

**State of the College
Diversity, Equity, and Social Inclusion
Race and Ethnicity
Creasie Finney Hairston, Ph.D., Dean**

Several recent events ranging from hate speeches on college campuses, to demonstrations vowing to return the United States to a time in history when racial discrimination was protected by law, to the Presidential decision to repeal DACA have placed race and ethnicity at the center of public debate. This is no less the case here at our own university. Chancellor Amiridis and President Killeen have issued statements affirming our commitment to providing an inclusive environment and to partnering with other universities to address social policies that negatively affect our students.

Here at the Jane Addams College of Social Work, we have, on an ongoing basis, implemented policies and practices to assure that the college is a great place to work and study for individuals from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. Our mission of social, racial, and economic justice is grounded in core social work values and ethics and provides the foundation for our academic programs, community engagement and research. There are many areas and accomplishments where we can, and do, take great pride. Recent events both within and outside the university compel us, however, to carefully review how we are doing with respect to race and ethnicity and how best to continue to advance our mission in a very challenging social climate.

I was really pleased to see so many students at our August orientation and reception. This was our first time having an outdoor reception on the plaza. Though the food lines were long, students stayed and engaged in lively conversation with each other and with faculty and staff. With very few exceptions, they did not have their heads buried in their phones, tweeting, texting, and emailing, though I understand that emailing is “old school.” There was an air of excitement and a “I am so glad I was accepted and I am so elated to be here” theme that permeated the auditorium and plaza.

UIC is one of the nation’s top research universities. We have world acclaimed health science colleges and health services, and based on undergraduate enrollments have been designated as both a Hispanic serving and an Asian serving institution. We are proud to be UIC and equally proud to be the Jane Addams College of Social Work at UIC and one of UIC’s seven health science colleges.

We are a graduate school of social work offering the MSW and PhD degrees and have a national reputation for program excellence. U.S. News and World Report consistently ranks us among the top ten percent of social work programs. Those rankings are based on reputation surveys of all deans and directors of social work programs in the United States. College Options’ 2016 ranking of social work graduate programs ranked our MSW program number nine in the country, citing program quality and return on investment. We have over many years received very high marks on all Council on Social Work Education reaccreditation reviews and UIC internal reviews. Those reviews cover student success,

organizational climate, diversity, curriculum, community engagement and scholarly productivity.

We are well known throughout the world and social workers, social justice scholars, and social work educators actively seek us out for partnerships and collaboration. In the past year alone we hosted delegations from Costa Rica, Finland, Germany, Japan, and Switzerland. Other global connections include Alice Butterfield's teaching assignment this past summer as a Fulbright Fellow in India and her ongoing consultation with organizations in Ethiopia; Amparo Castillo's involvement in UIC's diabetes empowerment work in Mexico, and Annette Johnson and Julie Fisher's consultation on school social work development in Japan.

With student enrollment ranging from 470 to a little over 500 annually JACSW is one of the nation's larger graduate social work programs, and the second largest in Illinois. Each year hundreds of students from different races and ethnicities identify JACSW as the college of choice for obtaining a graduate social work degree. Our student body represents this diversity. Black/African Americans accounted for 14, 17 and 18%; Latinos 18, 19, and 17%; Asians 6, 6, and 6%; Native Americans 2, 2, and 1%; and whites 55, 52, and 58% of our student body in FY 15, 16, and 17 respectively. This fall Black/African Americans represent 14%, Latinos 24%, whites 52%, Asians 5% and Native Americans less than 1% of the JACSW student body. These percentages of students from underrepresented groups exceed the overall UIC graduate and professional student percentages.

The size of the JACSW faculty is small relative to the size of our student body and especially so when curricular options, community engagement projects, research programs, and university service responsibilities are considered. Our current tenured system faculty number only 18 persons. Tenured/tenure track faculty are 50% white, 33% Black/African American, 11% Asian and 6% Latina/African American. Additional full time faculty include four persons with clinical appointments and one lecturer and is 60% African American and 40% white. The size of the full-time faculty has varied between 26 and 30 each of the last five years and the departure of one or two people during any given year impacts diversity percentages. Since FY15 two tenured African Americans and one tenured Latino have resigned to accept leadership and research positions at other social work programs. With their departures the College now has only two tenured faculty, including the Dean, from underrepresented groups. Since FY15, two Latino clinical assistant professors and three African American clinical assistant professors have also left the faculty.

