HELPING OTHERS
RISE

A Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Plan for Ferris State University

2023-2027 DIVERSITY PLAN

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"Get all the knowledge you can, but use your knowledge in the right way, and it will be of untold benefit to you. Don't use it in oppressing others …. And when you see a man or woman trying to rise and doing the right thing, don't be selfish but try to help that person rise."
~Woodbridge Nathan Ferris, 1910

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Helping Others Rise: A Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Plan for Ferris State University

The Diversity and Inclusion Office (now the Diversity, Inclusion, and Strategic Initiatives Office, DISI) was created in January 2007.[1] The Office led the work to create Ferris' first diversity plan. The university community spent months debating definitions of diversity and inclusion. These debates were necessary—and productive. After coming to a consensus on what is meant by *diversity* and *inclusion*, the campus community next identified four strategic goals accompanied by proposed initiatives and actions. The challenge was strategically embedding diversity and inclusion into the University's infrastructure. Each division was charged with creating work teams and empowering those teams to implement action plans consisting of specific initiatives, assigned tasks, and systems for monitoring progress. In 2008, the DISIO began producing annual reports—*Diversity at Ferris*—to monitor progress across the University.

Over the next decade, the University invested significant resources in creating offices that serve underrepresented populations, including the Office of International Education, the Center for Latin@ Studies, the Veterans Resource Center, and the LGBTQ+ Resource Center.[2] These offices joined with the Office of Multicultural Student Services (created in 1986) to help with student recruitment, retention, and graduation. Here was tangible evidence of the University's commitment to becoming a more inclusive environment.

In 2016, the University adopted its second diversity plan, *There Is a Home for You at Ferris State University*. The initiatives in that plan resulted from a yearlong assessment, including a diversity audit conducted by two external firms: Ibis Consulting Group and Creative Diversity; the deliberations of a university-wide planning group; and discussions between the DISIO vice president and individuals and groups at the University. The plan focused on both diversity and inclusion.

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[1] For simplicity, DISIO will be used to refer to the Office, including the past and present.
[2] The name of the Center for Latin@ Studies is being reviewed and is likely to change.

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The University that created, adopted, and implemented that plan is far different today. We are smaller. In 2016, there were 14,187 students enrolled at Ferris, by 2022, that number had decreased to 10,072. This represented almost a 30 percent decrease. Fewer students resulted in less tuition revenue—and a smaller workforce. In 2016, the University had 1,521 full-time employees; by 2022, there were 1,171 full-time employees, a 23 percent decrease. The total workforce numbers, including part-time employees, are even more revealing. In 2016 there were 2,070 employees; in 2022, there were 1,473, a 29 percent decrease. It is not inconsequential that the University has fewer financial and human resources.

This document represents the University's latest plan. It is entitled *Helping Others Rise*. This plan will emphasize diversity—for example, increasing the number of racial and ethnic minorities in the student body and the workforce. And it will have an inclusion focus, meaning creating a welcoming campus. But this plan will also focus on equity. In its simplest terms, equity means giving every student and employee what they need to succeed by increasing access, resources, and opportunities, especially for those individuals and groups who have been historically disadvantaged in the country and underrepresented at Ferris State University. Finally, this plan represents the first university-wide planning document that has *belonging* as a driving force.

This plan has fewer initiatives than earlier plans. In part, this is because of fewer students and employees—stated bluntly, there are not as many people to do the work. This means that the University must be more strategic as it tackles the important work that needs to be done. The initiatives in this plan are meaningful, doable, and measurable. More importantly, they are necessary.

Helping Others Rise is a living document—one that can be updated as necessary in the future. As Ferris State continues to change, it may be necessary for the University to seek out different approaches to reach its DEIB goals.

Guiding Principles

The University's guiding principles are embedded in and expressed by our core values, mission, and vision. These guiding principles should be the foundation for all the work done at Ferris State University.

Core Values

Collaboration: Ferris builds partnerships within the University and the global community that promote shared goals and success.

Diversity: Ferris commits to being an inclusive university community that respects the dignity of the individual and promotes the acceptance of others.

Ethical Community: Ferris implements policies, procedures, and actions to promote transparency, advance our mission and foster integrity, civility, and respect within and beyond the University.

Excellence: Ferris dedicates itself to innovation and quality execution that sustains and promotes relevance in a changing world through best practices and benchmarking.

Learning: Ferris promotes hands-on, transformative learning; balancing theory and practice, encouraging teamwork and innovation, and emphasizing critical thinking—all are fundamental elements of career success.

Opportunity: Ferris honors the legacy of our founders by encouraging and supporting all who wish to acquire the knowledge, leadership, and communication skills that are the foundations of personal success.

