# COAS Student Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Plan

November 2, 2020

This is the second of three documents from COAS that will address the diversity, equity, and inclusion of faculty, students, and staff. The focus of this document is on COAS students.

One of the major goals of an academic institution is to test new ideas with an eye toward challenging or confirming the status quo in any given field of knowledge. Diverse groups bring alternate ways of knowing that can lead to the flourishing of ideas and lead to innovation in theory and practice [1]. Innovation will be more likely with increased diversity in all its many forms. Furthermore, diversity is critical for student learning. In an inclusive environment, students learn more because students learn from each other and they learn more from a diverse group of students. Similarly, students learn more from a diverse group of faculty and staff.

Our goal is to strive towards broad diversity; however, our first step is to increase the demographic diversity of our students in a way that reflects and then goes beyond the diversity of UNF’s service area. This plan will help bring us closer to this goal in the area of student diversity through a process that requires faculty and administration support for the importance of diversity in knowledge building among UNF faculty and leading to ways in which the richness of diversity can be built upon in the classroom.

Retention and graduation rates are two critical metrics for UNF. In the past, UNF performance on these metrics was significantly lower than that of other SUS institutions. This plan aims at improving student learning, student retention, and student graduation rates. COAS constitutes more than a half of UNF and its contribution to UNF metrics performance will be significant. UNF as a whole needs to have a frank exploration about how privilege (racial, economic, social etc.) functions as a variable with respect to keeping and graduating students and, for that matter, hiring and retaining faculty as well.

We also need to make sure students understand the implications of performance metrics funding for their experience at UNF and are comfortable with navigating these issues with the help of UNF faculty, and staff.

## I. Student Engagement. Interaction between Students and Faculty

I.1. Issue: UNF and COAS need overarching strategies for improving retention and graduation rates. Many such strategies are being developed at the university level. COAS specific strategies will dovetail with University strategies. The development of college-specific strategies should be encouraged. To establish these strategies we need to know the major hurdles faced by students from diverse groups. Many of these hurdles could be identified from the UNF Campus Climate surveys or similar instruments.

I.1. Action: The results of the Campus Climate survey will be shared with the COAS faculty. The chairs will discuss these results at department meetings. Departments will suggest retention and graduation improvement strategies that could work for their disciplines. These strategies will be communicated up the line. The following is a non-exhaustive list of potential strategies for improving retention and graduation rates.

Marketing/encouragement to apply to UNF

Assisting with applications to the University

Getting students up to speed with rigor of academic study (especially for first generation students)

Helping with the selection of academic programs that play to students’ strengths

Helping with programs that work to strengthen students’ skills in areas of need such as:

Time management

Managing work and school

Developing strategies for improving skills and efficacy such as written communication, development of broader vocabulary, mathematical skills

Creating procedures for communicating and forming alliances with faculty and advisors

I.2. Issue: COAS needs to make sure students feel at home at UNF. Stronger interaction with potential students will be helpful here. COAS administration, faculty, and staff have to be “real” with developing an understanding of the lives and the competing interests that challenge our students’ rates of success. Finding responsive ways to support students and doing this in novel ways that can’t be found in other institutions might be what makes UNF more appealing and, ultimately, more likely to support student success.

I.2. Action: Potentially departments could reach out to area high schools and community colleges. It would be beneficial to have an established pipeline that would bring students to UNF. Valencia College in Orlando and UCF as well as Santa Fe College in Gainesville and UF are good examples of such pipelines. The Dean’s Office will work with Institutional Research to provide necessary analytics with respect to transfer students that will be shared with COAS departments. Departments will suggest strategies that will improve collaboration with area community colleges and high schools. For instance, some area community colleges actively interact with UNF departments to make sure their respective curricula align with each other.

The rigor that students might face at UNF compared to community college might be unexpected. Specific programming geared towards easing the transition from community college to UNF could be of help here. For instance, a new majors course that introduces majors to their chosen field could ease this transition. Departments should broadly advertise such initiatives. Communication with advisors is key.

Faculty should be encouraged to develop strategies—such as flipped classrooms, just in time teaching, and peer instruction—that make learning more active and experiential as opposed to passive and perhaps tedious in some instances. Such strategies can go a long way in making UNF students’ experiences a success.

