

# **Diversity Committee End of Year Report 2019-2020**

Submitted by Shania Montúfar, Diversity Committee Chair; Lizzie Cremer, Diversity Committee Vice Chair; Sam Tillman, Kavya Singh, and Elana Sanders-Braxton, Diversity Committee Members

## **The Year in Review and Some General Notes**

I will begin by sharing that I am tremendously proud of the work of the Diversity Committee in this academic year. I can attribute this to the tireless, creative, and passionate work of my exceptional committee members. We communicated not only as peers, but also as friends and allies. This was made possible by our early conceptualization of what the Diversity Committee ought to be. We established that advocacy, community, and education ought to lie at the forefront of our work. From there, we sought to ensure that the real experiences of our diverse student population serve as the drivers for our policy, programming, and advocacy efforts. Early on, we attended identity and cultural-based organization meetings, hosted focus groups, and worked to position our committee as a readily-accessible voice for underrepresented community members. Through this work, we were able to host Advocacy Days and plan a wide-reaching Diversity Week in collaboration with a variety of student organizations.

Through conversations with student organizations and faculty, we developed our dead name, land recognition, faculty diversification, bias incident reporting, and open housing projects. While many of these projects are still very much in progress, I am confident that they critically address some of the concerns of our student population. Moving forward, I am hopeful that the Diversity Committee maintains its student-forward approach to developing initiatives. Diversity, inclusion, accessibility, and equity efforts present an uphill battle. The Diversity Committee must remain engaged with the Center for Diversity and Inclusion, underrepresented student organizations, and other campus entities in order to effectively undertake these efforts.

*Shania Montúfar*

## **Projects & Suggestions**

### ***Attending Identity & Cultural Organization Meetings***

In an effort to build connections with our constituents, members of the Diversity Committee visited the general body meetings of most of the cultural and/or identity based organizations on campus early in the year. In the fall semester, a spreadsheet was made of all of the liason organizations and their meeting times, locations, and dates. Information for the spreadsheet was compiled by emailing organizations or stopping by their table at the Activities Fair. Members of the committee were then assigned to attend based on their availability. At the meetings, we introduced ourselves, explained our role on campus, and shared our contact information. This was effective in helping us to understand the events and priorities of each organization as well

as helping us to build a long-term relationship with them. Having relationships with these organizations became useful when we were planning events and projects throughout the year.

**Suggestion:** Attend ID & Cultural organization meetings early in the semester.

### ***Meeting Regularly with the Center for Diversity and Inclusion***

Beginning in Spring 2020, our committee began meeting biweekly with Brad Turnbull, the Interim Director of the Center for Diversity and Inclusion (CDI). We used these meetings as an opportunity to update the CDI on our upcoming projects, events, and research. We found that sustaining this partnership with the CDI was essential to developing effective and impactful projects and hope that future committees continue a similar practice.

**Suggestion:** Find a time to meet consistently with the Director of the CDI early in the academic year. Use this meeting to exchange updates, project ideas, and other resources.

### ***Diversity in Admissions & Focus Group***

At the beginning of the Fall 2019 semester, a focus group was held to discuss diversity and inclusion in our Admissions processes. The discussion was facilitated by Dr. Tyana Lange, Vice President for Enrollment Management and Marketing, and Dr. Tara Hart, Director of Admissions. Members of identity based organizations were invited to attend. Three main project ideas came from this discussion. The first was to create an accountability system for discriminatory incidents that students could use throughout the semester. The next idea was to make it easier for students to change their Truman email to reflect the name they currently go by, rather than their dead name. The last was to complete a process for new students (and possibly current) that would allow students to self-identify clubs or organizations they are interested in finding out more information.

**Suggestion:** Follow up with Dr. Lange and Dr. Hart about changes to the Admissions process. Use Focus Groups as a tool to gauge student opinion and experiences related to project ideas.

