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A Plan for Our Future
The College of Education Diversity Strategic Plan

Prepared by the Subcommittee for the Diversity Strategic Plan Development,
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INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE: SITUATING A DIVERSITY PLAN WITHIN THE COLLEGE STRATEGIC PLAN AND THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The College of Education (COE) values a diverse community of people, ideas, scholarship, and artistry. We continuously work to represent and value the diversity of our region through the compositions and actions of our faculty, staff, students, and programs. Our goal is to engage in active diversity throughout all of our business and educational activities, demonstrating through our actions the high degree of success achievable through embraced diversity (College of Education Strategic Plan 2011).

We believe that teaching the ideals of inclusiveness, pluralism, and mutual respect for all people and cultures is a humanistic imperative requisite for ethical living (Dewey, 1938/1997; Hickman & Alexander, 1998) and full civic participation in a multicultural democracy in a diverse human world (Gay, 2010). In pursuit of these ideals, the COE has taken great strides to ensure that diversity is an important value. These ideals are in line with the COE Strategic Plan’s goal of diversity. As the plan states, we seek to:

1. Improve our shared understanding and valuing of diversity in all its forms.
2. Increase the recruitment, retention, and completion rate of students of diverse backgrounds.
3. Increase the recruitment and retention of faculty and staff of diverse backgrounds.
4. Engage in diversity in our curriculum, scholarly and artistic endeavors, and daily operations.

Despite our commitment to these ideals as an institution, we continue to see a gap between our stated goals and values and the lived experiences of our student body. Most notably, we continue to see a dearth of students from historically marginalized groups enrolling in and graduating from our college. Therefore, it is imperative that the COE reexamine and create an institutional context, a curriculum that actively encourages respect for diversity, fosters students’ ability to understand the fundamentals of diversity (such as identity, cultural competence, and social justice), and nurtures education professionals for whom these values are indelible characteristics.

Particular to initial and advanced teacher certification programs, the Northern Illinois University Conceptual Framework identifies a core set of goals broadly defined as knowledge, practice,
and reflection, which lead to the development of exemplary educators. One of the stated tenets embedded in each goal, diversity, is the focus of this plan. The conceptualization of diversity driving this plan is one that considers it a crucial aspect of the conceptual framework for teacher education and all programs in the college. Homogeneity necessarily restricts “creative and critical thinking,” meaningful “scholarship,” and “collaboration.” Furthermore, the capacity and quality for “caring” and “lifelong learning” is dependent upon the factors people must negotiate within their own lives.

All departments and programs associated with the college operate under the regulation of a number of professional accrediting organizations and standards, and each makes reference to the importance of diversity, a fact the subcommittee has been conscious of during its deliberation. For example, according to our primary teacher certification accrediting body, the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), teacher certification programs in our college are mandated by Standard 4 to ensure that our unit effectively “designs, implements, and evaluates curriculum and provides experiences for candidates to acquire and demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions necessary to help all students learn” (NCATE, 2010).

Although NCATE does not operationally define diversity, eschewing that responsibility to the units, NCATE does make a powerful statement about its intended meaning of diversity, a unit’s responsibility toward diversity, and expectations for meeting those responsibilities. NCATE expressed:

The unit has the responsibility to provide opportunities for candidates to understand diversity and equity in the teaching and learning process. Coursework, field experiences, and clinical practice must be designed to help candidates understand the influence of culture on education and acquire the ability to develop meaningful learning experiences for all students. Candidates learn about exceptionalities and inclusion, English language learners and language acquisition, ethnic/racial cultural and linguistic differences, and gender differences, and the impact of these factors on learning. Proficiencies, including those related to professional dispositions and diversity, are drawn from the standards of the profession, state, and institution. Candidates are helped to understand the potential impact of discrimination based on race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and language on students and their learning. (National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2010)

Although NCATE is clear in its intention to foster understanding of discrimination based on race, class, gender, ability, sexual orientation, and language on students and their learning,
that directive is somewhat problematic. As expressed, the directive can produce the unintended consequence of students developing stereotypes of others who do not reflect a norm. Additionally, NCATE’s ideas do not necessarily encourage students to be self-reflective about identity and how their own identities are influenced by their discreet and idiosyncratic experiences. In other words, simply understanding the trends of how pedagogy, curriculum, and instruction decisions can affect various groups does not help students better understand the self, the influence of their own identities, and the unique needs of individuals with whom they work. As we know, there is much greater diversity within groups than across groups. Hence, it becomes necessary to look beyond the term diversity toward a set of ideas that helps learners consider their own experiences and how they compare and contrast to others’ experiences.

The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 2009), which establishes the standards for our counselor education program, speaks directly to the diversity requirements in programs. In addition to specific knowledge, skills, and practices of diversity in advocacy, Standard 2 specifies:

**SOCIAL AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY**—studies that provide an understanding of the cultural context of relationships, issues, and trends in a multicultural society, including all of the following:

1. multicultural and pluralistic trends, including characteristics and concerns within and among diverse groups nationally and internationally;

2. attitudes, beliefs, understandings, and acculturative experiences, including specific experiential learning activities designed to foster students’ understanding of self and culturally diverse clients;

3. theories of multicultural counseling, identity development, and social justice;

4. individual, couple, family, group, and community strategies for working with and advocating for diverse populations, including multicultural competencies;

5. counselors’ roles in developing cultural self-awareness, promoting cultural social justice, advocacy and conflict resolution, and other culturally supported behaviors that promote optimal wellness and growth of the human spirit, mind, or body; and

6. counselors’ roles in eliminating biases, prejudices, and processes of intentional and unintentional oppression and discrimination.
CACREP embraces ideas expressed in the NCATE standards, but goes further by pointing to specific ideas and practices students should know, like conflict resolution, cultural self-awareness, conflict resolution, and cultural social justice.

