

# DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION

## NEWSLETTER



ISSUE 01 • MAY 2020



## IN THIS ISSUE

Greetings from the CDO **1**

---

2020 Lux Award  
Winners Named **3**

---

Brittany Flokstra, an  
Instructor for Everyone **3**

---

Student Spotlight **5**

---

Summary of 2019-2020  
Climate Survey **5**

---

Who's Doing What  
in DEI Work **6**

## Greetings from the CDO

Fifteen years ago, I penned a piece for the Alumni magazine "Today." I led with the assertion that the word "diversity" often frightens those who hear it. They become nervous, believing that for diversity to occur, they will have to forfeit something: money, position, opportunity, power. Thus they resist any attempts to advance the prospects of people who are unlike them in some fundamental way. Today we call those "fundamental ways" protected characteristics and they include race, color, creed, disability, ethnicity, gender identity, genetic information, marital status, national origin, political affiliation, pregnancy, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, veteran or military status. There are, as you can see, quite a few but research tells us that

the top three (that is, the three that are most likely to be noticed) are, in this order, race (color), sex and perceived socio-economic status.

Since then, we've made progress. We've added "Equity and Inclusion" to the word "Diversity" when we talk about this work. And same-sex marriages are legal. At UNI, we've established student centers for our military veterans and LGBQA+ communities. We also have a center for students with accessibility needs. Most institutions and corporations have something along the lines of a Chief Diversity Officer, and there are enough consultants, employees and researchers in the area that promoting Diversity has become a multi-billion-dollar business, according to Pamela Newkirk in her

book, "Diversity, Inc." No surprise: Racial demographics of this country are changing so quickly that within about a decade 12 states will be minority white.

Yet few minds have changed, the needle hasn't wiggled much. The marginalized remain marginalized, un(der)employed, unrepresented, poor. In the past few weeks, we've listened to doctors and other experts tell us that because they are more likely to be stressed and poorly cared for due to racism, Blacks in this country make up a frighteningly disproportionate percentage of those who die after contracting coronavirus.

All of that tells me one thing: the way we diversity practitioners do our work needs some tweaking. In fact, it's imperative that we change it or, as people who seek to lead in this area, we simply will not succeed.

So that is what UNI is going to do: from the top down we're going to look for and engage in those out-of-the-box ways to practice DEI, create a deeper value and understanding for the work, and hold every member of the Panther Nation accountable for doing their part to make this campus a welcoming and equitable environment. Do I know yet what those new practices look like? I do not, and I'm glad. If I knew already, they probably wouldn't be very new.

We're starting with the President's Advisory Committee on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, a group of 14 members from the UNI community who have been nominated by their peers. They'll meet regularly to look at our issues, opportunities and challenges related to DEI; and begin to establish new practices that ultimately will lead to new culture.

I'm excited about what we'll be able to do.

I hope you too are excited about the possibilities. Working together in a meaningful and intentional way, we are going to make UNI a great place for everyone.

Looking forward to walking this journey with you,  
Gwenne Berry



## HELPING HANDS IN TROUBLED TIMES

The COVID-19 pandemic has upended life around the globe. So much change, causing so many problems, in such a short amount of time can be traumatic for just about anyone. The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) tells us that black and brown students are experiencing even more problems: Issues like lack of access to WiFi (for online courses), lack of study space or time in the home, food insecurities and financial concerns. With a little grace and empathy, each of us can help. Here, first, are some ideas for students looking for a little peace; then, a few ideas for faculty and staff wanting to reach out to those students who need help.

### SURVIVAL TIPS FOR STUDENTS:

1. Stay engaged - Join student organizations, programming from student life, the CME or other campus partners.
2. Stay connected - Connect with friends, family members and peers via apps like Zoom, Houseparty, Google Hangouts.
3. Stay learning - Although you are pushing through the final weeks of school, read more, learn new trades and crafts, or start a new project (gardening, painting, sewing, etc.).
4. Stay positive - Meditate, listen to inspirational podcasts, or journal.
5. Stay healthy - Stay engaged in physical activity, meditate and eat healthy - also continue to practice social distancing.

