

# DEI Strategic Planning Undergraduate Students Subcommittee

## Recommendations Submitted to:

Dr. Carol Henderson, Vice Provost for Diversity and Inclusion, Chief Diversity Officer, and Advisor to the President

### Overview

In the fall of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic was ongoing and a vaccine had yet to be widely distributed, upending life and “normalcy” all over the world; the 2020 U.S. presidential election cycle was exceptionally divisive and, even following its conclusion, continued to exacerbate political fissures in families and communities across the nation; the deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd elevated calls for policing reform and widespread protests for racial justice; and, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) recorded an unprecedented spike in hate crimes, its highest such recording in 12 years<sup>1</sup>. Hate crimes against Asians, Asian Americans, and Pacific Islanders, partially attributed to racialized blame over the origins of COVID-19, rose by 70%<sup>2</sup>, a statistic highlighted by the murders of six (6) Asian women in Atlanta, in March of 2021. It was against this social-political backdrop that Dr. Carol Henderson, Emory University’s first Chief Diversity Officer, launched the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Strategic Planning Process and the task before this subcommittee.

The DEI Strategic Planning Process is an effort to develop a strategic plan for the systemic promotion of diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice across the Emory enterprise, and the institutionalization of these values in its norms, practices, and culture. To draw on the collective experiences, knowledge, and expertise of the Emory community, Dr. Henderson commissioned seven (7) subcommittees to draft a series of community specific recommendations. These recommendations were to include, but were not limited to, the initiation of new practices and programs, the revision of current practices and programs, and the development of accountability measures to promote feedback and transparency. Representation among these seven committees was intended to capture the diversity of the Emory community: undergraduate students, graduate and professional students, post-doctoral students, faculty, staff, alumni, and civic and community partners.

Dr. Henderson tasked Malcolm J. Robinson (Office for Racial and Cultural Engagement) and Candice M. Williams (Center for Civic and Community Engagement) to co-chair the Undergraduate Students subcommittee in collaboration with the following subcommittee members: Sophia Ahn (SON22), Ilyah Brufett (C23), Chris Ejike (OX21, C23), Taína Figueroa (Office for Racial and Cultural Engagement), Michaela Foronda (Student Involvement and Leadership, Oxford College), Robin Fu (C21), Henry Mangalapalli (C22), Elizabeth Peeler (Office of Health Promotion), Adele Pereira (BBA23), Grace Shrestha (C22), and Shana Ware (Office of Respect).

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.fbi.gov/news/pressrel/press-releases/fbi-releases-2020-hate-crime-statistics>

<sup>2</sup> <https://crime-data-explorer.fr.cloud.gov/pages/explorer/crime/hate-crime>

## Community Profile

Emory University has a total undergraduate enrollment of 8,040 students. Approximately 990 students begin the first two years of their undergraduate education at Oxford College of Emory, the site of Emory's founding,<sup>3</sup> in Oxford, Georgia, 36 miles east of Atlanta. Students beginning their education on Emory's Atlanta campus may choose from more than 92 majors and 63 minors across more than 50 departments in the Emory College of Arts and Sciences, Goizueta Business School, or the Nell Hodgson Woodruff School of Nursing. Emory University students are exceptionally diverse in terms of their self-identification and experience and represent 46 U.S. states, Puerto Rico, Washington, D.C., and 29 nations. Ethnically and racially diverse, 31% of Emory students identify as Caucasian/White, 22% identify as Asian/Asian American, 11% identifying as Hispanic/Latinx, 13% identifying as African American/Black, and 1% of students identifying as Native American; additionally, 18% of Emory students identify as non-U.S. citizens. Undergraduate students are also economically diverse with 20% of students receiving Pell Grants.

Emory does not maintain comprehensive records on the sexual and gender identity, or sexual or romantic orientation of its undergraduate students. However, Emory is home to a diverse community of LGBTQ+ identified undergraduate students as reflected in its programming, events, discussion groups, and student-led organizations which include Emory Pride, Oxford Pride, Sorority and Fraternity Pride Alliance: LGBT & Allies in Greek Life, among others.

## Process

The 2020-2021 academic year created unique challenges for the DEI Strategic Planning Undergraduate Students Subcommittee with respect to the subcommittee's ability to engage undergraduate students in the information gathering and feedback process. The COVID-19 pandemic acutely impacted undergraduate student education with many undergraduate students reporting feeling "disconnected" from the university and their academic work. Because the 2020-2021 academic year was almost entirely virtual, the Emory University administration and all functional units continually strived to keep students engaged and to create a sense of community. Unfortunately, in interviews with students, the subcommittee found that undergraduates often felt overwhelmed by the amount of electronic communication they received from the university, in addition to their academic coursework and cocurricular activities which also took place online. The overcommunication and virtual fatigue contributed to a poor rate of undergraduate student response to invitations for interviews, listening sessions, and surveys.