Mission

Ferris State University prepares students for successful careers, responsible citizenship, and lifelong learning. Through its many partnerships and its career-oriented, broad-based education, Ferris serves our rapidly changing global economy and society.

Vision

Building on the vision of our founders, Ferris State University will be an agile and transformational university. By integrating theory and practice, we will

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foster opportunity, discovery, and professional preparation for a dynamic global society.

Defining Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) at Ferris State University

A university community needs a shared understanding of key terms when developing a diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging plan. The creation of a shared vocabulary is done before introducing strategic goals. The following definitions were produced after discussions with Ferris State University students, faculty, and staff:

Diversity is the range of human differences, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, social class, physical ability or attributes, religious or ethical values system, national origin, and political beliefs.

Equity refers to fair and just practices that ensure access, resources, and opportunities are provided for all to succeed and grow.

Inclusion is involvement and empowerment, where all people's inherent worth and dignity are recognized.

Belonging is feeling valued, respected, supported, and empowered in your professional, educational, and personal endeavors.

Underrepresented refers to groups that, relative to their demographic presence in the population, have lower-than-average participation rates in colleges and universities.

The Planning Process

Creating this DEIB plan—*Helping Others Rise*—involved students, faculty, and staff from across the University. Much of the work was done in partnership with EAB, a nationally renowned consulting firm specializing in assisting with higher education resources. Below is the timetable that was used.

DEIB Planning Timeline

May 25, 2020—Derek Chauvin, a white Minneapolis police officer, killed George Floyd, a Black man, by kneeling on his neck for nine and a half

minutes. The death, recorded by bystanders, touched off the largest protest movement in U.S. history and a nationwide and global reckoning on race and policing.

June 2020 – A town hall meeting was held to hear Ferris community member's thoughts about the killing of George Floyd and their views on the racial climate at Ferris.

June 2020 – A demonstration/vigil was held on the Ferris campus with nearly 500 students, faculty, staff, local public safety and police officers, and the surrounding Big Rapids community members.

Summer 2020 – In response to the town hall meeting and the demonstration/vigil, Ferris issued *Our University's Continuing Commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion*, a document that outlined specific actions that the University will undertake.

September 2020 – The university-wide diversity committee met to discuss the racial climate at Ferris.

From October 21-November 25, 2020 – Ferris State University students participated in the National Assessment of Collegiate Campus Climates (NACCC) survey. The survey assessed, from students' perspectives, the racial climate at the University.

November 2020 – The University held a town hall meeting to discuss a recent incident involving a faculty member's comments about race and COVID-19.

November 2020—The University created a DPS and Office of Student Conduct Data Committee. The committee produced a report with recommendations in April 2022. The committee, which also looked at housing data, continues its work.

December 2020—The University created a Campus Climate Team.

February 2021 – The VP for Diversity, Inclusion, and Strategic Initiatives gave an annual report on the University's progress in implementing the initiatives in the current DEI plan and led a discussion with the Board of Trustees about the University's next plan.

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April 2021—The Public Safety and Office of Student Conduct Committee shared its report at a university town hall meeting.

April 2021 – The VP for Diversity, Inclusion, and Strategic Initiatives Senate Diversity Committee met with the Academic Senate's Diversity Committee to discuss the new DEIB plan.

July 2021 – The DISIO began working with EAB on equity and DEIB planning.

August 2021 – The DISIO met with the Senate Diversity Committee meeting to discuss the University's next DEIB plan.

September 2021 – The DISIO met with the university-wide diversity committee to discuss the University's next DEIB plan.

September 2021 through October 2021 – EAB consultants collected surveys from members of the Ferris community to help them diagnose our status regarding equity and inclusion.

September 2021 through December 2021—EAB consultants reviewed the University's current DEI plan.

February 2022 – The VP for DISIO updated the Board of Trustees on the University's plans and progress toward creating a new DEIB plan.

February 2022—The DISIO met with the Academic Senate Diversity Committee to discuss diversity initiatives and the creation of a new DEIB plan.

February 2022 – With our partners from EAB, the Ferris Equity Initiative (FEI) leadership team hosted an FEI Leadership Institute for all the Best Practice Team leaders. The institute included project management training, a review of the pre-built plan for their respective practice, and training and resources on the appropriate approach to implementing the best practice.

March 2022 – The FEI leadership team and our partners at EAB hosted the first annual FEI Convening, which allowed the University community to learn more about the initiative and the best practices adopted.

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April 2022 – The VP of DISIO hosted one-on-one and group listening sessions across the University (Examples: Student Affairs Directors, Administrative Council, and Dean's Council).

