

Office for Diversity and Inclusion



Welcome!

Welcome to the inaugural newsletter from the Office for Diversity and Inclusion (ODI)! Each semester we will update you, our campus and community partners, about the exciting news, programming, and events offered by our central office and seven cultural centers and programs. Together as one ODI, we work with you to bring about the institutional cultural change that is supporting efforts to make the University of Connecticut more diverse, equitable, inclusive, and just.

Over the last academic year, ODI has grown in its ability to offer training, programming, initiatives, and resources for students, staff, faculty, and alumni. Despite the challenges of the last year – including the visible Anti-Black racism surrounding the deaths of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor; visible anti-Asian racism surrounding COVID-19; and a national rise in antisemitic and anti-LGBTQIA+ incidents – we believe that UConn is moving the needle with our own campus climate. We are encouraged by the high levels of excitement and passion our students, staff, faculty, and alumni have for the important work of diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice (DEIJ), and we are excited about expanding our role facilitating that work.



This newsletter contains a brief recap of ODI's work and accomplishments over the 2020-2021 academic year. While we are committed to making our institution more justice-oriented and anti-racist, we recognize that words ring hollow if they are not backed up with actions. We will briefly outline some of the actions we have taken to demonstrate the University's commitment to DEIJ. You will also find a description of our plans moving forward for the 2021-2022 academic year, updates on new staff, a list of selected coming events for 2021-2022, and a list of celebrations of the various diverse communities that call UConn "home."

UConn is committed to the DEIJ work that makes our institution stronger and improves student, staff, and faculty experiences. ODI is excited to be enacting this commitment, and thankful for the partnerships with each of you that enable us to make UConn a better place. This work cannot be done by one unit alone; we are thankful that you are joining us on this important mission!

A Look Back: ODI in 2020-2021



ODI Engagement 2020-2021

The 2020-2021 academic school year provided numerous opportunities for ODI to engage with the UConn community.

Dr. Frank Tuitt, UConn's Vice President and Chief Diversity Officer, began his tenure in the summer of 2020. One of his first acts was to reach out to the community to discuss UConn's diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) landscape. Dr. Tuitt was pleased to find that enthusiasm and eagerness for advancing DEI efforts were high, and used these conversations to outline areas for ODI's 2020-2021 focus:

- Enhancing communication
- Attending to campus climate
- Bringing multiple partners in for collaborative efforts
- Accountability.

Over the 2020-2021 academic year, ODI has grown as a hub for resources and a facilitator for institutional change. Our primary form of engagement has been trainings and workshops, events, and consultations with departments, units, and individuals across the University. We are proud that our Cultural Centers and Programs, as well as our Central Office, was able to offer 86 trainings and workshops, 285 events, and 359 consultations for the 2020-2021 year – a total of 730 opportunities for engagement!

ODI Engagement at a Glance, 2020-2021 Academic Year



Racial Justice at UConn

For the 2021 Martin Luther King, Jr. convocation, ODI produced a short video to honor Dr. King's legacy and affirm that Black Lives Matter at UConn. See the video at <https://youtu.be/KzIJY9I0IAA>.



A Look Back: ODI in 2020-2021

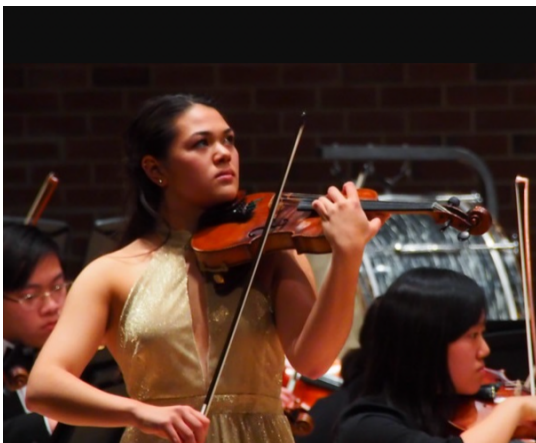
How ODI Engagement Seeks to Move the Needle on UConn's DEIJ Climate

During the 2020-2021 year, Central Office and Cultural Centers and Programs had 730 combined opportunities to engage the UConn Community.

