

Diversity Action Plan: 2008-2011

STRIKING BALANCE: Our Commitment to Inclusive Excellence



UNIVERSITY *of* ST. THOMAS

Diversity Action Plan Vision Statement

By 2011, it is our hope that diversity action planning will have played a major role in facilitating transformative, educational experiences for people, organizations and communities associated with the University of St. Thomas. St. Thomas strives to foster and sustain an environment of inclusiveness that empowers us all to achieve our highest potential without fear of prejudice or bias.

We commit ourselves to building an exemplary educational community and workforce that offers a nurturing and challenging intellectual climate, a respect for the spectrum of human diversity, and a genuine understanding of the many differences-including race, ethnicity, national origin, gender and sexual orientation, age, socio-economic background, religion, geographic and linguistic background, physical and cognitive ability-that enrich a vibrant urban teaching university. We expect every member of our St. Thomas community to embrace the underlying values of this vision and to demonstrate a strong commitment to diversity and inclusion.

Critical Success Factors for Diversity and Inclusion

1. **Commitment to Action.** We are committed to learning by doing. Community, diversity, and inclusion mean different things to different people. In order for these concepts to be integral parts of St. Thomas, they must be rooted in action by all UST stakeholders.
2. **Demonstrated Leadership.** Diversity is a key component of the UST mission. All campus leaders are tasked to show demonstrated leadership in issues of diversity and inclusion.
3. **Empowerment at the Classroom and Unit Levels.** This is not a top down plan. It allows for differences within departments and disciplines and calls for empowerment at the classroom and unit levels. We will be developing tools for individual and collective accountability.
4. **Effective Partnerships.** By nature, diversity and inclusion do not happen in a vacuum, UST must do a better job of building effective partnerships with key organizations on campus, the surrounding community, Minnesota, and the nation.
5. **Innovation.** As the realities of the 21st century continue to emerge, America will rise to challenges presented by issues of diversity and inclusion. Any realistic attempts to address these issues on our campus require stakeholders to “think outside of the box” and be innovative.

University's Mission, Vision, & Convictions

Mission

Inspired by Catholic intellectual tradition, the University of St. Thomas *educates students to be morally responsible leaders who think critically, act wisely and work skillfully to advance the common good.*

Convictions

As a community we are committed to:

Pursuit of truth

We value intellectual inquiry as a life-long habit, the unfettered and impartial pursuit of truth in all its forms, the integration of knowledge across disciplines, and the imaginative and creative exploration of new ideas.

Academic excellence

We create a culture among employees, students and staff that recognize the power of ideas and rewards rigorous thinking.

Faith and reason

We actively engage Catholic intellectual tradition, which values the fundamental compatibility of faith and reason and fosters meaningful dialogue directed toward the flourishing of human culture.

Vision

We seek to be a recognized leader in Catholic higher education that *excels in effective teaching, active learning, scholarly research and responsible engagement with the local community as well as with the national and global communities in which we live.*

Dignity

We respect the dignity of each person and value the unique contributions that each brings to the greater mosaic of the university community.

Diversity

We strive to create a vibrant diverse community in which, together, we work for a more just and inclusive society.

Personal attention

We foster a caring culture that supports the well-being of each member.

Gratitude

We celebrate the achievements of all members of our community in goals attained and obstacles overcome, and in all things give praise to God.

Diversity in the University's *Strategic Themes & Priorities*

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This commitment is not new. Greater diversity and inclusiveness are entirely consistent with the goals stated in the University's *Strategic Priorities: Planning for the Future* document¹, which was approved in concept on May 4, 2006 by St. Thomas' Board of Trustees. In these strategic priorities we seek to implement our mission and vision by addressing three critical challenges that are key to making the next steps forward in our history: first, to contain the effects of a national trend of ever-increasing costs in higher education and to insure that education for all qualified students is affordable (**ACCESS**); second, to make new breakthroughs in effective teaching and active learning that foster a holistic approach to education (**EXCELLENCE**); and third, to deepen our identity as a faith-based, Catholic university where the integration of faith and reason develops leaders who are committed to the common good (**CATHOLIC IDENTITY**).

