect and discuss these issues.
- **Diverse Graduate Students.** Graduate students at Rice have historically been a minority of the student population, however, graduate students now represent 50% of the student population at Rice. Currently, the offices recognized as DEI resources on campus do not serve graduate students although the graduate population is comprised of almost 50% international students and the majority of graduate students are involved in cultural and affinity clubs on campus. The Graduate Student Association (GSA) has historically served as the primary resource for graduate clubs, providing cultural programming, professional development and networking events, funds for club programming, and advocacy for graduates across campus to the University administration. The annual GSA working budget for the year is comprised solely of grad student fees and, currently, nearly 40% of the annual budget is set aside for grad clubs to apply for funds to support their own programming, professional development, and networking events. In addition, the Student Activities office and Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies Office provides support to graduate clubs through advising and funding. From surveying our Latin American Graduate Student Association (LAGSA) and our Black Graduate Student Association (BGSA), we learned that the offices these grad groups most utilize are GPS, Student Activities, and OISS – none of which are DEI-recognized resources. Both LAGSA and BGSA have voiced that they would like greater visibility on campus to raise awareness for their groups and to also recruit more members. They have shared that they feel they would benefit from more advising on professional development events and connecting with alumni, as well as intentional programming with other cultural groups. We as a GSA work with several of our graduate clubs including Rice Chinese Students and Scholars (RCSSA), the Brazilian Student Association (BRASA), Indian Students at Rice (ISAR), and more, and in our working relationship with these groups, a consistent theme of desiring greater financial and advising support, as well as professional development and connection with alumni, persists. As stated in V2C2, we completely agree that "outstanding graduate programs are essential to our broader success and reputation as a research university." We feel that expansion of University support for connecting grad clubs with financial and advising support in addition to professional development opportunities and contact with alumni would only strengthen Rice's graduate programs. With graduate students comprising 50% of the student population at Rice and the DEI recognized resources on campus not currently serving graduate students, we feel that this is a significant gap that should be addressed.

As stated in President Leebron's V2C2 plan to Expand Access, Diversity and Inclusiveness, "we must accelerate progress in building a diverse faculty and work to retain and advance the careers of faculty and academic leaders." The University recognized DEI resources, however, are not inclusive of important DEI efforts related to faculty and staff hiring and support. Diverse tenure-track faculty hiring is consistently reported to increase the inclusivity of the Rice environment, according to the Survey of All Students (SAS) of both undergraduate and graduate students. Tenure-track faculty searches are led largely in part by individual departments, and while implicit bias training is now mandatory for search committees, not every department has a DEI statement or committee that shapes their searches to improve the diversity of their tenure-track faculty hires. Secondly, once faculty or staff are hired by Rice, they are not trained in how to create inclusive research and teaching environments. This impacts the success and experience of Rice students significantly. As the diversity of Rice's student population continues to grow, *tenure-track and teaching faculty*, and staff at Rice should not only match this diversity, but also be trained and equipped to effectively teach and mentor the diverse student community found at Rice.

To these ends, we are demanding the following actions be taken:

- **REFLECTION.** Reassessment of the University's mission with regards to diversity, equity, and inclusion and how the existing *departments, offices, and spaces* on campus are working to fulfill that mission.
 - *Schools and Departments.* SAS data, as well as research by the [Department of Education](#), demonstrates that students feel that diverse faculty improve the inclusivity of the University environment. Yet, there is no central oversight to ensure that departments lead their tenure-track and teaching faculty searches with diversity in mind here at Rice. Many departments do not have statements of commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion in their field for either faculty or graduate student recruitment. Adequate training for both tenure-track and teaching faculty in creating inclusive teaching and research environments should be examined as well to foster an environment that continues to encourage diverse groups and ideas. Such training does not yet exist at Rice, though we can look to peer institutions such as [Johns Hopkins](#), [Harvard](#), and [Duke](#) Universities that have assessed their structure and its conduciveness to DEI efforts and developed robust inclusive teaching practices to promote diverse and inclusive teaching and research environments. The remainder of the Schools at Rice should also follow the leadership of the Jones School of Business and the George R. Brown School of Engineering and institute diversity councils within their schools to ensure progress towards more inclusive academic programs.
 - *Spaces.* There is consistently a need for more space on campus to accommodate student programming and clubs. During the 2019 New Student Orientation cycle, there was not enough physical space on campus for all of the new graduate students, resulting in many students spending extended periods of time outside and eventually leaving campus. With the creation of a new Student Center quickly approaching, there is a need to thoroughly reflect on the University's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion and evaluate how all spaces on campus reflect that mission. The Multicultural Center (MCC) in the Rice Memorial Student Center (RMC), although petitioned by students to serve as a space for students to program, was placed under the Office of Diversity of Inclusion (ODI) even though ODI is historically a faculty-oriented office, not a student-focused office. If the MCC is to be integrated into the new student center, a re-evaluation of its charge and mission should be performed. We must analytically consider the role of the MCC on campus and the programming it must institute to align with resources available at our peer institutions.
 - *Offices.* With the current structure, many offices on campus fall under the responsibility of the Dean of Undergraduates, which results in a very undergraduate student-focused mission

for these offices. Through advocacy led by the GSA, many offices have appointed an individual to serve as the graduate student coordinator for their respective office. However, graduate students are 50% of the Rice student body and deserve an equitable allocation of staff, resources, time, and energy. With the lack of a Dean of Student Affairs or Dean of Student Life, there is not a clear sense of what our University's mission for student life is for undergraduate and graduate students collectively. We should also consider the limited staffing in recognized diversity, equity, and inclusion offices that limits the potential scope of student programming, often putting that burden on student organizations instead. Finally, student inclusion depends on inclusive campus climates, yet for both undergraduate and graduate students facing discriminatory behaviors in the classroom and beyond, students have limited access to support systems to appropriately address these instances.