Students enrolled in exercise science and athletic training must demonstrate awareness of the impact that clients’/patients’ cultural differences have on their attitudes and behaviors toward healthy lifestyles. Furthermore, students must demonstrate knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, and skills necessary to achieve optimal health outcomes for diverse client/patient populations. Finally, it is expected that the student work respectfully and effectively with diverse populations and in a diverse work environment.

Specific to athletic training, students must be able to recognize clients/patients exhibiting abnormal social, emotional, and mental behaviors. Coupled with recognition is the ability to intervene and refer these individuals as necessary. Additionally, athletic trainers appreciate the role of mental health in injury and recovery and use interventions to optimize the connection between mental health and restoration of participation.

Although there is no accreditation body for the exercise science program (in the Department of Kinesiology and Physical Education), diversity remains a strong mainstay in the program. For instance, students participate in many opportunities to apply practical classroom knowledge in a variety of diverse settings. Namely, students are paired with seniors at Oak Crest Retirement Center in DeKalb, Ill., to aid in exercise and functional movement patterns of geriatric individuals, have the opportunity to become involved with youth (through the Motor Development Research Laboratory) and individuals with disabilities (through the NIU Adaptive Physical Activity Research and Teaching program), and experience a culminating six-credit-hour internship as a way to better understand the opportunities in the choice of future professions. These experiences allow students not only to master content in the exercise science program area, but also experience and better understand the diverse needs of the population they will be working with in the future.

It is important to note that we do not wish for this document to convey the notion that we, as an institution, have not been attendant to or caring of these issues. We are aware of the fact that we are a strong community of faculty, staff, and students who see the value of diversity. In short we do not aim to offend anyone. This document is not meant to point fingers at any particular office or department within our institution, for all areas of the COE have done important work to

“teaching the ideals of inclusiveness, pluralism, and mutual respect for all people and cultures is a humanistic imperative requisite for ethical living”
advance the above ideas through course work, policies, and practices. This document is intended to propose a plan for diversity with clear goals—observable, measurable, and achievable actions that can be fruitful to our college as we progress further into the 21st century.

Finally, this document focuses on the needs of all our students—undergraduate, graduate, and at-large—and any student encountering the College of Education, and the document also addresses our faculty and staff. To this end, the document is composed of five major sections: overview of rationale for diversity experiences, curricular needs, department-specific programmatic needs, faculty and staff development needs, and action plans to address each.

**RATIONALE FOR DIVERSITY EXPERIENCES**

Although many terms have been, and continue to be used to describe the overarching plan for increasing the diversity of our students, faculty, and staff, few agree on a common theme. Certainly there must be cultural understanding, but we must move beyond notions like tolerance and acceptance toward ideas like cultural competence and social justice advocacy.

**DEFINING DIVERSITY: A RETURN TO THE INDIVIDUAL**

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, diversity is “the condition or quality of being diverse, different, or varied; difference, unlikeness.” Furthermore, the etymology of the term emanates from the Latin for difference. Human diversity, of course, exists on many levels—whether we consciously acknowledge them or not—and takes multiple forms, both visible and invisible. Typically when we talk about diversity, the conversation largely centers around the following characteristics:

- Race
- Ethnicity
- Language
- Socioeconomic status
- Gender
- Sexual orientation or gender identity
- Religion
- Nation of origin
- Physical, cognitive, and emotional ability
- Veteran status
- Age

But other subtle forms of diversity are equally powerful for individuals: subculture identifications, intellectual diversity, regional diversity, and so forth. One assumption driving the development of this proposal is that diversity is necessary for human growth, and that...
understanding and acknowledging diversity is essential to the intellectual, cultural, social, and professional development of education professionals and teachers (Nieto, 2009). A number of terms are associated with diversity: *multicultural education* (Banks, 2004), *culturally relevant pedagogy* (Ladson-Billings, 1994), *culturally responsive pedagogy* (Gay, 2010), and *cultural competence*. Through the subcommittee’s deliberation, the notion of *cultural competence* seems most fitting.

Although the pedagogical approaches mentioned are powerful lenses through which we can view our mission and work, our students, across identities and experiences, must possess an understanding of cultural competence. Cultural competence is an understanding of the importance of culture in affecting students’ perceptions, self-esteem, values, classroom behavior, and learning. According to Abt-Perkins and Rosen (2000), “Research on culturally relevant and responsible instruction clearly shows that knowledge of students’ family, community, and socioethnic cultures—their languages, literacy practices, and values—can help teachers address the interests and build on the skills of their students” (p. 254). As such, it is essential that our curriculum possess at its core the encouragement to explore not only sound pedagogy and practices but also

- a keen awareness of cultural competence in order to understand the students before them;
- how policies, pedagogies, and practices impact different communities and students; and
- how their own identities and experiences impact students, schools, and communities.

Explorations of *others* is essential but must be part of a larger mission: understanding one’s own identity and how that experience impacts and has been impacted by schooling, in order for our students to see the power of education more deeply and critically. As hooks (1994) pointed out:

> All of us in the academy and in the culture as a whole are called to renew our minds if we are to transform educational institutions—and society—so that the way we live, teach and work can reflect our joy in cultural diversity, our passion for justice, and our love of freedom. (p. 34)

Additionally, understanding oneself is essential to understanding and fostering respect for diversity within a community. It is becoming increasingly important for pre-service teachers and other education professionals to develop a keen awareness of not only general trends in cultural differences, learning styles, and issues unique to various groups, but also to develop an appreciation of their own identities and how their identities impact curriculum, pedagogy, and instruction.
Creating a context and curriculum in which critical exploration of the self and others in order to
develop a theoretical or pedagogical framework to guide professional practice is indispensable.