The recommendations shared in this report were developed using the following methods:

- **Contributing Authors** – The subcommittee is grateful to be able to include research and recommendations by other members of the Emory community. The subcommittee has made an effort to appropriately attribute this work wherever possible.
- **Individual Interviews** – Subcommittee members conducted one-on-one interviews with undergraduate students during the Spring 2021 and early Fall 2021 semesters.

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<sup>3</sup> Emory University continues to examine its founding, its history, and its connection to the enslavement of Africans and African Americans and the dispossession of Indigenous persons. A recent example of these efforts would include the *In the Wake of Slavery and Dispossession* symposium. <https://libraries.emory.edu/slavery-symposium/index.html>

- **Listening Sessions** – Subcommittee members conducted four (4) in-person and virtual listening sessions<sup>4</sup> with undergraduate students early in the Fall 2021 semester. These listening sessions were attended by 162 undergraduate students.
- **Surveys** – During the Spring 2021 and Fall 2021 semesters, the subcommittee released a survey for completion by undergraduate students. The survey was completed by 21 undergraduate students.
- **Primary Sources** – Given the widespread use of social media as a platform for self-expression and reflection, the subcommittee gathered information about Emory undergraduate student experience from narratives students made publicly available online. These communications include Tweets, Instagram posts, YouTube videos, and Op-Ed pieces in the Emory Wheel. The period of sources reviewed included sources from the 2017-2018 through the 2020-2021 academic years.
- **Secondary Sources** – The subcommittee also gathered information about student experience from interviews with Emory undergraduates conducted by other actors such as the Emory Wheel. The period of sources reviewed included sources from the 2017-2018 through the 2020-2021 academic years.

### **Best Practices Research and Emory Resources**

External resources reviewed in the development of this report included:

- USC Pullias Center for Higher Education – “Creating a Diverse Student Success Infrastructure: The Key to Catalyzing Cultural Change for Today’s Students”
- Mike Wilton et. al. – “Improving Academic Performance, Belonging, and Retention through Increasing Structure of an Introductory Biology Course”
- Milagros Castillo-Montoya – “Professors’ Pedagogical Strategies for Teaching Through Diversity”
- Stacy A. S. Williams & Addrian Conyers – “Race Pedagogy: Faculty Preparation Matters”

The draft of this report began with a survey of existing diversity initiatives targeted at undergraduate students across the university. Programs and initiatives submitted by the following offices were reviewed: Office of Spiritual and Religious Life, Emory College Scholars Program, SILT, Office of Undergraduate Education, LGBT Life, Residence Life, Center for Civic and Community Engagement, New Student Programs, Goizueta Business School, Office of Undergraduate Affairs, Office of Diversity Inclusion at Oxford, Diversity & Inclusion, the Office of International and Summer Programs, the Emory School of Medicine, among others. The subcommittee would like to recognize the significant work being done by our campus partners across the enterprise and thank them for supporting this initiative.

Other reviewed Emory initiatives included:

- Task Force Report on Untold Stories and Disenfranchised Populations
- University Committee on Naming Honors
- Twin Memorials Working Group

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<sup>4</sup> Listening sessions were made possible with financial and other support from Emory Campus Life, including Enku Gelaye, Senior Vice President and Dean of Campus Life, Suzanne Onorato, Assistant Vice President of Campus Life, and Dona Yarbrough, Assistant Vice President of Campus Life.

- A Crucial Step Towards Healing - Apology to Dr. Marion Hood

## Recommendations

The following recommendations are organized in the three thematic areas: Accountability; Professional Development, Education and Awareness; and Climate and Culture.

Accountability – Taking responsibility and action for identifying and eliminating persistence patterns of inequity that impede our ability to fulfill our institutional mission and goals for education rooted in our DEI principles and values for the Emory enterprise.

### Immediate

- Create forums for students to engage the University's attempts to address its history, and the current moment, beyond written statements both in and out of the classroom.
- Create a mechanism for the consistent and easily accessible dissemination of how the University seeks to address demands brought forth by students about inequality.
- **The University should acknowledge publicly when student demand and leadership serves as the impetus for university action with respect to inequity (e.g. Students of Asian and Pacific Island heritage report in multiple sources as feeling as though their activism at the University is not a part of how the university tells its story of progress.)**
- As part of its policy towards recognition and reconciliation of Indigenous persons displaced, the University should develop specific and sustainable policies for the recruitment and matriculation of Indigenous students.
- Increase support for first-generation students and students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds by increasing connections between existing FLI initiatives.