April 2022 – The DISIO updated the university-wide diversity committee on the progress regarding developing a new DEIB plan.

September 2022 – The DISIO updated the university-wide diversity committee on the progress regarding developing a new DEIB plan.

October 2022 – The Ferris community was asked to participate in a survey designed to help define *Equity* and *Belonging*.

November 2022 – The DISIO updated the university-wide diversity committee on the progress regarding developing a new DEIB plan.

November 2022-March 2023—The University community responded to proposed DEIB Goals 1-4 via surveys.

December 2022-March 2023 – EAB facilitated DEI planning focus groups.

January 2023 – The DISIO met with Academic Senate Diversity Committee to discuss the new DEIB plan.

February 2023-- The VP for DISIO updated the Board of Trustees on the progress toward creating a new DEIB plan.

February 2023 – The VP for DISIO met with the university-wide diversity committee to discuss the proposed initiatives in the new DEIB plan.

February 2023 – The FEI leadership team and our partners at EAB hosted the second annual FEI Convening. During the 2023 convening Ed Venit, Managing Director of EAB student success research, shared his research titled "Navigating the Recovery" regarding higher education's continued struggle with the long-term disruption brought on by the pandemic and the profound impact on enrollment student success and equity.

March-August 2023 – EAB reviewed the new DEIB plan draft.

July-August 2023 – University members reviewed the DEIB plan draft.

The Plan

Diversity, equity, inclusion, and a sense of belonging were central to Ferris State University's past, and they remain essential as we approach the future. Our founder, Woodbridge Nathan Ferris, was a champion for human rights before it was popular—or even normative. *Helping Others Rise* is our latest effort to live out his legacy. Through this DEIB plan, Ferris renews its commitment to providing fair treatment, access, and opportunity to all students and employees. *Helping Others Rise* charts a course for the future and leverages our efforts and resources toward becoming the University we aspire to be.

This plan has four strategic goals. Action steps follow each goal. These action steps are the proposed work for the University. This plan will measure progress over time at the University.

GOAL 1: Create a welcoming and inclusive environment where students and employees feel a sense of belonging.

Actions:

Develop, deliver, and strongly encourage diversity, discrimination, and harassment training for all employees and students, emphasizing fostering equity-minded educational environments.

Provide confidential and easily accessed processes for students to report grievances.

Institute regularly administered climate surveys and other information-gathering tools for students, faculty, and staff — such as focus groups, town hall meetings, and topical discussion groups — and use the data collected by these tools to inform policy and practice.

Include DEIB responsibilities and performance indicators, as appropriate, in employee evaluations.

Create and promote a yearly calendar of DEIB events.

GOAL 2: Enroll, retain, and graduate a diverse student body.

Actions:

Where possible, create scholarships that target underrepresented students.

Each college should identify, implement, and support practices that address achievement gaps—persistence and graduation—between white students and students of color.

Increase the number of students engaged with Navigate.

Develop a comprehensive retention plan.

Academic Affairs is in the process of developing a Master Plan. That plan should include strategies for incorporating diversity and inclusion in significant ways in teaching, learning, and research.

GOAL 3: Hire, retain, and promote a diverse faculty and staff.

The Ferris State University definition of diversity includes race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, social class, physical ability, or attributes, religious or ethical values system, national origin, and political beliefs. Having a diverse workforce would be inclusive of all these differences. However, Ferris State University has struggled to hire, retain, and promote racially and ethnically diverse faculty and staff.

Actions:

Hold every division and college accountable for bringing DEIB excellence into recruitment and hiring practices.

Review exit survey data to identify trends.

Provide learning opportunities for departmental chairs, deans, and search committee members to incorporate best practices for hiring and advancement of faculty.

Design and implement a well-organized, intentional, and strategically planned employee mentorship program.

GOAL 4: Provide the infrastructure to support diversity, inclusion, equity, and belonging.

Actions:

Develop a comprehensive system of accountability and assessment that quantifies the University's performance about specified DEIB goals.

Develop a plan that addresses access for students and staff with diverse needs, such as gender-neutral bathrooms, prayer /meditation rooms, lactation spaces, and physical access to campus facilities.

Ensure all facilities and communication platforms are fully accessible and universal design practices are implemented throughout the University.

Better align the work done by cultural offices.

Designate additional physical spaces across campus for activities and dialogues focused on equity, inclusion, and diversity issues—inclusive of creating a center that houses all cultural and identity centers.

Embed DEIB practices into all major university planning.

Key Numerical Indicators

✓ Sense of belonging as reflected in tri-annual climate survey
✓ Minority student enrollment
✓ The graduation rates of students in groups with high rates of attrition
✓ The diversity of employees in the workforce

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