- **CENTRAL DIVERSITY COORDINATOR.** While efforts to coordinate the recognized DEI offices has been ongoing this academic year, a key limitation is that these offices are overseen by several different university leaders (i.e the Vice President for Administration oversees AA and EEO, the Vice President for Public Affairs oversees Multicultural Community Relations, the Vice Provost for Academic Affairs oversees the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, and the Dean of Undergraduates oversees the Office of Multicultural Affairs). We believe such stratification limits the achievement of campus goals for creating a diverse and inclusive environment. The creation of a University leadership role whose mission will be to coordinate all DEI efforts on Rice's campus and work with the existing Council for Diversity and Inclusion (CODI), the Provost, the President, the Schools, and all DEI resources on campus to increase visibility of these resources for faculty, staff, and students and also promote coordination between DEI resources would allow for the creation of a more collective and cohesive mission in regard to DEI efforts. This role should be created at the level of the President's office in order to adequately empower this person to work with the President and the Provost of the University and to coordinate all of the offices and efforts under their jurisdiction. This individual will also be tasked with communicating these efforts and resources to Schools, departments, and to the SA and GSA to increase student, faculty, and staff awareness.
- **EXTERNAL REVIEW.** Notwithstanding V2C2, the last publicly available statement of a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion by University leadership ([the Faculty Senate and the Board of Trustees](#)) was in 2003. We are calling for the execution of an external review of Rice's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Resources. This review should be performed with consideration to the items we have highlighted above, but should be thorough and exhaustive in its examination of all DEI resources for students, faculty, and staff at Rice. The successful completion of the external review and its outcomes will be overseen by the Provost, the newly appointed coordinator in the President's Office for Diversity and Inclusion Efforts at Rice, and the Council for Diversity and Inclusion (CODI) currently led by Dr. Roland Smith. External reviews related to diversity, equity and inclusion resources have been conducted by many of Rice's peer institutions including [Princeton](#), [Dartmouth](#), [Brown](#), and [Yale](#) and have enabled positive change to be affected with regards to DEI efforts.
- **DIVERSITY AS A CRITICAL PART OF GENERAL CURRICULUM.** Cultural competency is seen by a growing number of students as essential for existing in a diverse environment. The Latinx Working Group proposed a cultural competency course, similar to Critical Thinking in Sexuality, that would be required for all incoming new undergraduate students. This course would be 0 credits, similar to CTIS, but the benefit of cultural competency and sensitivity would be invaluable. Diversity has been outlined in past reviews of the general curriculum, such as in the Committee on Undergraduate Curriculum's May 2007 report 'The Education of Rice Undergraduates', as critical to the Rice experience, and such a course would allow Rice to keep pace with our peer institutions with regards to DEI efforts.
- **REFORM.** Given its expanding role to work with the President, Provost, and central Diversity Coordinator and oversee the execution of the recommendations laid out in the external review

proposed above, we believe reform is needed for the existing Council for Diversity and Inclusion (CODI). CODI currently serves as an institutionalized committee to increase awareness for DEI resources on campus as well as champion DEI initiatives within Rice. The Council has served an important role for many years, but with the call to reassess the University's mission in regards to DEI efforts and the need for the expansion of DEI-recognized offices on campus to be inclusive of all of the diverse populations at Rice, reform for CODI is also necessary. The Provost of the University, as well as the new University campus Central Diversity Coordinator, will sit on the committee alongside the committee's current members. Additionally, the GSA and SA will appoint representatives from their respective student populations to serve on the committee in addition to the GSA and SA Presidents who currently serve on the committee. The list of DEI resources at Rice will also be updated to include all DEI-related resources on Rice's campus, and representatives from each of these resources will attend CODI meetings to report what their office or group is working on in order to increase awareness and encourage coordination on relevant efforts.

- **ASSESSMENT.** In coordination with the Office of Institutional Effectiveness (OIE), CODI will also oversee the surveying of students, faculty, and staff on campus climate to track the success of inclusivity efforts on campus. Surveying will be conducted annually to track the progress of inclusion efforts and to also inform CODI about relevant diversity and inclusion efforts that should continue to shape their advocacy within the University. Appropriate subcommittees to execute these advocacy items will be created and will report their progress in the regular CODI meetings. Progress on advocacy efforts will be held accountable by the CODI chair and the central Campus Diversity Coordinator. In addition, all climate data will be made public to the Rice community to allow for increased visibility and accountability in identifying areas for improvement.

We feel strongly that the items we have highlighted above demonstrate areas for growth within Rice and align with the Vision for the Second Century's goal of providing "the programs and financial support that attract and enable the success of outstanding graduate and undergraduate students from all backgrounds" and building "diversity in all aspects among our faculty and staff". Many of our peer institutions have recognized within the last several years the critical need to evaluate university structure and office function related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. We applaud the work Rice has done thus far in improving our student diversity and for always working to enhance the Rice experience. We believe that the execution of the items above will only enhance Rice as a community and will further the efforts the University has begun to increase awareness of and improve the vibrant, brilliant, and diverse community that is Rice University.

Sincerely,

Hannah Pearce
GSA President 2019-2020

Grace Wickerson
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