

SIUE holds Diversity Strategic Plan Summit

by Megan Wieser
January 19 2017 9:31 AM



EDWARDSVILLE - The Southern Illinois University Edwardsville Office of Institutional Diversity and Inclusion hosted a rich, action-oriented dialogue among more than 240 campus administrators, faculty, staff and students, and surrounding community leaders, during the Diversity Strategic Plan Summit held Wednesday, Jan. 18 in the Morris University Center.

The event featured a discussion-based analysis of the University's Diversity Strategic Plan that was enacted in 2013. Participants were invited to offer objectives, outcomes, measures and projected completion dates that would help achieve the goals set forth in that plan.

Venessa Brown, PhD, associate vice chancellor for diversity and inclusion, led the Summit, which included the tag line: "The journey continues to build an inclusive campus environment." Brown began the day by quoting Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr: "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter."

"One of the best parts of a university is that we have so many different perspectives and experiences, and we get a chance to share those with each other and create a richer environment for all of us," SIUE Chancellor Dr. Randy Pembroke said. "Today, we're going to talk about goals and objectives, but the part I like the best is the action steps we'll be discussing. We're not going to just talk about what we'll do, not just support the concept, but we are going to make our environment better.

"The University Diversity Strategic Plan aims to identify goals and strategies for pursuing success in diversity and inclusion, helps to develop empathy and understanding through knowledge of others, and reminds us that an appreciation for diversity and inclusion benefits all of us."



The six goals brought forth for discussion included:

- Improve recruitment and hiring of diverse faculty, staff, students and administration.
- Improve retention of diverse faculty, staff, students and administration.
- Develop and maintain a campus culture and climate in which embracing diversity and inclusion is a core value of the SIUE community.
- Enhance students' diversity-related knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for succeeding in a diverse, inclusive and global world.
- Advance institutional commitment and accountability to diversity and inclusion initiatives, practices and policies.
- Develop collaborative partnerships that support diversity and inclusion initiatives at SIUE.

Diversified groups of participants discussed each goal in small groups and then presented their recommendations to all attendees. Among the multiple ideas brought forth were such recommendations as expanding the Office of Diversity and Inclusion for programming and sustained dialogue to be implemented in greater frequency and at the program and departmental level, mandatory cultural courses and training requirements, and stronger peer-to-peer mentorship programs for students, faculty and staff.

“We need to add some help and resources to the Office of Diversity and Inclusion to help put this entire plan into operation,” student body president Luke Jansen told the group. “We can sit here and talk about it all day, but if there’s not one driving force behind it, it’s not going to happen.”

“We need to understand what businesses and non-profits need in terms of a global and diverse workforce and consider how we can work together to organize internships for our students in those areas, and how we can develop training programs to meet those needs,” said Mary Weishaar, PhD, executive director of International Affairs.

“SIUE has grown comfortable with being comfortable,” added David Groves, graduate assistant for Campus Activities Board in the Kimmel Student Involvement Center. “Often times we hear complaints, but not solutions. We need to decide exactly what are we doing to turn those complaints into the solutions we need, and what are we doing to support the students.”

Also speaking at the summit was Dr. Lakesha Butler, clinical associate professor in the Department of Pharmacy Practice and a member of the University Diversity Council. She reminded the group of SIUE’s mission to “develop professionals, scholars and leaders who shape a changing world.”

“Being an institution of higher education, we are charged with taking our students, and also faculty and staff, on a continuous journey of evolution and growth, not only academically, but also socially and emotionally,” Butler said. “We’ve certainly made great strides.”

According to Brown, all of the notes from the Summit will be posted in the University’s Diversity and Inclusion Online Learning Community through Blackboard. For more information, contact the Office of Institutional Diversity and Inclusion at 618-650-5382 or siue.edu/institutionaldiversityandinclusion/.

A town hall meeting on the Diversity Strategic Plan will be held in early April.

[Southern Illinois University Edwardsville](http://SouthernIllinoisUniversityEdwardsville) provides students with a high quality, affordable education that prepares them for successful careers and lives of purpose to shape a changing world. Built on the foundation of a broad-based liberal education, and enhanced by hands-on research and real-world experiences, the academic preparation SIUE students receive equips them to thrive in the global marketplace and make our communities better places to live. Situated on 2,660 acres of beautiful woodland atop

the bluffs overlooking the natural beauty of the Mississippi River's rich bottomland and only a short drive from downtown St. Louis, the SIUE campus is home to a diverse student body of more than 14,000.