

The 2021-2024 Strategic Plan:

*Inclusive Excellence in Action*

Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Rhode Island College

September 2020

## **Introduction**

Crucial to the intellectual and cultural vitality of the Rhode Island College (RIC) community are the values of *diversity*, *equity*, and *inclusion*. As such, the administration created a new unit under the president's office in 2017 to offer leadership on topics pertaining to these core values. Formerly referred to as the Office of Community, Equity, and Diversity (OCED), the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (ODEI) was incepted as a direct result of repeated requests to college leadership by the Dialogue on Diversity and Inclusion (DDI) committee as well as by faculty, students, and staff. ODEI bolsters the college's strategic direction and seeks to fulfil the promise to our diverse community espoused in [RIC's vision statement](#):

Rhode Island College will be recognized as an outstanding institution of higher education that is valued for high-impact programs and educational practices that prepare Rhode Island's diverse population. The college will be known . . . for its adaptability to the changing social and economic environment; and for its collective impact on Rhode Island's economy and culture.

ODEI exists to foster a culture of inclusive excellence that emphasizes antiracism, antisexism, and antiableism, and it fulfills this charge by ensuring compliance with state and federal civil rights laws. Comprising the Office of Institutional Equity and The Disability Services Center, ODEI guarantees adherence to Title IX, Affirmative Action, and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) guidelines. ODEI is led by an Associate Vice President who serves as a member of the President's Executive Cabinet (PEC), and responds to a critical infrastructural need the college has had in years past. As a result of the creation of this office, RIC is now more capable to provide greater clarity about the roles, authority, and accountability needed to achieve significant advances in diversity and inclusion. The creation of this office could not be more timely as the college has seen a significant rise in enrollment of Black and LatinX students and students with disabilities.

## **Purpose:**

The primary purpose of this document is to provide much needed clarity, strategy, and focus for the Rhode Island College (RIC) Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (ODEI) for a three-year period beginning in January 2021. This plan serves as a blueprint to the office's scope of work and guidance for the college's overall strategic plan and Executive Equity Plan. It also frames and supports the development and operationalization of equity plans across each division of the college. The challenges and opportunities laid out in this document identify key areas of further attention and/or realignment of resources.

This document synthesizes five years (2014-2019, pre-dating this office) of collaborative planning and information gathering, as evidenced by the following sources:

- Cambridge Hill Partners Report, 2014
- Reports submitted by the Dialogue and Diversity and Inclusion Committee going back to 2016
- RIC Current Strategic Plan: *Affirming Our Strength, Building Our Future*: Goal, Inclusive Excellence; Core Value, Diversity and Inclusion
- Notes from twenty Campus Climate focus groups
- Notes from Campus Climate Working Group and facilitator's notes from six feedback forums
- Notes and feedback from DDI committee on Campus Climate Results
- Training and notes from consultation visits with Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Higher Ed. expert, Dr. David E. Jones
- The creation of shared language and focus areas guided by both the Dialogue and Diversity and Inclusion Committee's subcommittee established to aid in this strategic plan and the feedback of the Inclusive Excellence commission, as part of President Sanchez' inauguration
- Feedback from the 2018 Campus-wide Diversity summit, led by the DDI
- Five CED staff retreats spanning from 2018 to 2019
- Annual Evaluations from the RIC AFT Administration Evaluation Committee
- Participation in the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education (NADOHE) annual conference and leadership institute (2018)
- Results of the campus-wide study entitled "Rhode Island College Assessment of Campus Climate for Learning, Living and Working," which was administered in Spring 2019

## **About the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (ODEI)**

**Mission:** The Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at Rhode Island College leads institutional initiatives that promote a diverse, inclusive, and equitable campus community. We ensure that RIC complies with federal and state antidiscrimination policies and laws. We strive to honor the diverse identities of our students and employees by building core cultural competencies that are grounded in best practices.

**Vision:** The Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion will lead systemic strategies, policies, and practices that will create an equitable, safe and affirming educational environment.

**This Strategic Plan defines the team as the following:**

**The Disability Service Center (DSC):** is the central location on campus for disability-related services for students and is a primary resource to educate, train, and guide the college community in understanding disability access, rights, and responsibilities. The DSC recognizes disability as a form of diversity, promotes the inclusion of individuals with disabilities in all aspects of college life, and endeavors to make students aware of the many opportunities and resources available to them at Rhode Island College. The DSC is committed to providing reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities and supporting them in achieving their academic goals. The DSC serves students with all types of disabilities: mobility, hearing, vision, motor, psychological, learning, attention, speech, medical, developmental, and other conditions.