Although JACSW faculty and staff come from different backgrounds and have different areas of expertise, they share in common a demonstrated commitment to the College mission and social work goals of advancing social, racial, and economic justice. JACSW faculty and staff are addressing justice matters on a daily basis. They are in, of, and for communities, particularly those that are poor, marginalized and have many disadvantages.

They are people like Joseph Strickland and Charles Hounmenou who work diligently to include the voices of those typically not included in academic research and social policy discussions. Joseph has convened forums involving women and girls involved in the



criminal and juvenile justice system. Charles has provided leadership for panels on sex trafficking at home and abroad.

They are people like Henrika McCoy and Otima Doyle whose research focuses on men of color. Henrika, the recipient of a three-year Federal grant to study young African American males' victimization experiences submitted an FY17 proposal to examine Latino males' experiences. Otima developed a proposal for Federal funding to study African American and Latino fathers' parenting practices.

They are people like Chang-ming Hsieh who is collaborating with the Chinese American Service League on a study of the quality of social services for older adults.

Included also are Marybel Flores, Director of Central West Case Management Unit, and the supervisors and staff whose work makes it possible for thousands of older adults to remain in, or return to following hospitalization, their own homes. Neither Chicago's harsh winters nor its hot humid summers have deterred them from making the home visits required to connect clients with resources. They serve Chicago's diverse west side neighborhoods with clients who are African American, Latino, Asian, and white, including different ethnic groups, some of whom do not speak English.

They are people like Barbara Coats who, in addition to serving as Director of Field Instruction, represents the College at numerous community meetings. Barbara's leadership was instrumental in our formally joining Austin Coming Together, a west side coalition of community organizations and groups engaged in community building.

They are people like Amy Watson who is collaborating with the Kennedy Forum to evaluate a mental health awareness training program for community residents, many of whom are poor and people of color.

Other College work with, and on behalf of, underrepresented communities includes serving on the Chicago Coalition for Police Accountability Community Council and other community boards, conducting Latino educational needs assessments for a community college, and hosting the office of the African American Family Research Institute.

The JACSW curriculum is designed to prepare students to work effectively with, and on behalf of, individuals, families, and communities from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. The curriculum includes classroom coursework and field instruction with content provided through lectures, discussion, written assignments, readings, videos, etc. One MSW foundation course has topics and sessions covering different racial and ethnic groups. Diversity content is infused and integrated, however, throughout the foundation curriculum, concentrations, and certificate programs. Students are able to enhance their knowledge and understanding of different cultures by taking graduate level electives in other UIC departments including Latino Studies, African American Studies, and Asian Studies.



We are in a process now of curriculum review and renewal in preparation for the MSW program reaccreditation and in response to changes in the Council on Social Work Education's accreditation standards. Faculty are examining syllabi and content to assure that materials are current and relevant to the contemporary needs of urban populations. Faculty curriculum committees are involving students, alumni and community representatives in program assessments and committee deliberations.

Our ongoing assessments indicate that program goals are being achieved. Student course evaluations are high with the average annual rating of the curriculum and instruction above four on a five point scale across courses, instructors and years. In annual evaluations of the field program, over 90% of both field instructors and students rate the program very positively.

Race and ethnicity are not identified in course evaluations or special surveys as topics that are not being adequately addressed by the academic programs. In response to an open-ended question about ways to improve the curriculum, for example, none of the respondents to a FY17 mental health concentration survey listed lack of diversity or a failure to emphasize diversity as a concern. Similarly, in reviewing their field placements none of the 85 students mentioned lack of diversity or access to racial or ethnic minorities as a concern. I am aware of two instances during the past two years where adjunct instructors made racially insensitive remarks in class. Both instances were handled promptly and appropriately when they were brought to the attention of College administrators.

