

DIVERSITY AND THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE

A FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION

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CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville is the state's flagship research institution, a campus of choice for outstanding undergraduates, and a premier graduate institution. As a land-grant university, it is committed to excellence in learning, scholarship, and engagement with society. In all of its activities, the University aims to advance the frontiers of human knowledge and enrich and elevate society. The University intends that all members of its community promote the values and institutions of a representative democracy and lead lives of political integrity, civic engagement, and responsibility.

Therefore, the University holds intellectual curiosity and the thirst for knowledge to be among its core values and recognizes that intellectual and academic freedom and integrity are essential components of a campus atmosphere that fosters the pursuit of knowledge and understanding. The University further recognizes that the pursuit of knowledge and understanding is enriched by an environment in which people of diverse backgrounds learn together and from each other, and participate in free and genuine exchanges of views. It recognizes that all members of the University community benefit from diversity and that the quality of learning, research, scholarship and creative activities is enhanced by a campus climate of inclusion, understanding, and appreciation of differences and the full range of human experience. The University of Tennessee must prepare students to function successfully in a diverse society. A university diverse in its people, curricula, scholarship, research, and creative activities expands opportunities for intellectual inquiry and engagement, helps students develop critical thinking skills, and prepares students for social and civic responsibilities.

Consequently, the University aspires to be an institution that celebrates diversity by welcoming all students, staff, and faculty as respected and valued participants in the University's educational mission. In furtherance of these goals, the University welcomes people of different races, ethnicities, religions, creeds, national origin, genders, sexual orientations, physical abilities, age, veteran status, and social, economic, or educational backgrounds. The University is particularly committed to welcoming groups who have been historically underrepresented, discriminated against or excluded. The University also supports and encourages the promotion of diversity in its curricula, programs, faculty research, scholarship, and creative activities.

The Legacy of Discrimination and Segregation

During the past half century the United States has moved steadily to address issues related to equality of opportunity. Building on such earlier successes as the women's voting rights movement and the integration of the armed forces, equal rights movements have focused on legal and moral issues related to ethnicity, race, gender, disabilities, sexual orientation, and intellectual freedom. The result has been the elimination of many legal barriers to equality and the promotion of justice for historically under-represented groups.

Despite progress, however, the legacy of discrimination remains. The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, thus reaffirms its intention to create a campus environment characterized by respect for diversity in all its forms. We begin by reviewing the impact of racial segregation upon the institution.

Public education in the state of Tennessee was segregated by law from 1870 to 1956. Although not legally segregated thereafter, de facto segregation continued. In 1968, Rita Sanders (now Rita Sanders Geier) filed suit against the state, alleging that segregation continued in violation of Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. The immediate occasion of the lawsuit was the University of Tennessee's decision to grant degrees and build a new facility for its Nashville campus. In 1968, the federal court ordered the state to develop plans to eliminate segregation in higher education. In 1977, UT-Nashville was merged with the historically black Tennessee State University, and in 1984 a Stipulation of Settlement was implemented with the intention of upgrading the Tennessee State campus and stimulating further integration of the historically white campuses. While the Stipulation of Settlement made progress toward these goals, more needed to be done. On January 5, 2001, the Court approved the Geier Consent Decree. The Decree sets out expectations for desegregation that if achieved within five years will relieve the state of the desegregation order. The state provides significant funding for the desegregation efforts, which have been progressing energetically since 2001. The possible termination of this lawsuit provides both an opportunity and a critical need to recommit to the value of a diverse University and to plan for the post-Geier University of Tennessee.

Consequently, The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, asserts that diversity is integral to the stated mission, culture, and goals of the institution. Intercultural and international understanding enriches the quality of education for all students and provides them with the skills they need to cross multiple cultural boundaries and communities. We live in a global village where the interests and actions of diverse peoples impact daily on our lives.

The University of Tennessee Board of Trustees affirmed its commitment to this mission in 2001:

“The primary mission of The University of Tennessee is to provide quality educational opportunities for the people of this state. Essential components of a quality education include an outstanding and diverse faculty [staff and students], first-class facilities, and an environment conducive to learning. The Board of Trustees is committed to achieving each of these essential components at The University of Tennessee. The Board of Trustees expressly reaffirms the University's policy of nondiscrimination in all aspects of university life including financial aid,

extracurricular activities, hiring, promotion and retention of employees, and the recruitment, enrollment and retention of students.”