STRATEGIC THEME 1: ACCESS

- As a Catholic university which seeks "to advance the common good," **St. Thomas will provide resources to recruit and develop a talented and diverse community of employees, staff and students** who are committed to leadership and service in society (p. 2)[*bold responds to Focus Areas #1 and #3*]
- The University will **attract and retain a highly talented and diverse student body at the undergraduate and graduate levels** by reducing financial barriers **and improving the environment for under-represented groups on campus** (p. 2). [*responds to Focus Areas #3 and #4*]

STRATEGIC THEME 2: EXCELLENCE

- We will **develop and execute a comprehensive plan for the fostering of academic excellence for all students** at the University of St. Thomas (p. 4). [*bold responds to Focus Areas #1, #2, and #4*]
- The University will **hire and retain diverse employees and staff of the highest quality in order to enrich the teaching and work environment** and to provide appropriate mentors and role models for all students (p. 5). [*bold responds to Focus Areas #1, #3, and #4*]

STRATEGIC THEME 3: CATHOLIC IDENTITY

- The University of St. Thomas will give witness to the social teaching of the Church in its communal life, and will **integrate principles of social justice across the curriculum and in co-curricular activities** in order to educate students "to be morally responsible leaders" (p. 7). [*bold responds to Focus Areas #2 and #4*]
- The University of St. Thomas will **foster an academic community that is known for civil and respectful dialogue** that both honors its Catholic tradition and is **open to learn from those of other traditions and viewpoints** (p. 7). [*bold responds to Focus Areas #1, #2, and #4*]

¹ This document can be found on the UST website at www.stthomas.edu/mission/strategicplanning

Planning Framework

While it is important to learn from the experiences, it is equally important to remember that this university is a unique learning and work environment. Based both on the research literature and our own experience, an effective university-wide Diversity Plan must represent the sum of the realities and possibilities of this University community.

Conceptualizing a Framework for Diversity and Inclusion: *Inclusive Excellence*

Inclusive excellence at the University of St. Thomas is defined as valuing differences with the intention of promoting learning, critical thinking, and personal enrichment of students that enables them to contribute to an increasingly diverse society and world as graduates of the University. Inclusive excellence builds a welcoming campus community that promotes learning for all students, administrators, faculty, contract professionals and staff. As we design a university that embraces inclusive excellence, our policies and protocols will reflect equity and educational quality for all. With respect to a diverse student body, equitable outcomes are about access, retention and graduation rates; for our employees ... access and promotion of a diverse, culturally and professionally competent employee population.

As articulated by American Association of Colleges and Universities, *Inclusive Excellence* in education is characterized by:

- Focusing on student intellectual and social development.
- Developing and utilizing organizational resources to enhance student learning and knowledge development—organizationally by challenging each student to high academic achievement and each organization member to contribute to learning and knowledge development.
- Being attentive to and drawing on the cultural diversity that learners bring to the educational experience to enhance teaching and learning.
- Building a welcoming community that engages all of its diversity in the service of student and organizational learning.

Designing living, learning and working environments for inclusive excellence will enable us to engage in civil conversation and reasoned debate with those who hold views that differ from our own and to interact with persons who have had different life experiences. The environments we design should provide ample opportunities to learn about diverse cultures locally and globally. They will support scholarship, professional development and pedagogy that are culturally responsive, facilitating inter-cultural interaction and a systematic approach to linking co-curricular experiences with academic programs.

The University of St. Thomas realizes that, to be a great Catholic university, to achieve and maintain excellence, we must expand and learn from the diverse talents of all members of the University community. Indeed, rather than defining ourselves by the numbers and types of individuals we exclude, we shall measure our efforts by the value we add in enabling the success of the diverse community of students we include.

Universities that commit to the successful implementation of a diversity plan should be guided by a sound conceptual framework. While there is no absolute objective way of laying out a single framework for diversity especially across varied institutional types, it is possible to identify a cluster of characteristics from diversity research and scholarship that are associated with “best practices”. Moreover, this conceptual framework for diversity should be closely linked to the more general framework for successful institutional change and transformation. Few institutions can provide equal attention to all five areas simultaneously. However, institutions can conceptualize their long term and short-term goals for each and the expected inter-relationships. Therefore, the proposed *Inclusive Excellence* framework for achieving diversity and inclusion has been created will serve as a compass for this Diversity Action Plan.



Our “inclusive excellence” model to achieve institutional diversity provides a framework of four broad areas of focus. The strengths of the model lie in its comprehensiveness, clarity, flexibility, relevance and usefulness. It is as effective in guiding institution-wide diversity efforts, as it is in guiding small unit diversity and inclusion initiatives.

DIVERSITY ACTION PLAN

Commitment to Diversity

Diversity is an indispensable component of inclusive excellence and holistic development. As a *Catholic* university and the largest *private* institution of higher learning in Minnesota, the University of St. Thomas has both an extraordinary opportunity and a special responsibility to create and maintain a climate that affirms diversity of persons as well as diversity of views. A commitment to diversity means a commitment to the inclusion, welcome, and support of individuals from all groups, encompassing the various characteristics of persons in our community. Among these characteristics are race, ethnicity, national origin, gender and sexual orientation, age, socio-economic background, religion, geographic and linguistic background, physical and cognitive ability. As we harness the power of diversity, we will provide students, employees, and staff a university experience rich in perspectives and opportunities to learn from each other.