**SOCIAL JUSTICE: THE ROOT OF WHAT WE DO**

The subcommittee engaged in extensive discussion about the term *social justice*. We are keenly aware of the term’s controversial aspects and how various political orientations could deem social justice as a “radical, left-wing mission.” However, as we thought more about the term and how it is used in education, we came to the decision that “social justice” most accurately reflects what we are attempting to institute through this plan.

Social justice can be constructed as a *goal*, *process*, and *stance* (Grant & Agosto, 2008; Ness, George, Turner, & Bolgatz, 2010). Social justice is a *goal* in striving to create conditions in which there is equal opportunity for all people. As a *process*, social justice is the systematic and institutional confrontation and amelioration of oppressive or marginalizing systems and structures across the range of diversity represented within an institution. At the root of this construct is the open recognition that groups and individuals can be marginalized through institutional practices—both explicitly and implicitly—and the institution has a responsibility of resolving those practices. Finally, taking a social justice *stance* means that the institution and its actors recognize the consistent need for examination and change of policies and practices in order to ensure equity and equality for all involved with the institution—students, faculty, and staff.

As pointed out above, *equity* and *access* are goals that permeate across the borders and boundaries of identity. However, race and ethnicity take on a particularly central position because of the institutional, social, economic, and political history of our nation, state, and university. Noguera (2008) expressed the responsibility of educators to explore these issues and create practices that mitigate these hurdles:

> “Educators, who should be committed to helping young people realize their intellectual potential as they make their way toward adulthood, have a responsibility to help them find ways to expand identities related to race so that they can experience the fullest possibility of all that they may become. (p. 16)”

"it is important to recognize the great and at times incredible work done by all our faculty and staff"
At first glance, one can easily connect this statement to historically marginalized groups in schools (African Americans, Asian Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, etc.). More to the point, when conversations about diversity ensue, the focus tends to be on historically marginalized others. However, we feel it is imperative to include our predominantly white student, faculty, and staff community, in light of how marginalizing practices have a tangible impact on both the institutionally marginalized and the institutionally privileged (Delpit, 1988; Jensen, 2005; McIntosh, 2004). This notion recapitulates the urgency of creating a curricular context in which all students can better understand and embrace their own identities while also fostering a respect for others.

Creating an environment that actively displays both a respect for diversity and a commitment to social justice, given the rapidly shifting demographics of our state and nation, is fundamental to our growth. By opening pathways of inclusion for marginalized students of all backgrounds, ensuring a wider representation of diverse backgrounds in classes throughout professional preparation processes, and displaying leadership on these issues at NIU, within Illinois, and nationally, we are providing growth opportunities for all COE students, faculty, and staff.

BRANDING THE COE AT NIU: SOCIAL JUSTICE

University President John Peters over the past few years at graduation commencement ceremonies has consistently expressed the idea that graduates from the College of Education at Northern Illinois University have an understanding of and commitment to social justice. We intend for our graduates to be both understanding and savvy with these ideas in order to carry these notions into their schools. This intention will go a long way in ensuring that the COE is directly associated with developing teachers committed to socially just and equitable teaching pedagogy and practice.

COE AND THE INTRACTABLE PROBLEM OF RACE AND ETHNICITY: A TEMPERATURE READING

The rapidly shifting demographics of students in elementary, middle, and secondary classrooms underscore the importance of developing curriculum, pedagogical strategies, and policies for COE students. It is evident that our College has an abundance of white, middle- or working-class, English-speaking, female, and (presumably) heterosexual students. Although this fact persists for many universities across the country, the need to increase the number of underrepresented educators in the teaching force is of high priority, given demographic shifts in the United States. Underrepresented students may differ from the mainstream in ethnicity,
primary language spoken at home, social class, and sexual orientation (Au & Raphael, 2000), among other factors. For the purposes of this document, we will briefly explore the status of lived racial experiences by non-white students in our college.

During the past three years, the College of Education Office of Student Services has held a number of focus groups with students who have been historically marginalized. The initial purpose for the focus groups was to discuss how students of color succeed in the COE. Internal research indicates that a relatively high number of students of color enroll as education majors or pre-majors. However, the completion rate appears significantly lower in regard to the number of students who progress through the program to matriculation. Key themes expressed by students consistently reveal an array of issues related to cultural competence and understanding.

The following student comments represent trends from the focus groups. For the sake of anonymity, we cannot attach names to the comments.

> “When we are encouraged to pick groups in the class room, the white girls most often pick each other, leaving us out to fend for ourselves.”
> “People are comfortable with people who have something in common with each other . . . .It would be helpful if our instructors helped a little more with barriers of traditions or stereotypes.”
> “Many of our peers are just not informed about how some of our lived experiences are valid because they belong to us.”
> “I am an African American student who made it to my clinical blocks. I had trouble pronouncing one of the books when I was student teaching, and they placed me in an ESL class.”
> “I am an Asian student. I was also placed in (an ESL) class. I had three different dispositions, and I believe they were all because I come from a different place.”
> “Most of the professors are really great, but some are not supportive and have trouble relating to me.”
> “I respect teachers challenging me to do my best, but I do not like it when they talk down to me. Sometimes they single me out, saying things like, ‘Do you understand so-and-so?’”