In many ways, The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, has become a more diverse institution in the past decade, striving for improved communication, addressing racial incidents forthrightly and openly, demanding respect for all individuals, accepting and celebrating differences as integral to institutional life and practice, and recruiting and retaining more diverse students, faculty and staff.

The following are examples of recent improvements:

Increasing ethnic and racial diversity

- In 2002-03, of the 4,536 regular UTK employees, 50% were females, and 13% were minorities (of whom 61.5% were African American). At the upper administrative level, 51% of persons in the executive/managerial/administrative ranks were female.
- The percentage of African American students in the entering freshman class continues to rise, from under 8% three years ago to nearly 10% in fall, 2004. This reflects the successful implementation of the African American Achievers and African American Incentive Grant programs under the Geier Consent Decree.
- Persons are filling higher administrative positions from historically under-represented populations, including six academic deans, a director of a school, two vice chancellors, two associate vice chancellors, three academic associate deans, and a dean of students.

Programmatic development

- The African and African-American Studies Program has a new director and enhanced quarters and operating funds.
- The revised General Education Program includes a specific requirement in intercultural studies.
- The Life of the Mind Program for entering freshmen introduces students to diverse cultural and ethnic perspectives through the reading of a book in common and supporting academic and public programs.
- The Africa Semester in Spring 2003 was a resounding success for both academic programming and student development.
- The Programs Abroad Office has expanded study abroad programs and greatly increased the number of students studying abroad.

Physical facilities

- The elegant new Black Cultural Center building, which opened in 2002, is fast becoming a

gathering place for peoples of all colors and creeds.

- The International House brings together international and domestic students in a wide variety of intercultural programs and activities.

Advocacy

- Religious diversity is well represented by numerous campus organizations.
- Advocates of diverse sexual orientations have generated broad campus support from faculty and students.
- As greater numbers of Hispanic/Latino students come to the University, a Hispanic/Latino Task Force, a Hispanic/Latino fraternity and sorority, and a Hispanic/Latino speaker series support them.
- The Chancellor's Commissions for Women and for Blacks are actively engaged in assessing the status of blacks and women and are advocating on their behalf.

The Imperative for Action

Even with these achievements, the University must work to ensure that the practice of discrimination does not continue. It is clear that the University needs to create a more inclusive community within the University and to reach out to the people of the surrounding community. Many groups still encounter barriers to the promise and achievement of equality, justice, and the unprejudiced quest for knowledge. A land-grant institution founded upon principles of access and opportunity, the University is still too often perceived as ineffectively serving a society that is daily growing more diverse. We must redouble our efforts to erase barriers based on differences in race, ethnicity, gender, religion, class, age, ability, and sexual orientation.

In April 2004, the Knoxville chancellor and vice chancellors announced plans for a comprehensive initiative based on a plan to enhance diversity, with the primary goal of creating a civil society that prepares students to function effectively in our increasingly complex global society. The campus leaders enunciated four fundamental perspectives:

- The University is committed to respecting diversity in all its forms: different ideas and perspectives, age, ability, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, political persuasions, and the socioeconomic and geographic composition of its faculty, staff and students.
- We approach cultural differences with an attitude of learning from others in order to enrich our own experiences, thus making progress toward creating a genuinely civil society in which all peoples are welcomed and honored.
- When our ideals fall short in daily practice, we will redouble our efforts to achieve a university community that reflects the pluralism of our society and of the world at large.
- As a free marketplace of ideas, the University believes that spirited discussion of diversity in all its manifold aspects and an acknowledgment of the complexity of the issues will lead to positive change.

Summary of the Action Plan's Goals

The University's Action Plan will focus on six broad goals, supported by more detailed plans advanced by departments, colleges, and administrative units. Accountability is the key to success and will be articulated at every level of the plan.

Goal One: Create and sustain a welcoming, supportive and inclusive campus climate.

The University aims to become a model academic community that promotes diversity and excellence and incorporates diverse perspectives in all its campus and community activities and communications.

Goal Two: Attract and retain greater numbers of individuals from under-represented populations into faculty, staff, and administrative positions (particularly department heads, directors, deans, and vice chancellors).

Increased success in recruiting and retaining diverse persons is critical. Success requires genuine commitment, persistence, and intentional planning on the part of the entire university community. An inclusive campus climate fosters retention.