### ***The Minority Ambassador Program Discussion***

As part of our ongoing project with Admissions, we had hoped to reimagine the purpose of the Minority Ambassador Program, which was a student-led initiative under the CDI. In its current state, MAP is not active. Moving forward, we had planned to do a focus group with past members of MAP and current Admissions administrators to determine how MAP could be repurposed. Due to the suspension of in-person classes, this focus group has not been able to happen.

**Suggestion:** Hold a focus group with MAP members and Admissions administration once in person meetings are allowed.

## ***ID & Cultural Organization Visibility and the CDI Newsletter***

Many identity-based and cultural organizations have expressed that they receive minimal interactions and event attendance from the general Truman State University community. Inversely, past Student Government surveys have indicated that Truman students feel as though cultural and identity-based organization events are not sufficiently visible on campus. While our committee did not actively engage with this concern until Spring 2020, we do have a few suggestions for future committees. First, the CDI currently puts out a newsletter with events and efforts hosted by cultural and identity-based organizations. However, this newsletter has minimal subscriptions (around 200). Thus, future committees should find a way to either automatically subscribe students to the newsletter or incorporate it into the Truman Today newsletter. Either way, this should allow for greater visibility of cultural and identity-based organization events and initiatives.

Outside of promotions, cultural and identity-based organizations greatly benefit from creative collaborations across campus. The Diversity Committee should seek to facilitate these collaborations for legislation, advocacy efforts, and events when possible.

**Suggestion:** Help increase the visibility of the CDI newsletter. Continue to promote collaboration between ID organizations.

## ***Hosting Advocacy Days***

Starting in Fall 2019, the Diversity Committee decided to start hosting “advocacy days” as a way to spread awareness about underrepresented groups on campus. This project idea came as a result of past Student Government survey data, which revealed that many students did not feel that enough awareness/advocacy projects came out of the Student Government. Our first advocacy day was hosted on Indigenous People’s Day. For this event, we created posters to inform students that the Diversity Committee would be tabling on October 12 to raise awareness for Indigenous peoples. The goal of this advocacy day was to honor Indigenous people and experiences. This included information about the historical presence of Indigenous groups in Adair county.

Our second advocacy day was hosted on International Day of Persons with Disabilities. This tabling event was held on December 3, 2019. The universal theme was “The Future is Accessible.” We used posters, candy, stickers and pamphlets to provide students with information about advocating persons with disabilities.

Our third advocacy day was in partnership with Association of Black Collegiates (ABC) for Black History Month. For this event, we showed *13th*, from filmmaker Ava DuVernay. This movie focuses on the racial inequality and the fact that the nation’s prisons are disproportionately filled with African-Americans. After the movie was over, the president of ABC and Shania, the

Diversity Committee Chair, led a discussion with the audience about the movie and the disparities it showed.

Our fourth advocacy day was scheduled to be held either at the end of April or first week of May to raise awareness for Asian-Pacific American Heritage Month (APAHM). Due to the suspension of in-person classes, the Diversity Committee was unable to do a fourth advocacy day.

**Suggestion:** Map out advocacy days early in the semester. Try to find ways to collaborate with campus departments, student organizations, and community members in planning advocacy days. If the committee is distributing promotional materials, determine a back-up plan for extra materials. One option for future years is to consider doing a documentary and discussion series for advocacy days. Movie-Discussion events are incredibly easy to plan, and they encourage in-depth discussion.

### ***Diversity Week***

The 2020 Diversity Week, scheduled for March 16-21st, was set to be an annual celebration, information, and advocacy week hosted by Student Government. It was planned in order to highlight our diverse campus community, advocate for underrepresented voices, and create critical dialogue. The theme was “Intersectionality.” The term was coined by Professor of Law, Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989 in order to describe how race, class, gender, and other individual characteristics “intersect” and overlap with one another. In order to make the 2020 Diversity Week truly intersectional, we created events in collaboration with a variety of organizations on Truman’s campus. We worked with the Center for Diversity and Inclusion, PRISM, the Association of Black Collegians, the Hispanic American Leadership Organization, the Center for International Students, the Ronald E. McNair program, NPHC greek organizations, the Episcopal Campus Ministry, and a variety of other cultural and identity-based organizations.