Research has shown that students are more academically successful when they feel welcomed, valued, and challenged by material that builds upon their prior knowledge, experiences, and interests (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). When these attitudes, behaviors, and curricular considerations are missing, students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds may resist learning (Kohl, 2005) and experience the institution as a hostile or unwelcoming place.
We believe it important to point out that the subcommittee recognizes the great and at times incredible work done by all our faculty and staff. Alongside that, we cannot dismiss the impressions of lived experiences by many of our underrepresented students. We also cannot continue to question why we have so few non-white students progressing and graduating through our programs if we are not willing to hear and act on those lived experiences. Again, this action is as much about good professional practice as it is a matter of creating a socially just institution.

**CURRICULAR NEEDS FOR DIVERSITY**

*In this section, an imperative is given to departments and the College Curriculum Committee for development and oversight of curricular changes that foster social justice education. Changes in courses, programs, and pedagogies, as well as assessments of student gains in social justice education are the purview of these curricular bodies. This committee provides impetus, oversight, and analysis of progress toward the goals.*

**AN IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCE: REFRAMING OUR NOTION OF CURRICULUM**

The notion of *curriculum* is complicated and complex (Null, 2011). This document is not the forum for a full examination of the idea, but positing how the subcommittee constructed the notion of curriculum while developing this plan seems essential. Historically, a number of valid and useful ways to look at curriculum largely can be placed in two camps: technical and nontechnical (Lunenberg, 2011).

Although a *technical approach* to curriculum is both useful and dominant in educational policy and practice, technical approaches that focus primarily on course content, objectives, assessments, and standards do not account for other more powerful and influential parts of a student’s overall lived educational experience. A great assignment that meets certain objectives can be compelling and effective, but students seeing a mural when they enter a building, or recognition of different cultural approaches by faculty and staff can also be useful. These actions are normally not accounted for in traditional, technical approaches to curriculum development.

The approach to curriculum the subcommittee used to guide our efforts incorporates *nontechnical* aspects of curriculum. Lunenberg described:

(Nontechnical curriculum theorists) like Eliot Eisner, Carol Gilligan, James Banks, Henry Giroux and Peter McLaren, William Reid, Maxine Green and Michael Apple, and William Pinar feel that the world is much more complex, involving subjective, personal, aesthetic, heuristic, transactional, and intuitive thinking and forms of behavior. The argument is that curriculum cannot be precisely planned—it evolves as a *living organism* as opposed to a *machine*, which is precise and ordered (emphasis added). (p. 5)
In effect, a significant part of the subcommittee’s deliberations aimed to consider efforts at addressing the needs of both concepts, subject matter content as well as the overall quality of the educational experience for all students who walk through our doors. The subcommittee hoped to put forth proposed initiatives and actions that encourage both a reframing of curriculum and a reframing of possibilities.

Complicating the efforts of the COE, and particularly distressing to teacher certification programs, are the recent state-level changes in the scoring of the Basic Skills Test (now the Test of Academic Proficiency, or TAP), that have resulted in a marked decline in the number of students entering (or being retained in) certification programs. Primarily, students of diverse cultural, linguistic, and academic backgrounds are now passing the BST/TAP at a shockingly low rate. In using the ACT as a predictor of success on the BST/TAP, students scoring 24 or greater have a much higher probability of passing the BST/TAP on the first attempt. Our students’ average ACT score is 22. Offering our students support on this paramount assessment is necessary for increasing diversity and ensuring the quality of our certification graduates.

Although the BST/TAP content has not changed, the scoring has. The recent drop in passing rates for NIU students signals our opportunity as an institution, and we must take immediate action to support students across identities and experiences as they prepare for this high-stakes exam. This trend, as well as unique COE issues discussed in this document, inadvertently serves as a barrier for students of diverse backgrounds (including socioeconomic status) who are considering a degree in education.

In addition to academic departments’ efforts in curriculum, departments are expected to increase credit-hour production and manage enrollment and retention. The establishment of professional development schools to reflect diversity of the population, the creation of clinical and internship experiences to reflect diversity, and the cocurricular experiences afforded to students are managed by both academic departments and by college offices. In particular, the COE Office of Partnerships and Office of Student Services are charged with creating action steps to increase diversity experiences toward a social justice education.

"we must move beyond notions like tolerance and acceptance toward ideas like cultural competence and social justice advocacy"
RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION EFFORTS: THE RELENTLESS PURSUIT OF INCLUSION

The College of Education’s Office of Student Services (OSS) is charged with offering leadership for
recruitment and outreach programs to students with diverse backgrounds, high-achieving students,
and nontraditional students. In partnership with the university’s Office of Admissions, the Campus
Resource Centers (Center for Black Studies, Women’s Resource Center, Latino Resource Center,
Center for Southeast Asian Studies, the LGBT Resource Center), the university’s Offices of Alumni
Relations, and Scholarships, the OSS works to identify, recruit, and retain prospective students. The
OSS develops marketing initiatives to support recruitment efforts and provides academic support
and assistance throughout students’ educational careers. Currently, the OSS’s revised recruitment
and retention strategic plans are under review in the dean’s office. This plan does not intend to
eclipse any of the important work being done through OSS. It is expected that their work will
continue and this plan will build upon and encourage their efforts.

FACULTY AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT NEEDS

Although departments and offices are expected to provide and support appropriate faculty and
staff development activities, it is also implied that these activities must initially focus on social
justice education until faculty and staff are well versed in diversity experiences. As expressed
throughout this document’s previous sections, understanding culture and committing to social
justice is not merely about creating a positive learning environment, it is also sound educational
pedagogy and practice. In light of an expanded notion of curriculum that moves beyond what is
taught in classrooms, it becomes imperative that all faculty and staff understand these issues.
As such, providing professional development and encouragement is essential.