Goal Three: Attract, retain, and graduate increasing numbers of students from historically under-represented populations and international students.

The University intends that its students will reflect the diversity of qualified students graduating from Tennessee high schools. The University will increase the retention and graduation rates of historically underrepresented students. The University will engage in increasing the recruitment and inclusion of international students into all facets of the university community.

Goal Four: Develop and strengthen partnerships with diverse communities in Tennessee and globally.

Alliances with civic, business, community, educational, and ethnic organizations will enable the University to strengthen its intercultural programs and will promote the productive exchange of ideas and resources. Because of its intimate linkages with global affairs, the University will seek to internationalize its programs and curricula to enhance both domestic and international cultural understanding.

Goal Five: Ensure that undergraduate curricular requirements include significant intercultural perspectives.

Because the world is made up of diverse peoples, the University academic curricula must ensure that all students study diversity. The University intends to strengthen academic

preparation of all students by infusing curricula with reputable scholarship and critical thinking skills regarding diversity. Courses incorporating diversity perspectives may be offered at any level, and will be incorporated in general education requirements as appropriate.

Goal Six: Prepare graduate students to become teacher, researchers, and professionals in a diverse world.

In today's world, learning communities and research groups are pluralist, heterogeneous entities typically characterized by high levels of diversity. The University intends that its graduate students leave the University well-equipped to serve as teachers, researchers, and professionals in environments and institutions that are increasingly diverse.

THE ACTION PLAN: A CAMPUS-WIDE FRAMEWORK

The following goals and objectives will guide the action plans to be advanced by departments, colleges, and administrative units. Each vice chancellor will coordinate the planning for his/her unit. A comprehensive University-wide plan including near- and longer-term strategies and responsibility for implementation and oversight will be in place by October 1, 2005.

The University seeks to ensure that genuine progress is made in intercultural and international understanding in all sectors of the institution. Successful implementation of the action plans requires individuals to take personal responsibility for improving diversity. To that end, all administrators will be held accountable for developing, implementing, and assessing diversity plans.

Goal One: Create a welcoming, supportive and inclusive campus.

Objectives:

- Develop and implement a campus-wide Quality Enhancement Plan focused on the enhancement of intercultural and international awareness.
- Ensure that the University's academic curricula prepare students to prosper in the pluralistic world of the 21st century.
- Develop strategies to oppose and eliminate all aspects of discrimination on campus.
- Foster professional development and advancement for all employees.
- Review and improve all elements of campus safety and security.
- Improve internal and external communication regarding diversity issues.
- Create and implement policies, and design physical facilities to support the family needs of faculty, staff, and students.
- Involve all campus constituencies – students, faculty, staff, and alumni – in promotion of diversity.

University strategies and benchmarks:

- Streamline and coordinate all African-American student support services.
- Develop support services for other historically under-represented populations.
- Support faculty efforts to infuse intercultural and international perspectives into courses across the curriculum.
- Appoint by nomination a campus-wide Council on Diversity to establish benchmarks, monitor, and update the action plan.
- Develop comprehensive procedures to assess and monitor annually the progress and effectiveness of diversity initiatives.
- Support student, campus, and community advisory groups working on diversity initiatives.
- Develop a diversity-training workshop for students, faculty, and staff.
- Protect the rights of all parties involved with allegations of discrimination.
- Develop procedures for reporting diversity-related incidents.

Goal Two: Attract and retain greater numbers of individuals from under-represented populations into faculty, staff, and administrative positions.

Objectives:

- Provide career advancement mentoring opportunities for faculty, staff, and administration.
- Increase the diversity of personnel at all levels.
- Ensure that University policies and procedures reflect and promote diversity.

University strategies and benchmarks:

- Require that all units conduct aggressive searches, including strategic hiring, and emphasize developing pools that include under-represented individuals.
- Require that each unit implement hiring plans that aggressively enhance the identification of diversity within their disciplines.
- Employ aggressive hiring, training, and promotion programs to increase the number of individuals of historically under-represented populations in all University positions.
- Develop a central revolving fund to support the strategic recruiting and hiring of diverse individuals.
- Annually evaluate administrators and hold them accountable for success in promoting diversity in their units.

Goal Three: Attract, retain and graduate increasing numbers of individuals from historically under-represented populations and international students.