I.3. Issue: Students from underrepresented groups often feel uneasy, particularly at the beginning of their studies at UNF. Very often, these students do not see anyone who looks like them in their classes. Fostering a welcoming environment is critical for student success. Knowing this, faculty and staff must find ways to both understand what this lived experience is like for students and open ongoing pathways of communication with them to discern how one can best provide an oasis of belonging when a student might be feeling estranged from their support network groups in the university milieu.

I.3. Action: COAS faculty should be strongly encouraged to participate in student orientation and be a part of College presentations. Such an activity should be supported and rewarded. Faculty cultural competency training will help faculty understand the stressors that are more likely experienced by students from diverse populations. These include but are not limited to micro-aggressions, explicit biases, cyberbullying, and culture shock regarding academic expectations, lack of faculty from diverse groups, etc. Faculty with this training will comprise a faculty allies or mentors network that should help students navigate the often-treacherous waters of college life. Additionally, more promotion of and participation in the Connections Mentoring Program can help coordinate mentoring relationships between faculty and students, thus helping faculty support students and encourage their sense of belonging. Connections has expressed a need for more faculty in a broader range of disciplines to be involved in the program.

These mentorship program needs to be advertised/conveyed to students through all avenues such as social media, student advisors, student clubs, orientation, etc. Potentially, program representatives could visit large enrollment courses to advertise these programs with a short presentation that could be given at the start of the semester. In this way, students will learn about these programs early on so they already have a strong mentorship network developed before they start getting into the smaller courses where they might be the only person who is like themselves.

I.4. Issue: Very often students do not feel that they belong here at UNF.

I.4. Action: Faculty need to promote a welcoming environment for students in class and to make sure students have a sense of belonging. The interaction between faculty and students in classes might be a good way of capturing attention of students who need help. This could be accomplished through faculty participation in tutoring sessions. It could also be helpful to make it mandatory for students to participate in office hours during first two weeks of classes. A role-play might be another way of helping students understand when to seek out a professor’s help and how to do it. When possible, faculty should provide opportunities for representatives from various campus office/centers to speak in classes to share information about resources. Many departments, such as the Department of Diversity Initiatives, the LGBT Center, and the Recreation and Wellness Center, offer classroom presentations on a variety of topics. Faculty should be encouraged to connect with these areas for class lectures, when appropriate, and make announcements about programs/activities that students can attend.

I.5. Issue: Very often students, particularly First Time in College (FTIC) students, do not understand the concept of office hours.

I.5. Action: Faculty should explain the importance of office hours to students during class cessions. This issue should be brought up during student orientation.

I.6. Issue: Faculty should be aware of students with disabilities. Very often, these students are reluctant to approach a faculty concerning disability accommodations.

I.6. Action: Faculty should encourage students to take advantage of all available services and accommodations provided by UNF. This can be done during class meetings, particularly at the start of the semester. DRC staff and the Dean of Students will be invited to the Chairs and Directors (C&D) meeting either during the August chairs retreat or during one of the first C&D meetings of the fall semester to review the services and resources offered by the Center. Chairs will communicate this information to faculty in writing and during department meetings.

I.7. Issue: Very often students have hard time navigating different styles of faculty teaching and syllabi.

I.7. Action: Academic freedom is a fundamental part of higher education. However, having more uniform approach, when appropriate and when possible, could help students, particularly those from underrepresented groups, to navigate complex university life. Having a uniform structure of faculty syllabi might be of particular help. The template will have a summary information about available resources for students including the Dean of Students, Counseling Center, Disability Resource Center, Military Veterans Resource, LGBT Resource Center and many more. Having all this information in one place can go a long way in helping students excel at UNF. COAS Dean’s office will review and improve the existing template and share it with faculty.

I.8. Issue: Very often, programs do not provide formal mentoring for their majors. Such mentoring is instrumental in retaining our students.

I.8. Action: Programs should be encouraged to institute formal and informal faculty mentoring as well as peer mentoring for students. Faculty should be given credit for such service.

I.9. Issue: Early participation of students in research is critical [2] for their retention.

I.9. Action: Faculty should be encouraged to pursue experiential learning funding that may potentially provide support for students. COAS Eisen Experiential Learning award is one such funding source. Departments and the College should work on establishing additional funding sources for research projects, internships, community-based learning, and other forms of experiential learning.

I.10. Issue: It is critical to have a line of communication with students. However, students often use social media instead of traditional means of communication employed by faculty.