### Short-Term (Up to 2 years)

- Research the history of student activism and develop a mechanism for memorializing the diverse history of student activism, including student demands, student protests/counter-protests, and resultant university action.
- Include information about the history of student activism in the New Student Orientation experience via existing summer learning modules.
- The University should reconvene and reconstitute the Committee on Class and Labor, revisiting the recommendations of the report for the contemporary social and political moment. It is the recommendation of the subcommittee that the committee's work include considerations of wealth disparity among students (e.g., the effect of legacy status in the admissions process on economic diversity) given *significant* student concern about inequality of resources at Emory.
- Increase investment in professional staff hiring to connect students from less economically resourced backgrounds with support resources at Emory (e.g. first gen, etc.).
- Continued development of funds to support the recruitment, matriculation, and retention of students from less economically resourced backgrounds.
- Neurodiversity and support for neurodivergent students is not currently a focus area of diversity initiatives at Emory. Neurodiversity should be incorporated as a part of the University's DEI initiatives and greater consultation should occur between DEI leadership across the enterprise and the Emory Autism Center. The Emory Autism Center has subject matter expertise and should

be utilized as a resource for promoting a more inclusive climate and culture at Emory for neurodivergent community members.

Professional Development, Education, and Awareness – Advanced learning opportunities for administrators, faculty, staff, students, both formal and informal, that utilizes various modes of engagement that enhances knowledge, proficiency, skills and effectiveness in implementing and practicing the principles and values of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

#### Immediate

- Aggregation and dissemination of information about formal and informal mentorship opportunities available to undergraduate students, with a focus on mentorship opportunities with a JEDI focus.
- Promote awareness of existing mentorship programs through university communications with students.
- Identify mentorship opportunities through student feedback.
- All faculty should include university resources for students on their course Canvas page to promote equitable access and awareness of Emory university resources for supporting students who encounter challenges.
- Incorporate material encouraging students to reflect on the fact that people have had different experiences (e.g., familial histories of alcoholism) with alcohol and not to pressure others to imbibe during trainings on responsible alcohol consumption.
- Faculty should be encouraged to create intellectual and emotional space for students to grieve when domestic or international instances of hate and harm are directed at people who share their identity.
- Move away from forced disclosure of pronouns. The University should promote a pronoun disclosure policy where students have the opportunity, but are not required, to disclose their pronouns.

#### Short-Term (Up to 2 years)

- As put forth by Henry Blair and Taryn Salako, of the Emory Autism Awareness Organization<sup>5</sup>, as a part of their proposal to support neurodiversity at the University: hire professors with ASD [Autism Spectrum Disorders] or professors with neurodiversity training; hold lessons during ECS 101 lectures or orientation groups sessions that teach students about neurodiversity; promote safe spaces for students with learning differences; educate your faculty by having someone come to teach each department and present to professors how certain students might benefit from an opportunity to provide more feedback; when EPASS, TAs (Teachers Assistants), or LAs (Learning Assistants) are being trained, we could implement a short document or presentation teaching them different ways to be cognizant of how someone may learn [or act] differently, providing some sort of assurance that they have completed that portion of training before tutoring students; during testing, Emory needs to make an effort to control sound, lighting, and temperature.

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<sup>5</sup> A copy the Emory Autism Awareness Organization's proposal, to increase support for neurodiversity at Emory, appears in its entirety as Appendix I of this report.

- Develop formal mentorship opportunities for non-STEM career pathways (e.g., law, graduate school, etc.).
- Create a funding mechanism to support students' professional development for non-STEM pathways. The University should strive to create equity in awareness of these funding opportunities.
- Increase civic and community engagement opportunities in academic coursework that ties the academic disciplines to service work in those areas.
- Streamline the methods and platforms for communicating information to students so that students don't feel overwhelmed and can access aggregated information. This will require the University to conduct research as to how and using what platforms students best receive information.
- The University should continue its efforts to promote diversity among faculty. The University should encourage faculty to be more attentive to the diverse pedagogical histories of knowledge and its production.

#### Long-Term (More than 2 years)

- Emory Oaks/Emory Autism Center is capable of training and greater transition methods for supporting students, however, Emory Oaks is not currently funded. This program should be funded.

Climate and Culture – Climate and Culture – Reflects the collective attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and principles of faculty, staff, students, and administrators.

#### Immediate

- Promote greater awareness and support for students from rural backgrounds.
- Promote greater awareness and support for the diversity of the international student diaspora and their experiences as college students at Emory (e.g., experiences among AAPI international students regarding increased hate crimes).
- Promote greater awareness of Emory as economically accessible to students from less sourced backgrounds.
- Create small- and large-scale opportunities for students to engage in dialogue and debate about civic life in the United States.
- Create a campus culture where the choice to be sober is supported and affirmed.
- The University should create opportunities for students to be able "to season" or add flavor to their dining hall food in a way that is more consistent with their cultural traditions.
- Ongoing funding for spring Autism (Neurodiversity) Awareness Month (April).

#### Short Term (Up to 2 years)

- The University has created opportunities for students to find community, fellowship, and support based on their experience of identity. However, undergraduates are concerned that this has resulted in a "silo" of experience in which students interact less with others from different backgrounds or those holding different perspectives. The University should increase its efforts to facilitate intercultural engagement and discussion among undergraduate students; and to

promote a shared value of learning through difference to collectively build an Emory community and identity where all are welcome.

- The University should take a more nuanced approach to cultural celebrations of vast and diverse diasporas.