Objectives:

- Develop need-based academic scholarships in order to increase student diversity.
- Prepare students to engage in the complex world of the 21st century.
- Through intensive recruitment, increase and retain the number of undergraduate and graduate ethnically and culturally diverse students, including international students.
- Bring the retention and graduation rates of diverse students to the same level as the University average.
- Provide career development mentoring opportunities for graduate, undergraduate, and professional students.

University strategies and benchmarks:

- Evaluate all existing minority recruitment and mentoring/retention programs, including Geier activities, to determine their effectiveness. Reallocate resources as necessary.
- Develop a plan and secure the funds needed to maintain progress after successfully meeting the Geier Consent Decree provisions.
- Ensure that classroom materials, methods, and climate reflect the imperatives of intercultural and international knowledge and awareness.
- Provide a wide range of cultural and intellectual programs that demonstrate a connection between academic and extra-curricular activities.

Goal Four: Develop and strengthen partnerships with diverse communities in Tennessee and globally.

Objectives:

- Identify and promote exchange of ideas and resources with civic, business, community, educational, and ethnic organizations devoted to intercultural awareness.
- Create a campus organizational structure to develop and support community linkages.
- Expand international agreements and relationships to increase opportunities for student, faculty, and staff engagement with global issues.

University strategies and benchmarks:

- Work with local and state communities to provide a cultural environment conducive to recruiting and retaining persons from diverse backgrounds.
- Create a Chancellor's Community Council to strengthen the relationship between the University and the communities it serves.
- Strengthen the University's minority procurement program to increase the participation of female- and minority-owned businesses contracting with the University.
- Strengthen and support faculty outreach to K-12 schools and post-secondary institutions serving historically under-represented populations.
- Develop a comprehensive communication and marketing program to promote diversity internally and externally, including a proactive media strategy.
- Collaborate with community groups in identifying and writing grants that support diversity initiatives.
- Support and recognize community activities of faculty, staff, and administrators.
- Make annual University awards to University employees whose leadership in diversity-related programs and services are outstanding and worthy of additional support.

Goal Five: Ensure that undergraduate curricular requirements include significant intercultural perspectives.

Because the world is made up of diverse peoples, the University academic curricula must ensure that all students study this reality. The University intends to strengthen academic preparation of all students by infusing curricula with reputable scholarship and critical thinking skills regarding diversity. Courses incorporating diversity perspectives may be housed in any discipline and may be offered at any level.

Objectives:

- Ensure that the University's academic curricula prepare students for the pluralistic world of the 21st century.
- Ensure that students from diverse orientations and underrepresented populations and backgrounds are recognized as essential participants in the life of the University and society.

University strategies and benchmarks:

- Assure that a wide range of undergraduate courses, including general education requirements, address one or more of the following subjects: races, ethnicities, religions, creeds, national origin, genders, sexual orientations, physical abilities, age, veteran status, and social, economic, or educational backgrounds.
- Develop, implement, and support professional development opportunities and programs to assist faculty and staff in transforming curricula to integrate diversity-related themes.
- Support, expand, and encourage interdisciplinary programs and partnerships that focus on diversity in their curricula.
- Encourage historically underrepresented students to participate in education abroad programs.
- Encourage and support the integration of study abroad into curricula.
- Ensure that faculty are equipped with tools and strategies to make their classrooms welcoming to diverse student populations.

Goal Six: Prepare graduate students to become teachers, researchers, and professionals in a diverse world.

In today's world, learning communities and research groups are heterogeneous entities typically characterized by high levels of diversity. The University intends that its graduate students will leave the University well-equipped to serve as teachers, researchers, and professionals in environments and institutions that are increasingly diverse.

Objectives:

- Ensure that graduate students have the training necessary to participate fully in the pluralistic world of the 21st century.
- Ensure that graduate students with teaching responsibilities are acquainted with the diverse range of learning styles found in today's classrooms.

University strategies and benchmarks:

- Assure that a wide range of graduate courses address one or more of the following subjects: races, ethnicities, religions, creeds, national origin, genders, sexual orientations, physical abilities, age, veteran status, and social, economic, or educational backgrounds.
- Develop and encourage diversity-related training for units to use in graduate teaching orientation sessions.
- Develop continuing education opportunities to prepare graduate teaching assistants to teach effectively in diverse classrooms.