We engage in many activities to provide a welcoming environment and an inclusive organizational climate. Some are just for fun; others serve to make things pleasant or provide information. Others acknowledge individual or group accomplishments.

MSW admissions director Edward Potts and admissions staff Jackie Richardson-Harris handle more than a thousand applications and inquiries each year. Their duties are varied and sometimes involve helping an applicant who is an undocumented immigrant access financial aid, convincing a worried parent that the campus provides a safe environment, and connecting an applicant with cultural and student support organizations on campus. Ed is often here evenings and Saturdays (after a full day's or week's work) to meet with potential applicants.

Our event organizers (Byron Samuel, Maria Carrasco, Veronica Stanfield, and Candace Stoakley-Camp) do the behind the scenes work to assure that our scholarship receptions, student orientations, commencement, workshops and community meetings are memorable events. We regularly receive unsolicited compliments, many thanks, and much praise from participants and their families.

Our publications, programs, and website reflect the rich racial and ethnic diversity of the individuals involved in carrying out the college mission as do our scholarship awards, tuition and fee waivers, and research and teaching assistantships.



Our Associate Deans Faith Johnson Bonecutter and Martin McDermott are proactive in implementing effective, efficient, and transparent procedures and practices dealing with facilities use, student grievances, human resources and a host of other matters. They solve problems on a daily basis and prevent the escalation of minor incidents into major disasters.

Our Central West Case Management staff build in fun times, i.e. the ugly Christmas sweater contest, summer barbeque, etc. to go along with their intensive work schedules and productivity expectations. The 4th floor's potluck lunches featuring Barbara Theus' peach cobbler, goodies that regularly appear in the College lounge areas and the many end of the semester pizza parties all contribute to making this a good place to work and study.

I am optimistic that even in our current environment of social policies that threaten the basic ideals of social justice, Jane Addams College of Social Work will do well and even thrive.

We were notified just this month that we, and several other social work programs, are the recipient of a \$1.92 million training grant that will provide stipends for students, many of whom will be from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups. Sonya Leathers will lead this program.

We are conducting a faculty search for two positions, one tenure track, the other clinical to begin Fall 2018. Both will be in our school social work concentration. Our ability to hire, despite budget cuts, provides opportunities to increase faculty diversity in ways that further strengthen our College. The search committee chaired by Chang-ming Hsieh welcomes your nominations and your active involvement in identifying potential candidates.

We are implementing this fall a series of open sessions, some refer to them as office hours, where students can meet and talk with administrators and faculty about their experiences at the College and other matters of concern. Appointments will not be needed. The sessions will be held at different times to accommodate the schedules of full-time and pm students.

To further our mission and priority goal of advancing diversity, equity, and social inclusion I will be appointing this academic year an Advisory Council to the Dean. The council will be charged with reviewing the state of the College and developing recommendations that help us do even better. The council will be composed of persons from different racial and ethnic backgrounds who have knowledge and understanding of the pressing needs of disadvantaged populations and a commitment to addressing those needs, and the willingness to work with us to obtain resources to support our students and programs. As you are aware, UIC is launching a major capital campaign. I will be working with our development director, Jackie Bonavia, our central development office and central alumni affairs office in establishing the council.

JACSW has a rich history and solid track record of embracing diversity and social inclusion. In this period of rising racial tensions and divisive rhetoric and politics we must continue to examine what we are doing and what we should do. It is important for us to engage in constructive dialogue about issues of race, discrimination, and intolerance. As I indicated in



my welcome letter to students, we must do that in ways that are civil and respectful and that acknowledge differences of opinion and the difference between opinions and facts.

There are no such things as alternative facts, even if we think they can boost our arguments, and even if they appear on social media. Our passion for justice or a particular cause does not give us the freedom to make claims that cannot be substantiated, to jump to conclusions without fact finding and analysis or to simply follow the crowd. I will borrow from an old saying that has guided my professional career. “First, to thine own self be true, and it shall follow as the night the day, thou cannot then be false to any man.”

Thank you for coming and participating in today’s conversation.

Delivered on September 27 and October 5, 2017.