Diversity is central to our institutional mission of teaching and educating students “to be morally responsible leaders who think critically, act wisely, and work skillfully to advance the common good.”² Purposely, we include “dignity” and “diversity” as part of our institutional Convictions: “*We respect the dignity of each person and value the unique contributions that each brings to the greater mosaic of the university community*”; and, “*We strive to create a vibrant diverse community in which, together, we work for a more just and inclusive society.*”³ In the strength of shared accountability, we encourage each academic and administrative unit, student organization, and campus community member to help make our campus a welcoming place for all. We are committed to the complex and dynamic process of creating an environment in which the benefits of diversity are realized. To this end, we propose an institutionalized **Diversity Action Plan** that assures accountability on institutional and individual levels; provides evidence of measurable progress over the long-term; and, ensures sustained engagement at all levels.

Definitions

It is important to note that the definitions provided here have been generated for use in this *Plan*. As more progress is made towards finalizing the **Diversity Action Plan**, definitions for how these terms (diversity, multiculturalism, and interculturalism) are used may change.

² University of St. Thomas *Mission Statement*.

³ University of St. Thomas *Convictions* #4 and #5, respectively.

- **Diversity**—encompasses inclusion, acceptance, and respect. It [diversity] requires the presence and participation of individuals who differ and are similar by characteristics such as, but not necessarily limited to race, ethnicity, national origin, gender and sexual orientation, age, socio-economic background, religion, geographic and linguistic background, physical and cognitive ability. Diversity also involves investigating and examining the socially-produced sources of those differences that result in systems of hierarchy and exclusion that have a history we all need to understand.
- **Multiculturalism**-is a belief that speaks to the issues of human diversity, cultural pluralism, human rights, and social justice for all people. It encompasses social climate, curricular and co-curricular, and administrative initiatives designed to help students and employees benefit from the many roles, alternatives, and opportunities that may originate from the full spectrum of cultures. It is the process of dismantling the structures and hierarchies that reproduce unequal power relations for the benefit of a few. Multiculturalism goes beyond the recognition of diversity (James, 1993).⁴
- **Interculturalism**-involves global and local interconnections; how cultures evolve through encounters with each other; interdependence of cultures; cultures as dynamic processes, necessarily interdisciplinary; attention to power dynamics as they affect interactions of cultures.⁵

⁴ James, J. (1993) ...*Black Scholar*, 23 (3 & 4).

⁵ From UST Employees Development Initiative *Teaching for Global Citizenship Conceptual Framework*.

Context—2007 Opinion Survey on Campus Climate and Diversity Action Planning

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To establish an institutional culture that supports diversity and inclusion, the Office of Institutional Diversity (OID) recommended, and the president appointed a nineteen-member University Diversity Advisory Council (UDAC) in December 2005. Since February 2006, OID has been engaged in developing the *Diversity Action Plan (DAP)* to support UST’s growing diverse community. This plan represents a “living” document that will be updated and revised, based on input from the University community and campus officials involved in implementing the initiatives described in the *Plan*. Progress on this plan is expected to be assessed annually, and the full document will be updated in 2011.

Campus Climate/Culture Audit Initiative

The University of St. Thomas recently completed a two-phase, year-long *2007 Opinion Survey on Campus Climate*. The President’s Office and OID partnered with Global Lead Management Consulting—an externally contracted service provide—who will oversee the development of a strategy specific to St. Thomas. The agreed deliverables from this survey were to:

- Provide measurable, strategic data that will provide direction for moving the diversity initiative forward at the University through the execution of a culture audit with both a qualitative and quantitative phase to fully capture the broad range of perceptions within the University.
- Identify key areas of strength and opportunity to enhance and improve diversity and inclusion. In addition, the assessment should surface any emerging trends relative to the University’s ongoing diversity initiatives.
- Establish a baseline measurement to assess the impact of diversity initiatives on key performance indicators going forward.
- Increase understanding of the perceptions of diversity among administrators and deans, chairs and faculty, staff and students– and determine how these perceptions impact the diversity initiative’s current progress.
- Present the climate study’s findings to key University constituencies as agreed upon by St. Thomas and Global Lead Management Consulting.