This engagement serves two important functions for members of the UConn community. First, it provides proactive training to help leadership, units, and departments think intentionally about how to advance diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice. This engagement is critical for transforming policies, practices, systems, and structures that will enable DEIJ to become a central component of day-to-day operations at UConn.

Second, ODI engagement provided support and a sense of belonging for historically marginalized students, faculty, staff, and alumni whose UConn experiences were not always reflective of our DEIJ values and aspirations. We have offered listening sessions so members of our community feel heard; resources and solutions to facilitate improving their experience; and advice about how to navigate these issues.

Most of all, the ODI unit has worked to let members of each of these communities know how important they are to the University of Connecticut. We believe UConn is made stronger by the diversity of its communities, and we celebrate each community's contributions.



Launching of a University-Wide DEIJ Website

ODI is pleased to announce that this fall, we will launch our new university-wide DEIJ website!

This website will be the University's one-stop source for all matters at UConn related to diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice. There, all members of our community can find resources tailored specifically to them.

New To the ODI Team 2021-2022

After a successful 2020-2021, ODI is expanding its abilities to facilitate improvements to UConn's DEIJ climate. We are pleased to welcome new team members whose presence increases ODI's capacity for online and in-person programming.

ODI welcomes the following to full-time roles:

- **Velda Alfred-Abney**, Central Office's Executive Assistant.
- **Elise Delacruz**, Assistant Director of the Women's Center / Director of the Violence Against Women Prevention Program.
- **Dr. Jonelle Reynolds**, Central Office's Director of Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives with a focus on employee-related priorities.
- **Michael Vidal**, Central Office's Director of Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives with a focus on student-related priorities.

We would also like to welcome the following team members with one-year appointments:

- **Neda Izadi**, part-time Specialist for the new Middle Eastern Cultural Programs (MECP).
- **Kaylee Mootz**, Program Coordinator for the Native American Cultural Programs (NACP).
- **Kiara Ruesta-Cayetano**, Program Specialist for the Puerto Rican/Latin American Cultural Center (PRLACC).
- **Patrick K. Russell**, Central Office's DEI Communications Coordinator.

Welcome to ODI!

A Look Forward: ODI in 2021-2022

Setting ODI Priorities

University leadership articulated three DEIJ priorities for the 2021-2022 academic year:

- Add significantly to diversity of faculty and staff
- Support an ecosystem to confront difficult truths and to promote important conversations about race and identity
- Add training that focuses on racial literacy and responsive approaches.

ODI has identified five primary areas to support the University's DEIJ priorities:

- Enhance and expand student DEIJ engagement, support, and development
- Enhance and expand faculty and staff diversity, support, and development
- Further expand and improve DEIJ strategy, the infrastructure and capacity for enacting that strategy, and planning
- Expand university-wide outreach, engagement, and advocacy
- Expand external community outreach, engagement, and advocacy.

Visit ODI's webpage for an outline of our projects, events, and initiatives to support UConn's leadership, faculty, staff, students, and alumni as the University enacts its DEI strategies.

We look forward to working alongside each of you in the important work of making UConn more diverse, equitable, inclusive, and just.

New Theme for 2021-2022: Becoming a Justice-Oriented and Antiracist Institution

ODI recognizes that advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion across the UConn system is essential for our success and excellence as an institution.

However, the recent local, national, and global challenges necessitate that we move beyond DEI and strive to become a more justice-oriented and anti-racist institution. To that end, much of ODI efforts will be assisting the University in becoming fully justice-oriented and antiracist.