ACTION PLANS

Rationale for plans and support elements are described in this section. It is well understood that
different individuals and departments/offices are at widely different stages in understanding the
issue and embracing the need for a social justice focus. This section will set the stage for activities
that may or may not apply to each faculty or department but are nonetheless college initiatives.

RATIONALE AND ASSUMPTIONS: SETTING OUR STAGE

A few key assumptions drive this plan.

Diversity is needed to ensure a well-rounded, high-quality education for all COE students.

At present, the majority of COE students are middle-class, white females, a common trend
across teacher education institutions. Despite this current trend, however, it is imperative that
we not satisfy ourselves with maintaining the status quo. Instead, we must challenge ourselves to do more to ensure a well-rounded, high-quality education for all COE students. That brand of education can only come from an environment and curricula conducive to and supportive of a wide range of backgrounds and experiences.

Diversity is essential for developing culturally competent, highly effective education professionals.

It is true that today’s educators must be fluent in issues related to culture and identity. Such fluency is not constructed merely through traditional educational means, however. Rather, it is essential that educational professionals have meaningful—and multiple—authentic multicultural experiences that cannot be simulated.

Diversity is crucial for the intellectual and social health and well-being of the COE and larger NIU communities.

The COE and NIU communities need a transparent and expansive plan for ensuring the intellectual and social health and well-being that can only be fostered in a pluralistic, inclusive environment.

Social justice is the conduit for successfully providing an education for all COE students.

Perhaps beyond any of the aforementioned benefits to the COE community, the issue at hand is a basic social justice issue. Education is a right, not a privilege, and learners of all backgrounds must be assured of equal access to and success toward their educational goals. Nowhere is this more important than in a college of education at a public institution of higher education.

DIVERSITY STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS

This plan presents four primary goals for implementation that frame our current and future efforts.

GOAL 1:
Faculty and staff members in the College of Education acquire and practice the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that reflect cultural competence and a commitment to social justice.

GOAL 2:
Students enrolled in College of Education degree and certificate programs will experience curriculum that encourages the valuing of social justice as well as knowledge, skills, and dispositions that reflect cultural competence.

GOAL 3:
The College of Education will actively recruit and retain students from diverse groups.

GOAL 4:
The College of Education will actively recruit and retain faculty and staff from diverse groups.
RECOMMENDED INITIATIVES AND ACTIVITIES

The following section is a list of recommended actions and activities the subcommittee designed to operationalize the institutional goals, principles, and values expressed above. This list does not represent mandates but instead constitutes recommendations of actions that can address concerns as well as developing a comprehensive approach to reconsidering the COE curriculum. Furthermore, it was decided by the subcommittee to create a list and signify which goals each item addresses, because many of the recommendations show overlapping qualities.

Collegewide responsibility for the College Diversity Plan implementation. The College Curriculum Committee (CCC) has specific imperatives toward curriculum, program and pedagogical changes to foster social justice. The CCC will also oversee assessment of efforts in student dispositions toward social justice. The College Council will advise and dialogue with the dean regarding faculty and staff professional development needs collegewide to improve diversity/social justice. The College Senate will monitor the successful implementation of the Diversity Strategic Plan as well as continue creating plans and initiatives that promote diversity within and across the curriculum. Departments and offices—particularly Offices of Partnership, Student Success, and College Relations—can also assist in branding the COE as an institution dedicated to social justice as a high priority for our curriculum and community. **ALIGNED GOALS: 1, 2, 3, and 4**

Assess, in a systematic way, faculty and staff professional development needs in relation to issues related to identity, social justice, and diversity, leading to regular and consistent professional development offerings. The subcommittee is wholly understanding of and values the notion of academic freedom among faculty, but we believe it is of paramount importance to continue to engage in professional development activities so that all faculty and staff are exposed to and understand these issues for the benefit of students’ educational environment. Departments and offices in the college and the College Senate are responsible for this oversight. **ALIGNED GOALS: 1 and 2**

Assess, in a systematic way, student understanding about social justice, identity, and diversity issues. The COE, in partnership with departments and programs, will develop and administer assessments that measure the knowledge, skills, and dispositions on social justice, diversity, and identity issues among students across each program area at the undergraduate level. Assessment will focus on rubrics that measure the candidates’ ability to increase achievement among culturally diverse P-12 students.
These assessments can be incorporated into existing assessment and should be targeted toward multiple courses in the students’ program. The College Curriculum Committee will specify goals and create a plan to assess these goals across the college.

**Aligned Goals: 2**

*Increase and foster university-school-district partnerships with Chicago Public Schools.* Working through the Office of Student Services, the Office of Partnerships, and the Office of External Programs the COE can strengthen ties to Chicago Public Schools (CPS). According to the NIU’s Office of Registration and Records, we currently have 795 students from the Chicago metro area enrolled in our programs, and very few of them are placed in student teaching assignments in Chicago Public Schools.

This lack of CPS placements works against our favor, because students know we do not routinely place students in CPS, and if they are from Chicago or the first ring of suburbs, they can opt to attend another university to complete their training as a way of saving money. In short, strengthening ties with CPS can open more possibilities and further help brand the COE as an institution that encourages instruction and research in urban education, social justice education, and diversity.