I.10. Action: (a) Faculty should make sure students understand how information is communicated in the College. This can be done during class meetings, particularly at the start of the semester. (b) A potential bulletin board, similar to an arrival-departure board at an airport, listing all the tests taking place in the next 24-48 hours could be very helpful.

I.11. Issue: There is a widespread fear of a failure among students. This fear is exacerbated by a course format with few heavily weighted assignments.

I.11. Action: Academic freedom is a fundamental part of higher education. Faculty have final say in the way they teach their classes. However, very often having many assignments that are weighted equally rather than few assignments that are heavily weighted could help students. Faculty might also want to consider evaluation methods that are more varied. This could include assignments that focus on application as well as mastery of content.

I.12. Issue: Many students have hard time finding a good study group.

I.12. Action: Faculty should help students find a fitting study group. This could be done through group assignments. Students’ cohorts, if appropriate, might help as well. Faculty might also want to consider doing more “with” our students whenever possible. This could include collective classroom learning experiences during which the entire class works on a project or development of a skill. These exercises provide opportunities/challenges for students to recognize different ways of knowing among their class members and, perhaps, could guide them in the direction of feeling more comfortable with smaller group/smaller study group experiences. Another alternative might be creating writing or learning groups in which faculty participate until students are ready to facilitate their own group experiences.

I.13. Issue: Very often, the curriculum that is presented to students lacks diversity. This is off-putting for students from underrepresented groups.

I.14. Action: Faculty should be encouraged to incorporate the issue of diversity and inclusion into their classes. Faculty, particularly in introductory courses, should invite successful representatives from underrepresented groups to share their success stories. They should also review assigned readings to see if the authors of these readings reflect the diversity of our service area.

I.15. Issue: Very often, programs do not know why students fail. Equally important is information about policies that work. Potentially this information can be obtained from exit interviews of students who left the program, as well as graduate exit interviews.

I.5. Action: (a) UNF Director of Assessment Dr. Amanda Kulp regularly conducts UNF graduate exit interviews. COAS chairs will meet with UNF Director of Assessment and discuss the data. Departments will be encouraged to arrange for meetings with Dr. Kulp and discuss what works and what does not. (b) In case of students leaving the program, departments will make necessary attempts to conduct exit interviews with students. This is a complex and sensitive endeavor since students lose their UNF e-mail when they drop out. Even when there is a line of communication, students are reluctant to discuss what they might perceive as their failure.

I.16. Issue: It is critical to understand the flow of majors. Programs should know where their majors come from and where they go if unsuccessful.

I.16. Action: Requests for information about in-and out-flow of majors will be forwarded by the Dean’s Office to UNF Institutional Research and the information, when available, will be shared with departments.

## II. Student Engagement: Student Government and Clubs

II.1. Issue: Faculty engagement with clubs needs to be improved particularly when the interaction between club coordinator and the club is superficial.

II.1. Action: Departments should make sure their club coordinators are effective and engaging communicators and if necessary make needed adjustments.

II.2. Issue: Students in clubs are self-selected and may not include those who actually need help. Many UNF students work and those who work have no time to attend club meetings. Data on clubs membership needs to be investigated.

II.2. Action: One needs to have data about club membership. Clubs should actively engage representatives from underrepresented groups. Student Government should work on this issue but faculty club coordinators should also encourage clubs to recruit students from underrepresented groups.

## III. Administrative Issues

Student learning is at the forefront of UNF. The administration is hard at work making sure UNF students have the best possible learning experience. However, quite often UNF policies are influenced if not dictated by federal and state laws. Navigating these policies is not an easy task for any student. Simplifying these policies when possible will assure student success at UNF.

III.1. Issue: The role of advisors in retaining our students cannot be overstated. Many COAS advisors do a superb job with helping students in their progress towards graduation. Advisors provide a warm transfer and introduction for students when they are referred to the office. Diversity and inclusion training will aid the process. Advising has a training manual/program that all new advisors go through. However, a diversity/inclusion component of the training has not yet been added. COAS advisors are encouraged to go through University-offered training such as the Safe Space program and attend the webinars from the National Advising Counsel that occasionally address diversity and inclusion. A more intentional approach might be helpful here.

III.1. Action: Diversity and inclusion training is needed and should be encouraged for new and seasoned advisors. A diversity and inclusion component should be added to the training manual. Advisors should be encouraged to attend training offered by UNF CPDT.