In addition, the Disability Services Center shall seek to assist students with temporary impairments, who are in need of short-term accommodations. Support services may include classroom and testing accommodations, advisement, referrals, and use of assistive technology. Students who self-identify and provide the Disability Services Center appropriate documentation of their condition may be eligible to receive reasonable accommodations in accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and analogous state laws. The DSC is also available to advise any student who needs information about how to obtain appropriate documentation of a disability.

**Office of Institutional Equity:** This office oversees compliance with Title IX and Affirmative Action (AA/EEO) laws. The Director serves as Title IX Coordinator and Affirmative Action Officer, and the Business Analyst supports her by conducting analyses for equity gaps and providing education, training, and outreach on issues pertaining to access, equity, opportunity, Title IX, and Affirmative Action. A major function of this office is to develop and review institutional policies and procedures for compliance with federal and state civil rights laws, regulations, and guidelines. In accordance with this, the Director interprets federal and state equal opportunity and non-discrimination laws and regulations including Title IX, and other applicable laws and regulation such as: AA/EEO, Title VI, Title VII, Title IX, VAWA and the

Campus Save Act, the ADA of 1990 and Amendment Act of 2008, Sections 503 and 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, the VRRRA, the Veterans' Readjustment Assistance Act and USERRA and any related regulations.

*Office of Title IX:*

Title IX Coordinator conducts and supervises investigations and monitors complaints of civil rights violations including discrimination, harassment, and sexual misconduct under Title IX. This process includes consultations, informal resolutions and/or formal investigations. This includes providing counseling, technical assistance, compliance, and training as needed, in matters related to equity, diversity, affirmative action, unlawful harassment prevention, and sexual misconduct prevention. The Title IX Coordinator engages outside experts as needed for investigations and coordinates with law enforcement as necessary. Title IX complaints and investigations are separate and distinct from any other actions that may occur, including but not limited to grievances filed alleging violations under employment contracts. Recent changes in federal guidelines required an agile response from RIC's Title IX Coordinator, and this strategic plan incorporates a multitude of changes that bring RIC's revamped Title IX processes and procedures up to par with new federal standards.

*Office of Affirmative Action:*

Affirmative Action exists to undo historic discrimination. This office achieves this crucial work by identifying areas of underrepresentation of people from historically marginalized backgrounds, including racial and gender minorities. Affirmative Action guidelines charge RIC to administer the following areas without regard to race, color, sex, age, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, disability status or veteran status: hiring, work assignments, salaries/wages, leave, layoffs, training, promotions, appointments, demotions, and discipline. As the College's AA/EEO Officer, the Director is required to maintain record-keeping procedures, conduct compliance reviews, prepare AA/EEO reports and plans, and monitor all stages of job searches. In addition, the Director reviews employee requests for reasonable accommodations, recommendations and investigates complaints regarding the same. This includes working with Director Human Resources (HR) on employee requests for accommodations as well as with the Director of Student Disabilities on cases involving students.

## **Part 1: The Case for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**

Reflecting the increasing diversity of our state, the student population at Rhode Island College has changed dramatically in the last several years. Since 2014, our undergraduate population of Hispanic students has grown by **32%**, and our graduate students by **50%**<sup>1</sup>; this mirrors a **26%** increase in Rhode Island's Hispanic population. In that same period, we have seen a **19%** increase in Black undergraduates and a **16%** increase in multiracial/multiethnic students, again mirroring state and regional demographic shifts.

Since 2014, our campus has seen a **165%** increase in undergraduate English language learners. Getting data about other historically underrepresented groups, including sexual and gender minorities, diverse religious communities, and immigration status, is difficult. That said, we have every reason to believe that our campus is becoming more diverse in these regards as well, based on the experience of campus staff and our own observations of our student populations. RIC has the potential to fully seize and integrate our unique campus diversity and to be a leader for inclusive education and student success.

A core charge of ODEI is ensuring that our campus is compliant with state and federal laws and accreditation regulations with regard to inclusion and equity. Thus, a significant portion of this Plan relates to compliance practices. This, however, is the baseline and foundational work found on college campuses across America. We must ensure we are proactively utilizing best practices from our peer and aspirant institutions to lead by example an inclusive campus community and service model in every office and across every division. To that end, our plan includes systematic strategies; frameworks and accountability metrics suggested by leading experts in higher education focused on ODEI, to include members of the Dialogue on Diversity and Inclusion Committee. Our focus is to build immediate and long-term capacities to fully engage with and serve *All* of our RIC community members to ensure we are living our values of Inclusive Excellence.