### HOW FACULTY AND STAFF CAN HELP:

1. Be understanding - Understand that students may be directly impacted by the current pandemic, so be compassionate.
2. Be flexible - Have flexibility in testing options, or assignment due dates; also be considerate in the amount or type of work given; still challenge them but support them.
3. Be encouraging - Encourage students to stay engaged, and reach the finish line.
4. Communicate - Communicate regularly with students, provide them with campus and community resources to help them through this time.
5. Ask how you can help!

- Keyah Levy, Associate Director, Multicultural Education, and Gender and Sexuality Services

# 2020 Lux Award Winners Named

As an illustrated design element, the Lux Service Award is the official University seal; a burning lamp of knowledge and the Latin word “Lux,” meaning “light.” It is conferred in the spirit of keeping the light of service to others burning brightly at the University of Northern Iowa. The Lux Service Award is the most prestigious award given to graduating seniors each academic year to acknowledge the culmination of their overall involvement. Recipients consistently go above and beyond, leaving a lasting legacy upon graduation.

This year’s awards, presented during an April 14 virtual ceremony, went to Farhan Bin Amjad, and Mahlia Brown.

**Amjad** is a Computer Science major from Rawalpindi, Pakistan. Farhan will leave his mark on campus through his involvement in International Student Promoters, Student Admissions Ambassadors, and Northern Iowa Student Government. Amjad believes that leading with love has helped him to connect with members of the UNI community and he hopes others learn that love can impact students in selfless ways. He hopes his positive approach to life and encouragement of other students will show them they can follow their dreams at UNI, as did he.

**Brown** is a Psychology major, with a Women’s and Gender Studies minor, from Marion, Iowa. Mahlia will leave her mark on campus through her involvement as a Resident Assistant, supporting the transition of incoming students. She was named the Director of Diversity for Northern Iowa Student Government in 2019, a position through which she advocated for minoritized and underrepresented students utilizing a social justice approach. Brown hopes that if, during her years of engagement, she has helped but one student to avoid the struggles she faced as a minoritized student on a predominately white campus, she will have fulfilled her goal.



## BRITTANY FLOKSTRA

### AN INSTRUCTOR FOR EVERYONE

Brittany Flokstra, a faculty member in the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry, made up her mind a long time ago that she would not hide from an identity that marginalizes her, and she would encourage other marginalized persons to feel just as safe and proud in her classroom. Flokstra, a white female, is lesbian. She knows that she could easily remain in a position of privilege, never divulging that she too is one of the marginalized.

“I remember my first few years out of grad school and I was really scared to come out,” she said. “What switched things for me was when I realized that I had colleagues who did not have that choice. They weren’t going to be sitting around after several months [on the job] and say, ‘Guess what? I’m black!’”





Years later, she still isn't trying to hide; not with hair that she has dyed in vibrant rainbow hues. On the first day of class for every course she teaches, every single semester, Flokstra tells students not only her name (You can call her "Doc Flok") but her pronouns. It's a small move, but it's also been extremely powerful.

For starters, she has seen a decided uptick in LGBTQ+ representation in her classes. "Students tell me I'm the only person who does that [shares pronouns] in class. As a result, they know they can come out to me, or tell me they are transitioning."

This semester she received an email from one of her students, a white male who grew up in rural Iowa. He wrote that Flokstra was everything he'd been warned about before coming to UNI. "I was liberal, lesbian, and a woman in STEM," said Flokstra. "This student came to college thinking he'd be dismissed by me, and I wouldn't be a teacher to him. He thought it would be his worst class and that I would not like him."

Yet, he took another course with Flokstra. "He wrote to me that, 'Instead of finding what I had been warned

about, I found you to be very open-hearted and passionate. You love teaching and you love teaching all of us. I have learned so much from you.'"