III.2. Issue: Students are often unaware of the resources available to them at UNF. The relevant information includes the resources of the offices of the Dean of Students, Counseling Center, Disability Resource Center, Military Veterans Resource, LGBT Resource Center, and many more. Information should be broadly disseminated to students. During a student’s initial advising session, advisors provide students with a folder with several handouts filled with helpful information including a listing of campus resources, their locations, and contact information. Many advisors also have a Canvas page for their majors that includes student resources. However, often students do not pay necessary attention to this information until it is relevant to them.

III.2. Action: In addition to faculty communicating this information in their classes and course syllabi, advisors should encourage students to take advantage of all available resources. This can be done during initial individual meeting with students as well as in subsequent sessions. Advisors should also be encouraged to simplify the referral list for resources, potentially adding subcategories to current broad categories in the list. These additional efforts create more work for advisors yet can be effective in removing barriers that prevent students from utilizing resources.

III.3. Issue: Students often feel that advisors have only limited availability. It is often difficult to get an appointment at the “right” time when advice is badly needed.

III.3. Action: More advisors are needed. The COAS Advising Office will be encouraged to resubmit its recurring budget request to Academic Affairs for new advising lines to help reduce the overall student/advisor ratio in COAS, the largest college on campus.

III.4. Issue: The Counseling Center does not seem to have sufficient staff to address student needs. Staffing of this center as well as other UNF support centers is particularly important. One can expect more referrals to the centers, particularly in such difficult times such as the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

III.4. Action: UNF as a whole should invest in these support centers through additional staff. The Counseling Center might consider providing larger workshops around mental health issues as opposed to one-on-one meetings.

III.5. Issue: Students often face roadblocks navigating One Stop*.* These roadblocks include but are not limited to the following:

* Difficulties accessing personnel for assistance by telephone with hold times as long as 40 minutes.
* Having long wait times when seeking services in-person at One Stop, even for simple tasks like providing a signature on a form
* Receiving misinformation from a One Stop team member, which the student follows, only to be told by another One Stop team member on a return visit that they made a mistake, thus incurring additional delays and repeated in-person visits to One Stop.

III.5. Action: UNF as a whole has been working on resolving this issue that is beyond COAS control. Potential solutions may include the following:

* Creation of effective options for triaging calls to One Stop or other strategies for diminishing waiting times
* Creation of a triage system for in-person visits that can expedite visits for processes that are less time-intensive while reserving longer appointment times for more complex issues
* Creation of a case management model for students who receive financial assistance by assigning students to one or two allies who are familiar with both the student and the types of assistance they receive, perhaps cultivating a more collaborative relationship with student recipients of financial aid.

III.6. Issue: Timing of the work-study hiring is often not ideal. For instance, work-study students may not work between the end of the fall semester and the start of the spring semester. These are the federal government rules, which are difficult to change.

III.6. Action: Departments need to be aware of this issue and have a contingency plan that could move the student from the Work Study funding to the department funding for the duration of the gap period.

## IV. Economic Issues Affecting Our Students

According to UNF Institutional Research 2019-20 data 31% of UNF students are at or below the poverty level. This is a very significant fraction of the UNF student body. UNF tuition is only a fraction of expenses that our students have to pay. Non-tuition expenses represent the lion’s share of the cost of attendance. These additional expenses are detrimental to the diversity of UNF and COAS. COAS is not positioned to address many of these financial issues. The goal of this section of the plan is to attract attention to these expenses that may be resolved at the university rather than college level.

IV.1. Issue: The Fountains vs Osprey Landing: Over past decade, UNF has moved towards more expensive on-campus living facilities. The cost of on-campus living often exceeds the cost of tuition. Making on-campus living more affordable will help every UNF student but it will be particularly important for students coming from the economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

IV.1. Action: Campus Planning ought to consider on-campus living facilities that are significantly more affordable for students than living off-campus.

IV.2. Issue: UNF’s strategic goal of becoming an R2 institution implies that there will be an increase in the number of graduate students. Many such students have families. However, UNF does not currently offer any on-campus graduate student housing, which makes UNF less attractive for graduate studies than its sister institutions.

IV.2. Action: Campus Planning ought to consider affordable on-campus graduate student housing

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IV.3. Issue: Food insecurity: Providing affordable meals for UNF students is critical for their wellbeing and success. However, UNF on-campus food vendors are often expensive. The food plans that are offered to students are often restrictive. The cost of food in Outtakes is often comparable to that of an airport. Buffet style dining in Osprey Cafe is perhaps easier to manage but it is more expensive for students.

