

2023-2024 Annual Report

Chair: Kyra Hunting

Members: Amy Brooks (resigned during period)

Mengtian Jiang

Scott Johnson (joined in Spring 2024)

Don Lowe

Nadia Sesay

Jessalynn Vallade

Lindsay Vance

Kakie Urch (on leave for Spring 2024)

The College of Communication and Information Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Committee met monthly throughout the 2023-2024 academic year and additionally as needed.

The DEI Committee committed this year to broadening the range of stakeholders who are involved in our activities and whose voices are heard by the committee. We were successful in this goal, with activities and events reaching a broader range of units as well as faculty, staff and students than has been the case in previous years.

Creating and supporting events have long been a signature function of this committee and this was a particularly successful year. The DEI committee sponsored or co-sponsored 10 separate events and brought guest speakers into 7 different classes to share their expertise with our students. A more detailed accounting of these events will be shared below. We continued our existing programs to promote and support DEI oriented activities within the program. Including our honorarium support for in-class speakers, our inclusive syllabi program, and our CI Outstanding Contributions to DEI award. We also launched new programs and resources within the College. This includes a new specially curated resources page on our College website that was shared widely with faculty and staff via postcards with QR codes during unit retreats and other events. We also launched the CI Inclusivity and Belonging Liaisons program to elevate the voices and perspectives of our students.

We continued to work on implementing strategies to address the previously approved strategic plan. We continued raising the profile of DEI by having the Chair of the Committee visit unit retreats, provide DEI updates at College Assembly's, attend leadership meetings, and regularly post as part of a weekly college newsletter. The Chair of the Committee also appeared at events held by the Office of International Diversity and represented the College at the SEC CDO Summer Conference in July 2023. At this event the Chair shared information about activities in the College and attended numerous panels and talks, in order to expand their expertise to better support the committee and the College. The Chair of the Committee also appeared at College K-Week to share information with students. The committee was successful in expanding its usefulness as a resource for the College with an increased number of staff, students, and faculty reaching out to the committee or its Chair for information and support. Expanding the role of the committee as a resource is worth considering for future years.

Events

The DEI committee sponsored or co-sponsored 10 separate events and brought guest speakers into 7 different classes to share their expertise with our students. These events spanned a variety of types of events including public lectures, small group master classes and networking events, professional development and pedagogy trainings, and cultural outreach and education events. Many of these events were open to not only the entire College but to the University and the Lexington community. We also co-sponsored events with other Colleges and offices as well as events for the larger Lexington community. This year we saw not only a significant increase in events but also an increase in attendance as well as an expansion of the kinds of audiences we reached. Reaching students at large scale events, however, continues to be a challenge. This year we had a high degree of success with high impact events with students through small group

workshops and breakfast or lunch meetings with guests.

The College of Communication and Information brought in two speakers that held lectures open to the public. On January 30th thru February 1st Jeanetta Sims visited to give a talk entitled “Finding Your Place and Purpose” as well as multiple wrap around smaller scale events. Dr. Sims is a leader in the communication field, a first-gen academic whose significant accomplishments beyond her extensive publication record include serving as a Dean, a tenure as co-editor of the *Journal of Transformative Learning* and service as NCA vice president. Her talk focused on strategies for meaningful paths to success and leadership within and beyond the academy, drawing on her work and personal experiences. In addition to her talk Dr. Sims visited a graduate course on Consulting Training & Leadership, met with members of the DEI Committee, had lunch with a group of first-generation undergraduate and graduate students, and met with faculty. She also conducted a workshop with the College Leadership. Across these events Dr. Sims engaged with approximately 68 members of the college.

The College also brought in Victor Luckerson, noted journalist and author of *Built from the Fire*, a book about Tulsa’s Greenwood District. Victor Luckerson’s visit was a collaboration with the 2024 AEJC Southeast Colloquium, hosted by the College, which he delivered the Keynote for. The lecture was open to the public and was attended by College faculty, staff and students in addition to AEJMC attendees. In addition to the keynote Victor Luckerson joined two courses in the Journalism program as a guest speaker and met with journalism and grad students over lunch to talk about his work as a journalist and a non-fiction author. Through these activities he interacted with approximately 50 of our students in addition to the lecture.

The College of Communication and Information co-sponsored additional speakers and events across the year. We partnered with the Patterson School to support a lecture by author

Howard French “From Ancient to Modern: Placing Africa at the Center of Our History” which was the Keynote for the Patterson School’s 2023 Fall Conference. This event reached students and faculty across the University as well as the guests of the conference. We were also a co-sponsor for the first Ziva Voices “HerStory in the Making” Speaker Event and was included in marketing materials at the event. This co-sponsorship benefitted our students in the form of networking opportunities at the event and access to guest speakers from around the world in our classes. As part of this project students in an ISC course “Case Studies in Public Relations” were visited with guest lectures from Jo-Anne Godden, creator of UK fashion brand RubyMoon, formerly with the Gap, and Mexican Artist and entrepreneur Helen Marcos. ICT students in “Issues in Information and Communication Technology” engaged with guest speaker Nyari Samushonga the CEO of WeThinkCode, a tech start up in South Africa. Journalism students in “Sports Broadcasting and Production” were visited by Crystal Gentry a Managing Post Producer at ESPN. This project aligned both with goals gleaned from previous listening sessions to put students in contact with working professionals from diverse backgrounds and 2023-2024 efforts around increasing International opportunities within the College.