As our campus continues to become more diverse, we will need to continuously build and reaffirm our capacity to ensure that all members of our community feel safe and welcome on campus, and to build our capacity to handle cross campus opportunity and accountability. To that end, this plan includes multiple areas of partnership development, capacity building, and collaboration with other departments, the members of the PEC as well as others in leadership. As we move toward in this important work, *the way* we work may change. We will be moving away from doing “one-offs” or programmatic activities and more toward collaborating with divisions and offices to build embedded knowledge, accountability and skills through systematic continuous learning and engagement.

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<sup>1</sup> All campus data provided by the Office of Institutional Research and Planning in August 2019

To that end, the Unity Center, a program under this office since 2017, has been restructured and is now integrated into the Division of Student Success in Fall 2020. The rationale is in part informed by this strategic plan, the exponential diversity demographic growth and the body of work related to the student experience and sense of belonging that was documented in the Campus Climate Survey report and in other assessments. It is important to note that the mission of the Unity Center, although central to the work of this office, is focused more on programmatic activities that are primarily focused on students and their cultural identities, their experiences, and the direct connection to academic success outcomes. This will continue and ODEI will be a partner in future endeavors.

## **Part 2: Strategic Goals and Priorities**

Leading a campus that is a diverse, supportive, inclusive, welcoming, and safe community for all is at the core of our work. To achieve this goal, we have adopted the following priority areas to help drive equitable systemic responses and shared responsibility across campus. Under each strategic framework priority area, we have identified growth goals and measures by year, enumerated in the table below.

### **2021-2024 Priorities**

1. **Consultation**: Offering consultation, guidance and resources to individuals, departments and divisions; promoting best practices for diversity, equity, and inclusion across the campus community. Building the information arm of the college through the promotion of training the trainer modeling, innovative inclusion strategies, presentations and training/professional development.
2. **Policy and Practices**: Developing and disseminating best practices on diversity, inclusion, and safety in higher education. Updating our policies or developing them based on legal changes and guidance that help move our campus toward inclusion and accessibility. Collaborating with other divisions, departments, and centers to identify gaps and develop practices and policies that are transparent, accessible, equitable, and inclusive.
3. **Accountability and Assessment**: Ensuring that our campus adheres to (and exceeds) all federal and state laws, regulations, and guidance from accrediting bodies with regard to campus climate and academic success. Every aspect of our campus will be responsive to the diverse demographics of our community and will operate utilizing evidence-based best practice. Development of equity metrics that will be evaluated over time to create an equity dashboard that is comprehensive, campus wide and measurable. This includes the stewardship and development of a first ever RIC Executive Equity Plan.



### **Part 3: Past Linkages to Institutional Priorities**

As one of its priorities in the 2017-2020 strategic plan, Rhode Island College defined Inclusive Excellence as a college campus that intentionally designs welcoming and inviting learning experiences for all students, regardless of background, income, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, religion or politics, for the benefit of the entire college community. Recognizing the dramatic increase in students of color and students from historically underrepresented backgrounds, our campus has pursued the goal of promoting a campus culture defined by Rankin and Associates as a construct that includes the current attitudes, behaviors, and standards of faculty, staff, and administrators and students concerning the level of respect for individual needs, abilities, and potential to reflect a culture in which every participant will grow in their understanding of the benefits and value of diversity and be better prepared to prosper in a world that is increasingly both culturally rich and complex.

In 2017-2020 RIC strategic plan the college identified the following two strategic priorities:

- Investing in the college's organization structure to support inclusive excellence, through establishing an Associate Vice President for Community Equity and Inclusion and investing in key foundational capacities related to representation and compliance.
- Increasing diversity among faculty, staff, and administration to reflect the demographics of the college and the state, through expanding and improving recruitment efforts to increase workforce diversity among professional staff, faculty, and administration, and establishing clear HR protocols to support inclusive excellence.

The college also identified two campus climate priorities:

- Review and strengthen key policies and practices involving Title IX, bias response, and safety, through a comprehensive policy and practice review and adoption of best practices; ensuring access to and awareness of Title IX resources on campus; and providing students with mechanisms to express any biases or inequities they experience or perceive.
- Improving campus climate for all members of the RIC community.