IV.3. Action: UNF needs to attract food vendors who can provide affordable nutritious meals. Faculty should be encouraged to donate food to the Lend-a-Wing pantry, which many food-insecure students have been using. COAS has 15 departments so it is conceivable for the College to have monthly food drives that are run by different departments. Departments may potentially take turns with food drives, which should provide a continuous flow of sustenance to the Lend-a-Wing beyond just Thanksgiving, and Christmas food drives.

IV.4. Issue: Textbook cost: It is a common knowledge that textbooks are very expensive. UNF faculty have made a tremendous effort in adopting free textbooks. This is possible only in a fraction of courses offered by the university. Regrettably, several faculty reported that the UNF bookstore had been marking up the textbook prices above those of the publisher. Allegedly, not all such instances had been rectified. This is particularly troubling since many low-income students have to use their scholarship funds to purchase textbooks and these funds cannot be used outside of the UNF bookstore. In other words, expensive textbooks are sold to those who can least afford to buy them.

IV.4. Action: COAS faculty should be encouraged to adopt less expensive and potentially free textbooks. Faculty are encouraged to coordinate the use of the same textbook particularly for the course sequences that span several semesters such as Calculus I, II, III, Gen. Chem. I&II, Algebra Physics I&II, etc. UNF needs to make sure the prices in the bookstore are not exceeding those of the publisher.

IV.5. Issue: The COVID-19 pandemic is an important test of UNF’s resilience. It revealed a number of areas that need improvement. One of such areas is a lack of fast and affordable internet access. Many students do not have access to such utility, which hinders their online education provided by the University during the pandemic. Some area internet providers do offer relatively inexpensive internet access but it may be still expensive for a significant fraction of UNF students, particularly those from underprivileged backgrounds.

IV.5. Action: UNF as a whole needs to explore the ways to provide students with inexpensive and reliable internet access. This can be accomplished through need-based scholarship funding or similar projects. Some solutions may include providing funding for MiFi Mobile hotspots.

## V. Physical Space for our Students

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, UNF has been in a distance-learning mode since March 2020. However, ultimately UNF students and faculty will return to normal face-to-face interactions. These interactions take place within physical spaces, which have to be student friendly. In many instances, making a space student-friendly requires a concerted effort on the part of the College, departments, the UNF Office of Campus Planning, and many other offices. Very often financial support for creating such spaces is outside of the College’s purview. Nevertheless, the issue of accessible student friendly space is critical for student wellbeing. The goal of this section is to attract attention to these physical space related issues and to suggest potential solutions.

V.1. Issue: UNF provides its students with access to many indoor and outdoor gathering spaces. Some of these spaces could use better furniture and a better setup. For instance, students often congregate in the lobbies without any appropriate furniture and without any plugin/charging stations for their electronic devises. Many UNF outdoor spaces such as “the Green” have only limited accommodation for disabled students.

V.1. Action: The space owners should recognize this issue and address it with all the available resources. If additional resources are needed, the appropriate requests for such resources should be forwarded up the line.

V.2. Issue: The availability of physical space for the College faculty and staff is an ongoing issue. Departments often outgrow their space and, in such a situation, the space dedicated to students is often converted to faculty offices and research/creative activity areas.

V.2. Action: When planning building renovations or new space, departments should include the “safe” student gathering space. The space should be “safe” in the sense that, within this space, students should be able to interact with each other without interfering with faculty business.

V.3. Issue: Some areas of campus have very few gender-neutral bathrooms, which puts LGBTQ students into a difficult position, forcing them to go to another building to find such a bathroom.

V.3. Action: Departments and the College will bring this issue to the attention of upper administration. Students should have access to more gender neutral bathrooms.

## References

[1] The Diversity–Innovation Paradox in Science, Bas Hofstra, Vivek V. Kulkarni, Sebastian Munoz-Najar Galvez, Bryan He, Dan Jurafsky, and Daniel A. McFarland, PNAS 117(17) 9284-9291(2020) <https://www.pnas.org/content/early/2020/04/10/1915378117>

[2] Undergraduate Research Participation Is Associated With Improved Student Outcomes at a Hispanic-Serving Institution. Timothy W. Collins, Sara E. Grineski, Jessica Shenberger, Xiaodan Morales, Osvaldo F. Morera, and Lourdes E. Echegoyen, J Coll Stud Dev. 2017 May; 58(4): 583–600.