The College also co-sponsored a speaking event with distinguished alum of the College, Jenisha Watts, Atlantic Editor, with “The State and Future of Journalism and the Health of Our Democracy” on March 20th which was a collaboration with the Office for Institutional Diversity and lead by the Community Engagement office. This event was billed as A Lyman T. Johnson 75th Anniversary Event. More than 200 guests signed up for the speaking event and it was attended by our JOU 101 students and our faculty member Jennifer Smith interviewed Jenisha on stage as part of the event. During her visit as part of this talk the College of Communication and Information also hosted a workshop with a group of students about careers in Journalism and the

role of Journalism in Democracy. During a previous visit in Fall 2023 the College of Communication and Information partnered with the University’s Center for Graduate and Professional Diversity to conduct a Master Class with Jenisha Watts in which she brought in multiple editors from the Atlantic Magazine via Zoom to speak to students about pitching to editors and crafting good stories. Both workshops were excellent career development opportunities for the group of students who attended, approximately a dozen at each event, and we received very positive feedback about the events. We conducted a similarly successful “Breakfast with Expertise” event with distinguished alum Celeste Warren a Vice President at Merck and author of *How to Be A Diversity and Inclusion Ambassador*. She spoke with students about her work, how she used her degree as she built career, and about the students own questions and ambitions. These smaller career oriented events, as well as lunches and dinners with our other speakers and guests were particularly impactful for our students and the committee is interested in continuing to try to find opportunities for these higher impact less formal events while making them available to a larger group of students.

The committee also sponsored two professional development opportunities for the College. These include a workshop on Universal Design for Learning and collaboration with CELT that was attended by faculty, staff that teach, and graduate students from across the College. We also sponsored a workshop with leadership expert and consultant Jeanetta Sims “Impeccable Leadership as the Way Forward in a World that Won’t Stop Raging” attended by unit heads, directors of undergraduate studies, assistant and associate deans, and others identified by unit heads as those taking on or moving toward leadership roles. This was the first year with our new more predictable schedule: running a pedagogy session in the fall and a professional

development oriented session in the spring and this was effective with increased attendance at both events.

Our final event of the year was a cultural event put on in collaboration with the Honors College. This was an Iftar Dinner that invited members of the University and the broader connected community to participate in an Iftar, a meal to break the daily fast during Ramadan. This family event was attended by well over 100 guests and the Chair of the DEI Committee was approached by graduate students from the College who expressed how much the event meant to them. This year showed excellent results in terms of increasing the reach, attendance, and profile of our events and as we move forward we will continue to build on these strengths by focusing on continuing to build a variety of events that are able to reach a wide variety of members of the College and meet their needs as well as collaborating with others across the University.

Visibility and Outreach

Another major goal for 2023-2024 was to make resources more available to the college community and to make the DEI Committee and CDO a more visible and reliable resource. Last year we focused on working with the College's IT and Communications team to build a resource rich DEI website. This year we worked to raise awareness of this page and resource page by having the Assistant Dean of Inclusion (the Chair of the committee) visit each of the Unit's Fall retreats to introduce the website, share some of the supports the committee provides, and to pass out informational postcards (these featured the members of the committee, our first events, and a QR code to the resource page). The Chair of the committee also attended Deans Leadership Committee, Student Advisory Meetings, and select staff meetings by invitation when relevant topics were under discussion.

These efforts resulted in a wider use of the committee and its Chair over the course of the year. Nearly every unit was involved in proposing a speaker or event and/or hosting a speaker in their courses, including the Graduate Program, which is a marked increase from previous years. The Chair was also contacted more widely for consultation to assist with various challenges relating to inclusivity over the course of the year. Faculty, staff and graduate students all reached out for issues ranging from: supporting disabled students, helping students gain access to specific needs or resources related to unique circumstances, communicating with classes about difficult topics, and supporting international students. The Chair also supported faculty and working groups by providing feedback on funding or program applications. In coming years, I hope to make the committee and chair a more formalized and heavily utilized resource to help College members locate advice, resources and to help bridge the College with other University offices and resources specifically related to inclusion and belonging and to ensure the needs of all students are being served. The committee and Chair worked with individuals from every unit, as well as student success, serving as a resource. The committee also served as a resource for student groups, most extensively NABJ, this year.

The committee both continued established programs to support or encourage the DEI work done by our faculty and staff and introduced new programs this year to provide more leadership opportunities for students. We conducted another year of the Inclusive Syllabi Project and supported faculty participants in accessing materials to diversify their syllabi. This program has steadily attracted a small number of faculty every summer and the committee has been told has increased discussion of this kind of syllabi revision. This program was discussed, alongside our resources page, at an Office of Institutional Diversity event attended by representatives of units across the University representing DEI efforts within their unit. The College and committee

also acknowledged the hard work of individuals throughout the College both through the announcements in the Committee's section of the weekly newsletter and formally through the awarding of our third annual Outstanding Contributions to DEI Award which was awarded at the College Awards Ceremony to our winner, a faculty member from the School of Information Science. The committee also launched a new program called the CI Inclusion and Belonging Liaison program. This program, modeled in part off student successes' highly successful College Ambassador Program, works with a small group of students who engage in outreach to other students, advise the DEI committee from the student perspective, serve as a resource to student success for DEI related activities, and will plan student oriented events. In the Spring they focused on developing a plan and agenda for what this role will entail in the upcoming year and provided feedback on the current state of the College's efforts and challenges.

Looking Forward

- We hope to continue to expand and refine how we support College members and units in meeting their goals, particularly in our role as a resource to help with "just in time" information or additional support as needs emerge.
- Build on the strong response students had to more casual and career oriented events.
- Build programming for next year around questions the committee received this year.
- Continue to work with and support unit heads and hiring in committees to work toward recruitment and retention goals.
- Develop the Liaison program to continue to elevate student voices from across our community.