Strengthening ties to CPS can also open doors for easier access to research sites, cohorts, and other institutional needs. Although we do have strong ties to Rockford, many of our students from cities and towns closer to Chicago will feel more empowered through the choice. **Aligned Goals: 1, 2, 3, and 4**

*Establish an informed, focused, and ongoing plan for helping students succeed on the Illinois Basic Skills Test or Test of Academic Proficiency (BST/TAP).* Most of our students need assistance passing the BST/TAP. This assistance could come in the form of a fewer-than-three-credit class taught by a trained literacy specialist with particular expertise in strategic test-preparation. Similarly as another option, we can regularly offer test-preparation activities as a noncredit, extracurricular activity (perhaps a series of independent sessions) that helps students understand the format, content, and expectations of the test. Currently the College Learning Enhancement Program in the Department of Literacy Education offers some services. We further recommend that more resources are extended to this venture. Also, we can create a page on the COE website that offers test-taking strategies and tips that students can explore when needed. The Office of Student Services will respond to this need. **Aligned Goals: 2 and 3**

*Create a new program with an urban education or social justice emphasis, or intensified promotion of Themed Learning Communities addressing urban education or social justice education.* Many NIU students from cities like Chicago, Rockford, and Peoria have an
interest in teaching in urban areas. However, our programs historically have not identified a focus on urban education or social justice education, and students are aware of this discrepancy. Creating an option using courses currently in our curriculum can attract students from diverse backgrounds who are interested in these issues and could make the COE known for urban and/or social justice education.

This program does not necessarily have to target students of color, but we do think it could create an opening for students of color. We also believe, as explicated above, it is necessary that clinical and/or student teaching options be expanded in Chicago. We know this district is very competitive; nevertheless, many NIU students are from Chicago, and for students interested in teaching in an urban context, Chicago is an indispensable site of engagement. Departments are charged to develop such connections in undergraduate and graduate programs as appropriate. ALIGNED GOALS: 1, 2, 3, and 4

Create a cohort model. Using a cohort model, we can encourage students to enter a program early and take a program of courses (perhaps similar to what was recommended above through Themed Learning Communities). For students of color, this model may be a more enticing option: Many of our current students of color report feelings of isolation because they are either the only, or one of the only, students who look like them in a class. This model will ultimately benefit all students in courses, because they will have a greater ability to hear multiple perspectives and experiences. Departments are charged to develop such cohorts in undergraduate and graduate programs as appropriate. ALIGNED GOALS: 1, 2, and 3

Adopt provisional admittance policies for programs where there is limited or restricted admission. The subcommittee understands that some faculty may believe that simply lowering GPA requirements may give an impression that we are making admission less rigorous; this concern is valid and important. To address this issue, we propose the option of allowing students a provisional admission. Specifics of such a policy may be under the discretion of programs and departments.

cultural competence is an understanding of the importance of culture in affecting students’ perceptions, self-esteem, values, classroom behavior, and learning
Allowing provisional admittance may open doors for many students in our campus community, especially underrepresented students. Becoming a professional in our programs is a demanding process; however, GPA alone does not serve as a reliable indicator of whether or not students can or will be successful professionals. For example, it is not uncommon for a student with a 4.0 GPA to possess great academic skills and content knowledge but not have the dispositions and interpersonal skills to be a successful education professional. By the same token, sometimes students who have a lower GPA do, in fact, show the characteristics of becoming great professional educators and can be successful, with nurturing and guidance. GPA is not always about a student’s ability; low GPA can be explained by unfamiliarity with academic literacies necessary for a high GPA, or ineffective management of time and resources.

Reassessing GPA requirements can open doors for many students on our campus interested in pursuing a career in education, and our students typically meet our high standards once admitted into programs. Departments are charged to develop such policies in undergraduate and graduate programs as appropriate.

**ALIGNED GOALS: 2 and 3**

*Create and/or require student engagement experiences.* Increase opportunities for undergraduate students to be engaged in and with diverse settings and populations. These engagement experiences could include coursework and projects that entail a service-learning component or classes and experiences that expose students to diverse populations and/or immerse students in various community settings in order to encourage students to think critically about their own identities.

In addition to academic experiences, extracurricular social and cultural experiences can offer students exposure to perspectives and life experiences that differ from their own. These engagement experiences could take place on campus or utilize surrounding communities (e.g. DeKalb, Aurora, Rockford, and Chicago). The purpose of these activities would be to furnish students with broader and multiple worldviews and help promote cultural understanding and competence. These efforts can be coordinated by a standing committee, as recommended above, in cooperation with related offices in the understanding culture and committing to social justice is not merely about creating a positive learning environment, it is also sound educational pedagogy and practice.

"
COE (such as the Office of Student Services, and/or advising offices). Below are examples that can be implemented. **ALIGNED GOALS: 1, 2, and 3**

**Themed Learning Communities.** Offer an urban-engagement Themed Learning Community that promotes issues of social justice, through interrelated coursework and service learning projects.

**Social justice film series.** Host monthly films on social justice-oriented topics. These events could include discussion sessions following the film.

**Community-based research methods course.** Offer undergraduate and graduate research methods courses that provide students with the opportunity to conduct community-based, participatory research projects. These projects could be carried out as part of teams and presented at a culminating community forum.

**Community service days focusing on projects in various underserved communities.** Organize collegewide service days that would entail students, staff, and faculty in working on a local service project or initiative, such as a community clean-up, greening project, or book drive.

**Urban neighborhood tours for students.** Provide tours of surrounding neighborhoods and specific communities in Chicago. These tours would be planned and coordinated in collaboration with institutions and organizations within each community and introduce students to issues relevant to communities where they may eventually work. As part of these tours, students would have the opportunity to interact with community residents and youth.

**Social justice symposium.** Plan a symposium that would focus on social justice, diversity, and/or identity issues. The event would bring together guest and student speakers who represent/speak to diverse lived experiences and provide workshops and discussion groups.

