



**Fairleigh Dickinson University**  
*One in a series of communications from the president*

## **President's Update – DEI Initiatives – September 7, 2021**

Dear Members of the University Community,

As you recall, the University last year formed a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Advisory Council to help develop new initiatives that will enable us to become a stronger, more inclusive, and more diverse community.

The advisory council—chaired by Dr. Dale Caldwell, the Executive Director of the Rothman Institute of Innovation and Entrepreneurship, and comprised of faculty, staff, students, and alumni—met throughout last academic year, gathered input from across the community, offered insights on various issues, and in May provided a comprehensive list of recommendations and suggestions that we will incorporate in our planning. In fact, we already have begun using their input to inform our actions. We deeply appreciate their great work and thank all the council members for their many efforts.

Several council members also helped the University develop a grant application to the New Jersey Office of the Secretary of Higher Education to support populations that have been historically disadvantaged, including underrepresented minorities, low-income students, and working-age adults. I'm very pleased to announce that our grant application was successful and that FDU has received a \$1.4 million grant over two years to support and foster student success among minority and low-income students, and provide more inclusive learning environments.

In a related and noteworthy development, we recently welcomed to FDU Dr. Uchenna Baker, an accomplished expert in DEI issues, who joined the University on August 2 as our new Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students and who, among other things, will focus on mitigating disparities in student outcomes and closing achievement gaps, while fostering a better sense of belonging and inclusiveness for all students.

We are moving ahead with conviction, and it's exciting to note that the projects funded through the new grant and the council's recommendations strongly align. As part of the grant project, FDU will retain an external DEI consultant, Alta Mauro, Ph.D., Associate Dean for Inclusion & Belonging at Harvard College, who will work with FDU's leadership and the DEI Advisory Council to provide oversight, consulting, and direction for key activities beginning with a campus climate survey that will be done in conjunction with the FDU Poll. This survey will assess attitudes, perceptions, behaviors, and experiences of students, faculty, and staff on each FDU campus concerning DEI issues. The survey results will be analyzed and disseminated, and inform future activities. The survey will be developed and implemented during this academic year.

Also through grant funding, we will engage external DEI experts to deliver campus diversity and inclusion workshops to help students, faculty, and staff become more aware and comfortable with concepts such as unconscious bias and cultural competency, and to help faculty recognize the cultural and pedagogical barriers often confronted by minority, first-generation, and other students in underrepresented groups, and equip them with evidence-based pedagogical practices to better meet those student needs.

These action steps align well with the recommendations made by the DEI Advisory Council. Among the goals cited were to assess, monitor, and evaluate DEI using relevant data; build a more equitable environment by increasing awareness and knowledge about bias and privilege; and promote cultural understanding and appreciation among students, faculty, staff, administration, and alumni. The council also recommended that the University cultivate a diverse, equitable, and inclusive learning environment, and better promote FDU's DEI initiatives. As part of the latter effort, we have been highlighting and will continue to profile on our website and media important people and programs who embody our commitment to this concern.

FDU's DEI Advisory Council will continue to be an influential force moving forward and will provide the University with valuable perspectives on critical issues, such as creating a confidential system for students and others to share DEI-related issues, assisting with training programs, and ensuring that curriculum and course offerings are aligned with DEI best practices.

This cannot be an isolated effort or something we think about from time to time. This must be something we all embrace, something that spreads everywhere within the community, and something that will inform all University actions.

As I've noted before, we have room to improve, to learn, and to grow. At the same time, we have an incredible community of caring individuals who are committed to doing what is right and what is necessary to ensure we are a model for the changes we want to see everywhere. Together, we will make this happen.

Yours in FDU,

Christopher A. Capuano, Ph.D.  
President