	<b>Training, Education, and Consultation</b>	<b>Policy Development</b>	<b>Accountability &amp; Assessment</b>
<b>Priority Areas</b>	Offering consultation, training, and educational and resources; promoting best practices for diversity, equity, and inclusion across the campus community. Building the information arm of the college through training the trainer modeling, workshops, presentations and formal training/professional development.	Developing and disseminating best practices around diversity, inclusion, safety, and legal changes that help move our campus toward ever more inclusion. Collaborating with other divisions, departments, and centers to identify gaps and develop practices and policies that are transparent, accessible, equitable, and inclusive.	Ensuring that our campus adheres to (and exceeds) all federal and state laws, regulations, and guidance from accrediting bodies with regard to campus climate and academic success. Every aspect of our campus will be responsive to the diverse demographics of our community and will operate utilizing evidence-based best practice.
<b>Year 1: AY 2021-2022</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop workshop curricula on 6-8 priority topics from Campus Climate Survey including sexual assault/violence; “know your rights” on reporting bias and violence events; inclusion for POC and LGBTQ students and staff; staff training on affirmative action; implicit bias; understanding disability accommodations and making events and programs accessible; language barriers and linguistic and cultural</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assessment/inventory of policies by division; Develop best practices strategy screen for inclusive policy development; create plans for ally development based on campus climate survey.</li> <li>Engage DDI</li> <li>Engage VPs and Deans</li> <li>Documenting and reporting number of contacts made with ODEI about issues on campus(patterns/types)</li> <li>referral networking</li> <li>Identify tools and resources for other departments to utilize in policy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assessment of roles and responsibilities and capacity</li> <li>Compliance inventory – what we need to be doing</li> <li>Resource inventory – what we have and what we need</li> <li>Foster cabinet level conversation about “Inclusive Excellence” and the role of ODEI across the campus</li> </ul>

	<p>competency (1st gen experience, immigrant experience, etc); commonalities and differences across identity groups.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Launch Training of Trainers on priority topics</li> </ul>	<p>development, for integration into the Equity Dashboard. (blueprint, rubric, etc) e.g. best practices for pronoun usage within a classroom; making online courses accessible for all types of learners</p>	<p>(including disability and access)</p>
<p><b>Year 2:</b> <b>AY 2022-2023</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Refine and expand training curriculum</li> <li>● Develop menu of training opportunities for website</li> <li>● Communicate to the campus about the training and professional development opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Create cross-campus, cross-level policy review committee on diversity, equity and inclusion</li> <li>● Develop charge, mission, and metrics for the committee</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Develop partnership plan to meet resources and capacity gaps</li> <li>● Identify and work toward resolving contractual limitations</li> <li>● Increase overall campus wide compliance with regulations</li> </ul>
<p><b>Year 3:</b> <b>AY 2023-2024</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● “Train the trainer” for a cohort that includes faculty, staff, and students who can deliver a wide array of trainings and technical assistance across campus in addition to resource library and virtual resrouces.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Launch an Education Equity Dashboard <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Infographic</li> <li>○ Gap analysis</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Tracking over time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Develop compliance scorecard tied to equity dashboard</li> <li>● Review and update compliance-related trainings</li> <li>● Engage compliance/risk-management team to help prioritize and elevate/lead on these issues campus-wide</li> </ul>

## **Conclusion**

Activating effective diversity, equity, and inclusion work is something many campuses are grappling with as our nation becomes more diverse and as equally divided. Rhode Island College is no exception. We have taken it on as a priority within our current strategic plan, and recognize the ongoing challenge and opportunity lies ahead as a new strategic plan is developed.

Leadership has invested in this work and has moved the needle these past three years. It is imperative that we plan for and continue to invest in this work as our student population continues to diversify at a much more rapid pace than our faculty and staff. Closing equity gaps and fostering inclusion across the diverse groups of our community will require collaboration among the functional offices across our campus, including: Finance and Administration, to determine appropriate resourcing and practices; Communications, to ensure development of materials and dissemination of information; Institutional Research, to support the data and measurements of progress toward goals; Student Success and Academic Affairs, to diffuse our work and expectations throughout the core teaching and learning functions of our campus; and the Office of the President, as we work collaboratively toward operationalizing a new campus-wide executive equity plan.

As a result of the work identified in this plan, Rhode Island College stands ready to integrate our values diversity, equity, and inclusion into a culture of inclusive excellence.