Featured Events 2021-2022:

ODI is excited to offer the following events:

- Building a Safe and Supportive DEIJ Community Across UConn
- History of the Tulsa Race Massacre: What's Law Got to Do with It? (AACC)
- Race and Religion: The Illusions of Religious Equality in the US (ASACC)
- Hispanic Heritage Month (PRLACC)
- Rainbow Center Arts Gala (Rainbow Center)
- LUNAFEST 2022 (Women's Center)
- Native American Heritage Month (NACP)
- Nowruz [Persian New year] (MECP)

Find more information on our diversity website and our cultural center websites.

Creation of a Middle Eastern Cultural Programs (MECP) and a New Space for Cultural Programs

One of ODI's signature accomplishments of 2020-2021 was establishing Middle Eastern Cultural Programs (MECP), the first formal space dedicated to sharing Middle Eastern culture on campus. Learn more at <https://mecp.uconn.edu/>.

ODI has acquired additional space in the student union that will serve as the new home for MECP and the Native American Cultural Programs (NACP). This new space will open on a temporary basis until renovations start and will reopen next academic year.

Campus Climate Initiative

Improving UConn's institutional climate continues to be a priority for the University after the recent rise in sexual harassment and anti-Asian, anti-Black, antisemitic, and anti-LGBTQIA+ incidents, both nationally and at UConn.

ODI is involved in several initiatives to develop a safe and supportive institutional environment. For example, we will host DEIJ forums for faculty and staff on the University efforts for enhancing the campus climate, as well as resources available throughout our institution.

Additionally, ODI is pleased to announce our partnership with UConn Hillel, the Center for Jewish Student Life, to combat the rise in antisemitic rhetoric and violence. This is one of several campus climate initiatives to make our institution more inclusive and affirming. Finally, we want to take this moment to remind you of the [InForm](#) website at UConn, which provides a centralized hub for reporting harmful behavior at UConn.

Celebrations

ODI advocates for access and equity across all university units; welcomes and celebrates the experiences of individuals regardless of background; and works to transform campus climate to build a more welcoming and inclusive community. We recognize, however, that we limit our success in these areas if our initiatives, programming, and communications only provide reactions to problem areas our community needs to address. Instead, ODI endeavors to also provide proactive initiatives and programming to celebrate the many diverse groups who call UConn home. We believe that providing these moments of celebration will have a larger long-term impact on improving campus climate than simply reacting to problems.

October provides a unique opportunity for the cultural centers and programs to celebrate the history, legacy, culture, and achievements of our diverse communities, as it marks three history and heritage months for three important communities:

- **National Hispanic/Latinx Heritage Month**, celebrated from September 15th – the anniversary of Guatemalan, Honduran, El Salvadorian, Nicaraguan, and Costa Rican independence – through October 15th. First recognized as Hispanic Heritage Week by President Lyndon Johnson in 1968, President Ronald Reagan expanded the observation to a full month in 1988 to better celebrate the achievements, culture, and contributions of the Hispanic and Latinx communities.
- **LGBTQIA+ History Month**, first inaugurated in 1994 by Missouri high school teacher Rodney Wilson, in order to celebrate the national and international contributions made by members of the LGBTQIA+ community. Wilson chose October because schools are in session and because October already has several LGBTQIA+ traditions, like National Coming Out Day (10/11), International Pronouns Day (10/20), Intersex Awareness Day (10/26), and Asexual Awareness Week (last full week of October). Overall, the goal of LGBTQIA+ History Month is to provide possibility models, build community, and emphasize the continued importance of civil rights.
- **Indigenous People's Week**, which occurs during the second week of October. Indigenous Peoples' Week both celebrates the legacy of Native and Indigenous peoples and recognizes colonialism's impact on these communities. NACP's week-long celebration kicks off with Indigenous People's Day (10/11) – originally organized in 1992 as a counter-celebration to the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus's arrival in the Americas, Indigenous People's Day officially became a national holiday in 2021.

During October, the **Puerto Rican / Latin American Cultural Center (PRLACC)**, **Rainbow Center**, and **Native American Cultural Programs (NACP)** will each hold extensive programming to celebrate the history and accomplishments of these groups, as well as to educate the wider community about the value and values each adds to UConn.

Check their websites to find specific events – we hope to see you there!