Global Lead’s *A Roadmap for Change* is a recommended approach for strategic diversity, inclusion and culture change at the University of St. Thomas. This recommended approach, encompassing key areas of focus, is the result of deep analysis of the 2007 UST climate assessment findings, coupled with extensive experience in helping academic institutions create a successful infrastructure for diversity and inclusion. Importantly, this approach is based upon identified strategic diversity and inclusion principles, which fall into *three critical areas*, and which can and should be addressed concurrently: **(1) Leadership Commitment and Involvement, (2) Engagement and Retention, and (3) Education and Training.**

The focus areas and subsequent sample actions listed in Global Lead's document are designed to create a dialogue among St. Thomas stakeholders, and are high-level strategic actions for consideration. It is important to note that St. Thomas may be already executing some of these recommended actions; however, based on the assessment findings, there is the opportunity to implement these types of strategies more broadly across the institution.

Next Steps 2008-2009: Diversity Inventory and Commitment to Action

Since Global Lead's presentations and final visit in April 2008, Fr. Dease requested that Dr. Lawrence Potter (Executive Director and Chief Diversity Officer), Dr. Susan Alexander (Executive Advisor to the President), and Ms. Edna Comedy (Associate Vice President for Human Resources) provide leadership for immediate next steps. We arranged two focus group meetings in August (with representatives from the University Diversity Advisory Council, Affirmative Action Committee, Human Resources Advisory Committee, Academic and Administrative Leadership Group and Executive Committee of the Faculty Senate) and two open brown bag sessions in October (one on the St. Paul and Minneapolis campuses) for input, discussion, and suggestions regarding next step actions. In addition to the focus groups and brown bag sessions, we met with Jane Canney (Vice President for Student Affairs) in September; and, Dr. Susan Huber (Interim Executive Vice President/Chief Academic Officer) and Dr. Mark Dienhart (Executive Vice President/Chief Administrative Officer) in November to discuss implementation ideas.

For the purposes of this *Diversity Action Plan*, we have modified the aforementioned *three critical areas* into four areas of focus: **(1) Leadership Commitment and Involvement, (2) Curriculum, Education and Training, (3) Recruitment and Retention, and (4) Community Building**. One expected outcome from Year One (2008-2009) of the *Plan* is to have all academic and administrative units:

1. Identify and report existing diversity and inclusion initiatives in their respective areas to the Office of Institutional Diversity of the appropriate Executive Vice President (by December 3, 2008);
2. Create new or enhance existing initiatives that would help promote inclusion, equity and intercultural learning. The new or enhanced initiatives must align with the four key focus areas. That is not to say, that all departments/units should have diversity initiatives in each focus area. However, departments/units are encouraged to include diversity and inclusion initiatives where appropriate. University officials and units will be responsible for implementing diversity and inclusion initiatives in Year One of the Plan (2008-09). OID is available to provide assistance and help units develop metrics that demonstrate institutional commitment.

Once alignment occurs at the senior-most levels, the next critical step will be to create a robust institution-wide strategic plan that includes quantifiable metrics in each of the focus areas to help advance the institution's diversity and inclusion initiative.

Culture Change is a Journey: Where We Are

St. Thomas has articulated its commitment to diversity and inclusion, and engaged in a comprehensive assessment of perceptions of the current climate, including quantitative and qualitative perceptions of diversity-related strengths and opportunities at the University. The assessment surfaced favorable perceptions with respect to several key themes important to campus climate. **The assessment also suggests room for improvement across a range of key theme areas.** Successful and sustainable climate change will require bold, consistent, and holistic efforts.

SEE ATTACHED MAPPING GRID
(which outlines current diversity activities by departments/units)

Futuring Diversity and Inclusion: Planning and Evaluating 2009-2011

The *Diversity Action Plan* provides a framework for developing unit plans. This *Plan* offers a structure and process for planning action steps to sufficiently address University's four focus areas on diversity and inclusion. The four focus areas provide emphasis and guidance to departments and units in developing institutional diversity priorities for the next two years (2009-2011). Department/unit leaders have the responsibility to translate these priorities into unit-level reality and progress.

1. The Office of Institutional Diversity shall serve as a resource to units
2. Each unit should develop/implement goals/strategies actions only in those focus areas relevant to their function(s) across the university
3. Diversity and inclusion goals/strategies should be aligned with the four focus areas
4. Diversity and inclusion goals/strategies should guide resource allocations, timelines, and measurable outcomes
5. Progress on each diversity and inclusion goals/strategies should be measured and reported twice per year; in turn, the Office of Institutional Diversity will monitor and compile annual university-wide diversity progress reports

Each department/unit leader will be responsible for:

- A. Making diversity an integral part of the unit's mission, planning, and day-to-day operations;
- B. Aligning its diversity and inclusion goals/strategies with the four focus areas outlined in the *Diversity Action Plan* and with the *University Strategic Priorities*, whenever possible;
- C. Implementing its diversity and inclusion goals/strategies and setting measurable outcomes;
- D. Reporting progress regarding these initiatives annually beginning 2009-2010 academic year.