That is why, for Flokstra, it's important to do more than teach. It's important to reach out and let students know they are important in the class, that the person teaching cares for them. "We can play around with preconceived notions about people or we can be the best teacher that we can be."

She uses that same mindset to assist her students trying to make their way through the COVID-19 pandemic while earning a college degree. According to the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), students of color and those who live in poverty are more likely to be negatively impacted when institutions move classes to an online format. They are more likely to be living without consistent access to stable WiFi, a computer, or even study space. Flokstra knows these facts, not because she read about them, but because she'd gotten to know so many of her students. As soon as the administration announced that classes were moving online for two weeks, she asked students to fill out a questionnaire.

"I asked if they had a computer, whether they had access to WiFi and what they would do if they did not have it," she explained. "I had three students say they had spotty WiFi but they could go to a coffee shop at that point. Then the coffee shops closed and we learned we weren't coming back this semester, so I reached out to those students to find out how I could help." In the process, she found a student who ultimately took an online test sitting in the parking lot of a coffee shop that, while closed, still had WiFi turned on. Flokstra helped other students work through issues by educating them about resources such as cell companies that offered special services like free increased WiFi signals and free data overages.

But that wasn't all. Flokstra extended deadlines on assignments when students had problems related to technology. "The flexibility should be built in," she said, recalling a recent Zoom meeting with colleagues where three of them froze and then disappeared from the screen. "That's beyond anyone's control. Let's just be gracious."

# Student Spotlight



**Name:** Laura Roman Jimenez  
**Major:** Finance  
**Minor:** Ethics  
**Hometown:** Cedar Falls, Iowa

**Hobbies:** Reading, biking, gardening, hiking, photography  
**Position:** Director of Diversity, NISG

## Why I applied for the position:

I applied for this position as equity and social justice is something that's been very important to me. Through my work on campus with various student organizations like UNIDOS, Racial Ethnic Coalition, Black Student Union and others, I've been able to learn and apply so much throughout my time at UNI. I figured that applying to this position could be the next step in learning and serving others in the local community.

## What I hope to accomplish in this role:

I hope that I can use this position to bring other people to the table who have not been represented before, that I can use this position to fight for others, and that I can continue the work of others before me.

## Plans for life after UNI:

I hope to stay in the Cedar Falls area and do work helping others in the community!

## Summary of 2019-2020 Climate Survey

The University of Northern Iowa conducted a Climate Survey between October 30 and November 20, 2019. To see a more detailed summary or access more information about that survey, [click here](#).

The survey was open to all students, faculty and staff of the institution, and was the first such survey administered since 2016. The instrument was developed solely for this purpose by the University's Center for Social and Behavioral Research in conjunction with the Chief Diversity Officer, Gwenne Berry.

Overall, key constituency groups rated the campus as generally friendly; positive for women; and welcoming, respectful and positive for active military/veterans. The majority of participants in each group (students, faculty, staff and administrators) reported that they *agree or strongly agree* that they are treated with respect at UNI, that their opinions are valued by others at UNI, that they feel valued at UNI, and that UNI is a place where they are able to perform up to their full potential.

A large majority of all respondent groups reported being *somewhat comfortable or very comfortable* interacting with various groups that might be different from themselves. The sole outlier in this area of reporting, was politics, with more respondents saying they felt a lower level of comfort interacting with those who have different political views.

The majority in all respondent groups disagree or *strongly disagree* that there is too much emphasis put on issues of diversity, equity and inclusion at UNI.

Still, the survey revealed some challenges faced by the University. A lower proportion of students of color (than white students) reported that they *agree or strongly agree* that they are treated with respect (55% vs 82%), and feel valued as an individual (42% vs 65%). A higher proportion of students of color than white students indicated that they *agree or strongly agree* that they have to work harder than others to be valued equally at UNI (62% vs 21%).