Our events were funded by our Student Government budget in addition to co-sponsorships provided by Greek Life, the Office of Student Affairs, the Classical and Modern Language Department, Admissions, the Center for Diversity and Inclusion, and the Sociology, Anthropology, and Justice Systems department. We reached out to each of these offices and organizations in late fall and early spring. In sum, we raised approximately \$1400.

The following was our schedule of events:

#### **Unity Dinner- Monday, March 16, 5pm-7pm in the SUB Activities Room**

Unity Dinner is free of charge and will feature presentations from a variety of Truman’s cultural, identity, and support-based organizations in addition to guided table discussion. The event will feature a keynote from Dr. Sue Thomas.

#### **Faith and the LGBTQ+ Community Panel- Tuesday, March 17, 6pm BH 114**

Join us to hear stories and perspectives from LGBTQ+ community members surrounding the navigation of faith, sexuality, and identity. This panel will feature students and community

members from a variety of religious backgrounds. All are invited and welcomed to attend! This event is co-hosted with the Truman State University Interfaith Center.

**[Spaces of Exile, Music of Unity: The Arrival of Salsa in the Heartland](#) - Wed. March 18, 6pm SUB Activities Room**

Pablo Sanhueza, creative director and co-founder of the Kansas City Latin Jazz Orchestra will perform and present on the political and cultural significance of Afro-Latin music in the Midwest while telling the story of political exiles and immigrants arriving in Kansas City in the 1970s and 1980s. Learn more about Pablo Sanhueza and the State Historical Society of Missouri here: <https://shsmo.org/speakers-bureau/speakers/pablo-sanhueza>

**[Supporting Students of Color Panel](#) - Thursday, March 19, 6pm BH 114**

Join us to explore the unique obstacles and experiences of students of color at Truman State University. Students at primarily white institutions (PWIs) often combat historical exclusion, hostile campus climates, and discrimination. Research shows that these obstacles greatly impact student retention and wellness. Through this discussion, we hope to uncover barriers and strategize ways to expand inclusivity at Truman. All are open and greatly encouraged to attend! Learn more about experiences of students of color at PWIs here: [https://www.gvsu.edu/cms4/asset/777A03CA-E5D1-90B3-8FF97B7EA6E9ECB3/higher\\_education\\_journal\\_article.pdf](https://www.gvsu.edu/cms4/asset/777A03CA-E5D1-90B3-8FF97B7EA6E9ECB3/higher_education_journal_article.pdf)

**[Moonlight Showing and Discussion](#) - Friday, March 20, 7pm VH 1000**

Moonlight is a critically acclaimed film which earned the 2016 Academy Award Best Picture. It is a semi-autobiographical work based on Tarell Alvin McCraney's play *In Moonlight Black Boys Look Blue*. The film follows the main character across his youth, adolescence, and early adult life as he faces obstacles related to his sexuality, identity, and physical and emotional violence. Following the showing of the film, the Association of Black Collegians and the Queers of Color Collective will host a discussion around the film. Capacity is first come, first served

**[Diversity Retreat](#) - Saturday, March 21, 10am-4pm SUB Activities Room**

Diversity Retreat is an annual event hosted by the Center for Diversity and Inclusion. Join us to examine and discuss identity, intersectionality, and the impact of privilege and oppression through a series of interactive activities, experiences, and critical dialogue hosted by the CDI.

