

SIU System Declares Itself “An Anti-Racist Organization”

October 20 2021 3:59 PM



SPRINGFIELD/CARBONDALE – “It’s not enough to just be opposed to racism. We need to announce publicly, which we are doing today, that as a university system, we are anti-racist and we are actively working towards developing and maintaining policies, behaviors, and systems that enhance racial equity and promote positive and sustainable change for faculty, staff and students on our SIU campuses ,” was the message Southern Illinois University System President Dan Mahony shared with participants during the inaugural Fall 2021 Conversation of Understanding held virtually on the system’s [YouTube](#) channel Wednesday afternoon.

Joined by a panel led by Dr. Sheila Caldwell, vice president for anti-racism, diversity, equity and inclusion, Mahony highlighted the steps SIU has undertaken to establish itself as an anti-racist university system. With this declaration, the multi-campus system becomes what it believes to be the first in the country to officially adopt the designation of becoming an “anti-racist system.”

Already, the SIU School of Medicine and the SIU School of Law have declared themselves to be “anti-racist” and the SIU Board of Trustees approved a values statement at its December 3, 2020 meeting to reflect their commitment to anti-racist, diversity, equity and inclusion (ADEI) efforts:

“The Southern Illinois University (SIU) System is an anti-racist community that opposes racism, discrimination, and inequity in any form, and embraces diversity, inclusion, equity, and justice for all people.”

“Just as there was unanimous support on behalf of the board of trustees to adopt the anti-racist statement last year, we are fully committed as partners with our leadership, faculty, staff and students to make fundamental changes that will be a model for all of higher education,” said SIU Board Chairman Phil Gilbert.

Mahony acknowledges the system is still in the early stages of establishing, maintaining and expanding ADEI initiatives. He noted leadership at all levels is enthusiastically committed to what he called “a journey towards becoming an antiracist system” as evidenced by the hiring of Dr. Sheila Caldwell as the Inaugural system-wide vice president for ADEI and Chief Diversity Officer, as well as other actions. Over the past year, the system has implemented an anti-racism task force focused on metrics, organizational analysis, policies and procedures and training and has made ADEI a goal in its strategic plan.

“We have made important symbolic changes in promoting diversity, equity and inclusion and now we need to go to the next level by adopting this identity of being anti-racist, increasing our commitment to dismantling institutional racism and raising a new level of understanding through training and accountability. Our work is really just beginning and I’m proud of the support our faculty, staff and students are lending to this mission,” Mahony said.

Additionally, as Caldwell pointed out during the event, SIU ADEI leaders have recently joined institutions in 20 other states as members of the National Association of System Heads (NASH) anti-racist policy task force which is focusing on ADEI Policies from a national lens.

Caldwell said she's looking forward to the implementation of an ADEI Leadership Certificate for students, as well as implementation of mandatory anti-racism and bias training for employees beginning in fall 2022.

“More initiatives will be announced in the upcoming weeks to build on our commitment to this anti-racism journey knowing that we have not yet arrived there. We are working together to ensure people of the global majority can thrive in every corner of the SIU System and we are committed to reducing the injustices and harm that have been created by racist ideas and policies,” Caldwell said.

Conversations of Understanding are a series of exchanges where students, alumni, faculty, staff and the broader SIU communities can share their experiences and thoughts on a variety of themes related to diversity, inclusion and equity. The October conversation focused on the transformative action steps SIU campuses can take to become a more inclusive, just and vibrant academic community by identifying and examining ideas, systems, policies and practices that advance antiracism and equity with the aim to build a better SIU for all. It can be viewed at the SIU System [YouTube Channel](#).