A lower proportion of faculty of color than white faculty reported that they *agree or strongly agree* that they are treated with respect (50% vs 66%), feel their opinions are valued by others (42% vs 58%), and feel valued as an individual (48% vs 54%). More than twice the percentage of faculty of color than white faculty *agree or strongly agree* that they have to work harder than others to be valued equally. Staff voiced similar concerns across the board.

These general patterns hold for LGBQA+ and gender for most items where LGBQA+, females and transgender/non-binary respondents are less likely than straight or males respondents to agree in regard to those same categories listed above.

Finally, substantially lower proportions of people of color than white respondents agreed that UNI has a strong commitment to diversity (Faculty: 33% vs 44%; Staff: 19% vs 61%; Students: 32% vs 57%).

# WHO'S DOING WHAT IN DEI WORK

DEI work cannot be conducted in a vacuum, and must be owned by an entire organization. Through this section, we'll highlight UNI programs, people and events that model excellence in DEI initiatives.

## **LIBRARY**

Wikipedia is the world's most-used reference source, but there are known problems of representation and inconsistent quality. Rod Library's Wikipedia Edit-a-thons are designed to address both problems. These events are always on a diversity-focused theme like "Representation Matters: Celebrating the 19th Amendment," "Redlining," "Wiki Loves Pride," "People of Color," "Art+Feminism," and "Human Rights." The goal is to increase quality content on un(der)represented topics in Wikipedia. Since spring 2018, we've had 200 participants improve nearly 500 articles; those articles have been viewed more than 29 million times. Students editors have the opportunity to improve the scope and quality of information.

## **COLLEGE OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION**

At the end of last semester, the College of Business Administration hosted its first CBA Listening Post to give students an opportunity to express their concerns about the racial climate on UNI's campus, as well as within the College of Business Administration. Candid conversations took place, and ideas were shared for ways the College could help

to foster a sense of belonging for every student. The Listening Post was attended by CBA faculty, staff and students only. Administrators were asked not to attend. More Listening Posts were planned for the spring but were postponed due to the campus' necessary response to the COVID-19 pandemic. For more information, contact Denita Gadson, Diversity & Inclusion Lead, at [denita.gadson@uni.edu](mailto:denita.gadson@uni.edu).

## **THE COLLEGE OF SOCIAL AND BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES**

The College of Social and Behavioral Sciences partnered with TRIO Educational Opportunity Center (EOP) and UNI-CUE for the second annual System of Support Conference in November 2019. The conference, themed "Neighbors for Peace, Prosperity and Compassion," began with a community panel facilitated by Abby Turpin (KWWL). Panelists included Debra Hodges-Harmon (Cedar Valley Iowa Works), Cary Darrah (Grow Cedar Valley), Christine Kemp (People's Community Health Clinic), Mayor Quentin Hart (City of Waterloo), Mayor Jim Brown (City of Cedar Falls), Assistant Chief Craig Berte, (Cedar Falls Police Department), and Chief Daniel Trelka (Waterloo Police Department). Topics

included the "24/7 Wall St." report ranking Waterloo-Cedar Falls as the worst place in the country for African Americans, LGBTQ+ support needs, allyship, and the need for community collaboration.

## **COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES, ARTS AND SCIENCES**

TheatreUNI's Multicultural Theatrical Society is for students of multicultural backgrounds and student allies. The purpose of this new organization is to give a voice to multicultural student performers and technicians through theatre while fostering an inclusive environment. The mission is to represent an ever-changing society utilizing theatre as outreach. Theatre is an art form that asks us to accurately represent the underrepresented by holding a mirror to society through performance. The organization won "Most Promising New Student Organization" at the Annual Student Leadership Awards in April.

If you have a program, person or event that you'd like to have highlighted in this publication, please send the information to Gwenne Berry, Chief Diversity Officer, at [Diversity@uni.edu](mailto:Diversity@uni.edu).