Unfortunately, due to the suspension of classes and events due to the COVID-19 outbreak, Diversity Week was canceled. Thus, we have passed a resolution moving the week to Fall 2020. We purchased a variety of materials including stickers, tote-bags, and candy to be used by the 2020-2021 Diversity Committee. These materials are located in the Student Government Office. Additionally, the Diversity Committee has the movie screening licensing for *Moonlight* until March 2021. Our presentation from Pablo Sanhueza has been paid for and may potentially be rescheduled. Please speak to Laura Bates for the latest information. See the "Resolution Rescheduling Diversity Week From Spring 2020 to Fall 2020" for more specific details.

**Suggestion:** Reaching out to campus departments and organizations for co-sponsorships can be enormously helpful. We tripled our budget in this way. Ensure that you are putting students and organizations at the center of programming, and consider centering events on relevant policy and legislative discussions.

### ***Dead Name Student Username Resolution***

The Committee hosted a focus group on 21 October 2019 in conjunction with Dr. Tyana Lange, Vice President of Enrollment Management and Marketing, and Dr. Tara Hart, Director of Admissions. The discussion included leaders of Truman's identity-based organizations and centered on diversity and inclusivity in Truman's marketing, admissions, and retention efforts. This project was prompted by a thread of that discussion, where transgender students expressed concern over not being able to acquire a new student username, as they are forced to still use the username with the initials of their "dead" name. After a period of research and discussion with relevant students, faculty and staff, the resolution was discussed on 1 December 2019 and adopted on 8 December 2019. The resolution called for a formal username change process to be established by Spring 2020, though that has not happened yet.

**Suggestion:** Follow up with ITS on the status of this project. We would like a section on the website to change the username as well as an all student email explaining the process.

### ***Land Acknowledgement Resolution***

After finishing work for Indigenous People's Day, the Committee began discussing how to continue its advocacy for Indigenous peoples, and in January 2020 decided to pursue Land Acknowledgement. After a period of research and discussion with faculty and other relevant sources, the Resolution was discussed by the Student Government on 13 April 2020 and adopted on 19 April 2020. The next steps for this project will be to help the Student Government implement the terms of the Resolution, and to communicate with faculty governance and the University administration if and when they consider Land Acknowledgement at the University level. Further advocacy and outreach to the Student Body will be needed to increase awareness of Land Acknowledgement and aid in its recognition on a campus-wide basis.

**Suggestion:** Ensure that the websites are updated by Fall 2020.

### ***Bias Reporting Policy (Shania)***

In our Fall 2019 focus group with leaders of identity and cultural-based organizations, several attendees brought up concerns with our bias reporting processes. Many individuals indicated that they had experienced incidences of bias but were unsure where and how to report. Additionally, they feared that their experiences would not be "serious" enough to rise to the level of a formal complaint through the Title IX office. They were also hesitant to engage directly with the behavior for fears of personal repercussions.

Thus, Shania Montúfar, the Committee Chair, began meeting regularly with Dr. Lauri Millot, the Institutional Compliance Officer and Brad Turnbull, the Interim Director of the CDI to discuss changes to current bias reporting policies. It was established that a team of faculty and community members should be created to address incidences of bias that do not rise to the level of a formal Title IX complaint, but address bias-motivated behaviors when they do happen. This team would function similarly to the Students of Concern team and would not have any serious disciplinary powers. If the team received any reports which could be sent to Student Conduct, DPS, or the Title IX office, they would be funneled to the correct channels.

Dr. Lauri Millot, Brad Turnbull, and Shania Montúfar presented all updates related to bias incident reporting to Executive Communication in mid-April. The team will continue to present its work to the Faculty Senate and Truman State University Administration throughout the coming months.

**Suggestion:** Check in with Dr. Lauri Millot and Brad Turnbull in the Summer and Fall of 2020 to see if they need supplementary support from the Diversity Committee or the Student Government.

