Question 4: How might units enhance the classroom experience and curricular content of courses to best meet the learning goals that we have for our students and that they hold for themselves?

What is the problem/situation? To reflect curricular best practices for D&I, we must provide faculty development (see responses to Question 2) to facilitate inclusive classroom practices. VCU’s values and goals for advancing D&I have not been incorporated into GenEd requirements. Currently, D&I learning opportunities are not well-communicated across the university. Time and resources are necessary to scale D&I programs. Recruitment practices for faculty, staff, and students aren’t necessarily designed to advance a culture of diversity and inclusion.

What does the literature/research have to say about it? To create environments that foster educational success, students need three fundamental conditions: a sense of security and inclusion, mechanisms for involvement, and an experience of community (Strange and Banning, 2001). The faculty role in creating these conditions is critical, but faculty need training to do so. D&I initiatives should be designed to appeal to the intrinsic motivation, curiosity, and desire to participate that many faculty will possess (Ceo-DiFrancesco, Kochlefl and Walker, 2019). Creating systems of recognition can supply the extrinsic motivation that appeals to other faculty. Best practices for D&I classrooms include frequent opportunities for students to relate their fears, anxieties, cultural experiences, classroom expectations, and epiphanies” (Cooper, Howard-Hamilton, and Cuyjet, 2011). D&I classrooms are characterized by faculty who are responsive to students’ individual levels of development and can productively challenge students’ often uninformed assumptions. Faculty also actively provide students with material that increases their knowledge about diverse populations. In a D&I classroom, the faculty’s teaching philosophy accounts for issues of power and invites students to participate in co-constructing a D&I community.

What does the work group recommend? (See Appendix A for details)
We recommend strengthening our faculty’s facilitation skills through D&I education. To enhance classroom experience, we recommend that faculty include diversity statements on all syllabi, provide physical indicators (e.g., signage) of VCU’s commitment to D&I in all learning spaces, and co-create discussion guidelines with students. For the curriculum, we recommend increasing the emphasis on D&I in the new GenEd30 requirements and suggest that faculty experienced in D&I education assess the course proposals and outcomes. We recommend a D&I Portal, a central hub to alert the campus about D&I learning opportunities and to support D&I training for faculty, staff, and students. VCU should leverage existing resources and educational opportunities and foster a culture of D&I. Appoint “diversity officers” to support departments and units. We recommend a greater emphasis on hiring faculty who already possess a commitment to and experience with D&I in the classroom. Require in application materials a statement detailing the applicant’s activities that demonstrate a commitment to diversity and inclusion. Finally, we recommend assessing and accounting for the time and resources required to scale these initiatives.


Appendix A

Classroom Experience. We recommend that faculty learn more facilitation skills so they have more confidence and skill in managing difficult conversations, or “hot moments,” in the classroom. Sometimes it’s just a matter of allowing space for these conversations, acknowledging their importance and value, and getting comfortable with saying “I don’t know” (cultural discernment) as needed. Workshops could support faculty in learning to manage difficult dialogs and faculty should develop inclusive statements for all syllabi\(^1\) (syllabi could also include the VCU helpline). D&I guidelines for the classroom can be important in setting the stage for handling difficult conversations and expectations for respectful behavior. Faculty and students can devise these guidelines for each class. Perhaps our student code of conduct could be revised to refer explicitly to D&I-related behaviors as well. We recommend signage or other visual representation in classrooms/learning environments as visual reminders of VCU’s commitment to diversity (Strange & Banning, 2001, p. 21).

Curriculum Enhancements. Because these courses can be a significant nexus for communicating VCU’s values and goals for D&I, we recommend all GenEd30 courses adhere to best practices for D&I curricula and that faculty who teach them seek relevant resources to develop the course. The GenEd30 Taskforce report stipulates that general education courses must emphasize “Diversities in the Human Experience” and that students should have 3-9 credits in this category. Further, all GenEd30 courses must meet six assessment criteria, including “Global and Cultural Responsiveness/Agility” and “Ethical Reasoning.” We recommend that faculty experienced in D&I education conduct the assessment process.

We also recommend establishing a “D&I Portal” - a central hub to communicate about D&I learning opportunities and provide resources for faculty, staff, and students as they work to develop the skills identified in the D&I rubric. This D&I portal could also house assessment tools of cultural competence, such as the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), Cultural Intelligence Scale (Early & Ang, 2006) and others, for those who are curious and seek more objective self-assessment. Faculty should be encouraged to consult discipline-specific D&I education practices if available (e.g., Health Sciences: Liaison Committee on Medical Education (LCME) for medical students; Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) for residents; Ethical and clinical practice codes related to D&I in Psychology, Social Work and other disciplines). Further, inclusive classrooms should be guided by Universal Design for Learning principles.

Curricular design efforts should leverage existing D&I resources, including current educational offerings (see Appendix B for a list) and the role of the Inclusive Learning Counsel (ILC), which is comprised of directors and chairs of D&I committees across campus. There are several existing teaching support resources that might be leveraged as well (See Appendix B for a list). We recommend expanding School of Education required courses to make them available to students across the university and creating a minor in inclusion in various departments. We note that more academic units could hire (or designate) a diversity officer (such as Professor Holly Alford’s position in School of the Arts). We must also target new faculty hires who already have D&I education experience to incorporate into their teaching upon hire. VCU job descriptions should require candidates to include statements of inclusion and evidence of diversity and inclusion knowledge and practice in their work, even for faculty hires with a research, clinical or other focus who may not work with students. Finally, there are challenges with the time and resources necessary to design programs to scale, and we recommend a task force to address these issues.

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\(^1\) See resources at Focused Inquiry for developing syllabus statements, as well as Brown University’s website for examples.
Appendix B

Current D&I Educational Offerings Across Campus

- The Division for Inclusive Excellence’s iExcel Education program is developing cultural humility education which will offer more than 20 courses beginning Fall 2019;
- Office of Multicultural Student Affairs (OMSA) D&I services, education, and training opportunities for students;
- The Department of Gender, Sexuality and Women’s Studies (GSWS), which is establishing a minor in LGBTQ studies;
- The School of the Arts, School of Social Work, and other academic units where D&I courses are offered; and
- The School of Education, which is offering required courses for prospective teachers to teach in an inclusive environment.

- IExcel Education is preparing to offer several courses to teach and model inclusive teaching to faculty and to provide stimulating D&I pop-up courses for students.
- iExcel Education is also planning a workshop that will be available (Fall 2019) to search committees and units that are conducting searches on both campuses so they can learn how to discern D&I capacity in candidates.
- OMSA offers a plethora of educational opportunities for students.

University Teaching Support and Resources

- Inclusive Learning Counsel (ILC)
- Student Accessibility and Educational Opportunity (SAEO);
- The Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence (CTLE);
- Academic Learning and Transformation Lab (Alt Lab); and
- Provost’s website for inclusive teaching
- The Diversity and Education work group’s resource folder.