**Self-directed vicarious experiences.** Students can be required to attend or participate in a minimum number of experiences outside classes that encourage them to think about the aforementioned issues and ideas. For example, students could attend lectures at another area university or screen a film or volunteer for a social service agency. The ultimate goal is to foster habits of engagement and service among our students. These activities do not necessarily have to be graded but can be collected into a portfolio and housed with students’ files. The activity must be validated by a faculty member and must include a reflection by the student. The particulars of a form and prompts for reflection can be created at a later date by department or program faculty.
Institute a cooperative teacher orientation and clearer expectations for school partnerships in relation to clinical and student teaching experiences. Cooperative teachers and school partnerships are indispensable to what we do in the COE, and we work with a significant number of highly qualified and effective classroom teachers. However, we have also found that cooperating classroom teachers can often contradict ideas we try to promote with our students. Additionally, students from diverse language backgrounds (typically African American or bilingual speakers) are asked to leave clinical and student teaching placements because of perceived language inadequacies that are actually language variations.

This problem is two-sided, with responsibilities on both sides. On the students’ side, they have a responsibility to master the skills, dispositions, attitudes, and language to be successful in any classroom. On the other hand, cooperating teachers have a responsibility to be aware of the fact that (a) students must be nurtured and (b) variations in cultural and linguistic capital do not necessarily signal inadequacy but difference.

We propose an orientation session for new cooperating teachers that would help them understand our expectations and important practices in teacher education. Similarly, as we reach out to districts, we must encourage districts to be more understanding and patient with students, especially those of underrepresented backgrounds, and further promote the notion that differences in cultural and/or linguistic capital do not necessarily mean students do not have the ability to be effective in their placements. Helping those who work with us understand not only our expectations and ideas but also what literature and research says about different aspects of teaching and culture will be essential in developing and continuing partnerships that support diversity and social justice. ALIGNED GOALS: 1, 2, and 3

Create and infuse transformative clinical training opportunities in a range of diverse settings for pre-service professionals. We must make a more concerted effort at ensuring that all our students have experiences in diverse contexts—rural, urban, and suburban. This effort will greatly assist our students in understanding the similarities and variations of employment contexts and has the potential of demystifying contexts of which they were previously unaware. This effort will aid in developing students’ critical thinking skills as they progress toward graduation. ALIGNED GOALS: 2 and 3

"understanding oneself is essential to understanding and fostering respect for diversity within a community"
Increase the number and frequency of speakers, lectures, workshops, and presentations offered through the COE, open to all members of the COE community. These opportunities are highly important to the intellectual engagement and image of the college and helps students see the profession as one of lifelong learning and professional development. Funding is always an issue, but speakers do not always have to be expensive. COE could target speakers from area universities like University of Illinois at Chicago, DePaul University, Northwestern University, and University of Chicago, all universities that are deeply engaged in urban and social justice education issues.

Connecting and working with professors and researchers in the area strengthens relationships and can result in increased social capital and relationships of reciprocity for our faculty, staff, and students. Additionally, reaching out to area universities and colleges can serve as a faculty recruiting tool. **ALIGNED GOALS: 1, 2, 3, and 4**

Increase efforts for community engagement. Ideas expressed thus far are dependent on strong ties to both school-based and community-based organizations. We encourage faculty, staff, and administration to develop more connections and partnerships with community organizations that can further encourage engagement with our students and serve as conduits for our recruitment efforts. **ALIGNED GOALS: 1, 2, and 3**

Increase the number of courses utilizing service-learning requirements. The Office of the Provost, as a part of NIU’s Great Journeys Strategic Plan, is encouraging all faculty members to utilize service-learning projects. Through these projects, faculty and instructors can design reflective assignments that encourage students to think more critically about their experiences, drawing on course readings and activities. The provost’s office is developing resources for this and the College of Education can get in on the ground floor and set an example for the university community. **ALIGNED GOALS: 1, 2, and 3**

Ensure curriculum infusion of ideas related to cultural competence, identity, and social justice. We propose that all departments review their official course outlines and syllabi to ensure that courses explicitly introduce the concepts of identity, cultural diversity, and culturally sensitive pedagogy and competence leading to social justice

"creating an environment that actively displays both a respect for diversity and a commitment to social justice, is fundamental to our growth"
values where appropriate. The College Curriculum Committee will provide oversight.

**Aligned Goals: 1 and 2**

*Continue student recruitment and retention efforts.* Our recruitment efforts are indispensable. We further recommend the extension of more resources to the recruitment effort so that we can have more agents of the COE (including faculty, administrators, staff, and students) attending college fairs, making campus visits, and coordinating with administrators at the community college, secondary, middle, and even elementary levels. Departments and programs have responsibility here, with oversight from the Office of Student Services. **Aligned Goals: 3**

*Continue faculty, staff, and administration recruitment of underrepresented groups.* Recruitment of underrepresented groups is a very difficult task for many reasons, and the subcommittee understands this challenge. Regardless, we encourage continued pursuit of diverse faculty, staff, and administration members across the spectrum of diversity as listed above. We encourage the dean’s office and departments to target underrepresented groups by posting position announcements with both traditional and nontraditional publications and periodicals, special interest professional organizations, universities and colleges of education, school districts, and other contexts whose audiences are primarily representative of underrepresented populations. **Aligned Goals: 4**

*Enhance connections among faculty, staff, and student support services.* The Center for Black Studies; Latino Resource Center; Center for Southeast Asian Studies; and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Resource Center offer not only support to thousands of our students but also resources for faculty and staff development. For example, the LGBT Resource Center offers Ally training, and, according to their web page, sixteen members of our faculty and staff have gone through the training. The training helps participants better understand the needs and issues of the LGBT community and further teaches participants how to be an active Ally and supporter of the community so that LGBT students know there are spaces of safety where they can go. Similarly, the other NIU resource centers offer information, research, and support for more effective engagement with underrepresented students. Increasing active participation of our faculty and staff understanding culture and committing to social justice is not merely about creating a positive learning environment, it is also sound educational pedagogy and practice*
with these centers will increase the visibility and cooperative spirit of the COE across the campus community. Engagement can also result in exposure to potential candidates for faculty and staff positions. **ALIGNED GOALS: 1 and 4**