### ***Faculty Diversification Research***

This project began in order to address the challenges that Truman still faces in establishing and maintaining a diverse faculty. Research was conducted on the initiatives taken by other colleges and universities regarding faculty diversification with the goal of applying this research to Truman's campus. The survey of these initiatives included the University of Maryland Baltimore County, Johns Hopkins University, and University of California, Berkeley, among other institutions. Initial research included a discussion with Dr. Nina Smith regarding her experience as an underrepresented faculty member. Dr. Smith noted that as the only black faculty member at Truman, she is in high demand for black students' time and support, a demand that she cannot meet on her own. Dr. Smith also noted that the University works hard to recruit underrepresented students, but lacks the same vigor for recruiting underrepresented faculty. Dr. Smith posited that faculty composition affects student retention, and a faculty composition representative of the student body would aid in retention of underrepresented students. Though there are built-in hurdles that the University must overcome, the Committee believes this project is worthwhile. At the present time, the research is incomplete, though the information gathered can and should be expanded upon. In order to corroborate the completed research, the next tangible step of this project will be to compare Truman's faculty demographics with its student demographics.

**Suggestion:** Continue researching faculty diversification efforts and initiative. Meet with Dr. Janet Gooch and other university administration to discuss the implementation of potential initiatives.

### ***Gender-Neutral(Open) Housing Research and Proposal***

Gender-Neutral housing is a project that Student Government has supported through several resolutions dating back to 2013. Currently, students can request gender-neutral housing and supposedly it is available to specific students (transgender or gender nonconforming) based upon an interview process. Given recent changes in the Board of Governors membership, the committee decided to pursue this project again and make Gender-Neutral housing more widely available to the student body.

We started by meeting with Jamie Van Boxel, Director of Residence Life, to discuss the feasibility of gender-neutral housing at Truman. He was supportive of the idea and proposed either making an LLC or trying to pass a Gender-Neutral housing policy through the Board of Governors. We ultimately decided to go the latter route. We also met with the Residence Hall Association and they were generally supportive. Then, we met with Janna Stoskopf, Vice President for Student Affairs. Janna gave us several suggestions about how to write our policy proposal for the Board of Governors. These included combatting misconceptions about the safety of open housing in addition to explaining how open housing can benefit the campus community at wide. We plan to bring this proposal to the Academic and Student Affairs Committee of the Board of Governors at their meeting on the first weekend of June.

**Suggestion:** Continue to promote this project throughout the summer. Propose a Gender Neutral Housing report to the Board of Governors by the end of Fall 2020.

## **COVID-19 Efforts & Suggestions**

### ***Future Disability Accommodations***

Throughout the COVID-19 response, students with disabilities have noticed that certain accommodations that seemed impossible before (video calls into lectures, working from home, etc.) are suddenly readily available. It is suggested that the future committee take note of this and do some kind of project to ensure that we do not forget that we are fully capable of making these accommodations for students with disabilities. We should use this as a learning opportunity.

**Suggestion:** Work on a project/resolution to recognize our ability to offer accommodations as an institution. Also keep an eye out for what other universities are doing.

### ***First Generation, Low Income (FGLI), and International Student Support***

Universities across the United States have found that FGLI and International students are disproportionately affected by COVID-19 related housing insecurity, food insecurity, and access to technology. The Diversity Committee worked with the Executive Board and the Office of Advancement to help initiate a fundraising campaign for these vulnerable student populations.



However, their experiences should continue to be researched and advocated for as the COVID-19 situation develops.

### **Continued Vision**

#### ***Accessibility & Disability Advocacy***

The 2019-2020 Committee recognizes its shortcomings in effectively addressing accessibility-related student concerns. In many ways, campus accessibility is a case-by-case process which warrants substantial individual attention. However, the committee is hopeful that it can be a more firm advocate for accessibility-related issues in the near future.

The 2020-2021 committee should initiate a dialogue with disability-related campus organizations and offices in order to understand the status of accessibility and resources on campus. Moreover, the 2020-2021 committee should strive to initiate a focus group or informal conversation with students with disabilities in order to brainstorm effective legislation.