*Increase utilization of the college and department websites to promote issues.* The COE and its departments can more aggressively utilize our website to promote issues related to social justice, diversity, and identity. We can use the websites to post work and research from faculty, staff, and students. Additionally, we can use websites to promote discussion in the online and campus community. By working with web design specialists (both in-house and consultants) we can consider more effective and engaging ways of visually branding ourselves as understanding and engaged with social justice, diversity, and identity issues. **ALIGNED GOALS: 1, 2, 3, and 4**

*Develop a student-faculty mentoring program.* Often, underrepresented students can feel lost and detached within our institution. Instituting and promoting a volunteer mentoring program can go a long way in helping students understand how to navigate our college, successfully complete course work, find clarity on dispositions and other culturally laden policies, and have a place to speak confidentially about issues. **ALIGNED GOALS: 1 and 3**

*Utilize counseling graduate student opportunities.* Create and promote support groups run by counseling graduate students for various groups represented in the college as way of first showing students we are sensitive to their social and emotional needs and second offering our counseling graduate students more opportunities to work with diverse student communities.
Examples of Initiatives and Activities Recommended to Implement the Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommended Initiatives and Activities</th>
<th>Aligned Goals</th>
<th>Oversight for Completion</th>
<th>Suggested Time for Implementation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assess, in a systematic way, faculty and staff professional development needs in relation to issues</td>
<td>1 and 2</td>
<td>College Council</td>
<td>Summer 2012; ongoing</td>
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<tr>
<td>related to identity, social justice, and diversity, leading to regular and consistent professional</td>
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<td>development offerings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assess, in a systematic way, student understanding about social justice, identity, and diversity issues</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>College Curriculum Committee; department chairs</td>
<td>Begin planning Fall 2012; Assessments instituted Fall 2013</td>
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<tr>
<td>Increase and foster University-School-District partnerships with Chicago Public Schools</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, and 4</td>
<td>External Programs; Partnerships; Office of the Dean</td>
<td>Immediate and ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establish an informed, focused, and ongoing plan for helping students succeed on the Illinois Basic</td>
<td>2 and 3</td>
<td>College Curriculum Committee</td>
<td>Spring 2013</td>
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<td>Skills Test or Test of Academic Proficiency (BST/TAP):</td>
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<tr>
<td>Create a new program with an urban education or social justice education emphasis, or intensified</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, and 4</td>
<td>College Curriculum Committee; department chairs (as appropriate)</td>
<td>Fall 2013</td>
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<tr>
<td>promotion of Themed Learning Communities addressing urban education or social justice education</td>
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<tr>
<td>Create a cohort model</td>
<td>1, 2, and 3</td>
<td>College Curriculum Committee; Office of Student Services; department chairs (as</td>
<td>Fall 2013</td>
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<td>(as appropriate)</td>
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<td>appropriate)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adopt provisional admissions policies</td>
<td>2 and 3</td>
<td>Senate; department chairs</td>
<td>For Fall 2013 applicants</td>
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<td>Create and/or require student engagement experiences</td>
<td>1, 2, and 3</td>
<td>College Curriculum Committee</td>
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<td>Institute a cooperative teacher orientation and clearer expectations for school partnerships</td>
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<td>Partnership Office; External Programs Office; department chairs (as appropriate to student teaching)</td>
<td>Fall 2013</td>
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<td>Create and infuse transformative clinical training opportunities in a range of diverse settings for pre-service teacher education candidates</td>
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<td>College Curriculum Committee; department chairs</td>
<td>Immediately</td>
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<td>College Curriculum Committee; Office of Student Services</td>
<td>Immediately</td>
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<td>Increase the number of courses utilizing service-learning requirements:</td>
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<td>College Curriculum Committee; department chairs</td>
<td>Fall 2012 or Spring 2013</td>
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<td>Continue student recruitment and retention efforts</td>
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<td>Office of Student Services</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
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<td>Office of the Dean; Senate; department chairs</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
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<td>Enhance connections among faculty, staff, and campus student support offices, centers, and services</td>
<td>1 and 4</td>
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<td>Ongoing</td>
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The Subcommittee for the Diversity Strategic Plan Development was formed in the fall of 2011. Dean La Vonne I. Neal charged the College Curriculum Committee (CCC) with the responsibility of developing a comprehensive strategic plan in relation to diversity in our college. Initially, the entire CCC began engaging in conceptual discussions about diversity needs and issues in the college, but, due to the large number of people and limited time available during meetings, it was moved that a subcommittee form. The subcommittee would take the lead in developing a document that could first be assessed and agreed upon by the larger CCC. Upon completion of review by the CCC, department representatives would then take the document to their departments for further review and consent.

Joseph Flynn, assistant professor in the Department of Leadership, Educational Psychology and Foundations, was recommended to serve as the chair of the subcommittee by CCC Chair Steve Wallace. Professor Flynn accepted, and CCC member Scott Wickman, associate professor in Counseling, Adult and Higher Education, also volunteered. A recruiting announcement was sent to department chairs, and initially each department was able to offer representation. However, as the work continued, some were able to participate more than others. Subcommittee members involved are listed on the title page of this document.

The subcommittee met several times and discussed a range of issues, eventually asking for representation from the Office of Student Services in order to be aware of ongoing efforts in the college. After much deliberation over three months, the subcommittee agreed on a number of different ideas and initiatives, collectively initiated the deliberation process, and wrote the final document.
REFERENCES


