

October 22, 2020

To: University of Iowa Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Stakeholders (Undergraduate Student Government, Graduate and Professional Student Government; Staff Council; Faculty Senate; Center for Diversity and Enrichment; President Harreld; Interim Provost Kregel; Interim Associate Vice President of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Tovar; Council of Deans, Students, Trainees, Staff, and Faculty of University of Iowa)

From: The Undersigned Members of the Search Committee for the Associate Vice President of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at the University of Iowa

We are writing as a subset of the members of the search committee for the Associate Vice President of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (AVP-DEI) at the University of Iowa. As you may know, our current search for an AVP-DEI has been discontinued and our committee has been disbanded, subsequent to President Harreld's announcement of his upcoming retirement. This is very disappointing to us. We recognize that efforts to achieve equity, diversity, and inclusion throughout our institution have fallen short of our aspirations, and we have been highly invested in helping to bring transformative, results-oriented DEI leadership to Iowa over the last several months.

The University of Iowa holds diversity, equity, and inclusion as core values, as described in our [Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Action Plan](#). Indeed, academe increasingly recognizes that attention to DEI is essential for a successful 21st-century university. Iowa has been a predominantly and historically white institution, but its campus is gradually becoming a more diverse community of students, staff, and faculty. Promoting equity and inclusion will maximize the contributions and success of all its members, while ensuring their safety and sense of belonging. It will generate more dynamic learning, innovative research activities, and responsive service to the state. Ultimately, DEI efforts support free and independent scholarship within an atmosphere of cooperation, respect, and collective wellbeing. Many campus members are already working tirelessly to advance DEI initiatives on campus; however, our community and its leaders have struggled to live up to our stated values. Given the importance of DEI, strong campus leadership is essential. Although we are dismayed by the close of this search, we thank Dr. Tovar for admirably serving as Interim AVP-DEI, and we pledge our continued support for her in this role.

We are writing today in a forward-looking manner about Iowa's next search for a DEI leader. We want to emphasize at the outset that we recognize and respect that the ultimate decision about the next hire rests with Iowa's President and Provost. Presumably a search committee such as ours will guide the President and Provost regarding their selection. Thus, we are writing with recommendations based on our experience to strengthen the processes surrounding the next search. Further, we make recommendations for the current presidential search, given the central role that our next President will play in the success of DEI efforts on campus. Below, we make recommendations in several key areas that we believe are critical to obtaining the kind of transformative leadership necessary to make substantial progress in the area of DEI at Iowa.

Nature of the DEI Leadership Position

The person assuming the DEI leadership position at Iowa must have the necessary authority, resources, job security, and regular access to senior leadership to catalyze DEI-related change and help create an anti-racist campus and community. Thus, it is critical for the person in this position to report to and meet regularly with the President; to serve as a Vice President, rather than as an Associate Vice

President; and to be a member of the President's Cabinet. Moreover, tenured faculty who apply for the position should do so knowing that their tenured status will be maintained, similarly to other high-level administrators at Iowa. This would enhance both job security and the respect the DEI leader commands among faculty, administrators, and Regents.

Qualifications for DEI Leadership Position

The most critical qualification for the DEI leadership position is demonstrated success leading large-scale, transformational change initiatives that advance equity, diversity, and inclusion. At Iowa, as at many other universities, this will entail working extensively with and earning the respect of students and staff, post-terminal degree trainees (e.g., postdocs and residents), faculty and administrators, and the community at large. Ideally, the selected candidate would have worked extensively with all of these constituent groups. The DEI leader should be well-prepared to address a broad range of DEI issues related to racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual identities; disability; religion; national origin; social class; military service; and many other identities and their intersectionalities.

Both faculty and non-faculty with an advanced degree should be eligible for this position, in an effort to remain open to a diverse array of potential change agents.

Excellent interpersonal and public communication skills will be key. To effect institutional and organizational change, the DEI leader must be able to challenge our community and its leadership in a judicious manner, to present and discuss controversial topics, and to address conflict in a way that builds consensus and produces meaningful outcomes.

The DEI leader should be highly familiar with, or engage in, DEI-related scholarship, and the person assuming the position should have significant knowledge about how issues of equity and inclusion (including relevant federal and state EEO and civil rights laws, regulations, and guidelines) impact students, trainees, staff, and faculty in campus communities.

The DEI leader should have strong track records in budget development and management; in the recruitment and management of both direct reports and working groups; in the collection, analysis, and presentation of data bearing on DEI priorities; and ideally in the solicitation and securing of external funding to provide additional support for DEI initiatives.

Finally, intellectual depth and breadth will be necessary to command respect and establish credibility in all areas of our campus and community.

Search Committee Membership for DEI Leadership Position

The membership of the search committee should be representative of campus stakeholders with respect to DEI. DEI issues are no less central to students and trainees than to staff and faculty, and we would expect our DEI leader to work closely with and advance DEI initiatives among all of these constituencies. Thus, students need to be well-represented on the committee, and trainees should also have a voice. At a minimum, at least two undergraduate and two graduate student representatives should be included on the search committee, and consideration should be given as to whether representation based solely on the shared governance model is sufficient for students. Care should also be taken to ensure that DEI staff on campus are well-represented, particularly given their unique vantage onto the DEI-related challenges we face at Iowa, as well as what is necessary to effect substantial change. Further, it will be important for all search committee members to complete training

on fair practices and the role of implicit bias in hiring decisions, and we strongly recommend that the President and Provost complete these trainings with the committee.

Communications of Search Committee for DEI Leadership Position

Communications among the search committee, senior administration, the search firm, and stakeholders should be both regular and transparent. Close coordination among the search committee, President, and Provost is critical, necessitating regular meetings for candid discussion of sensitive issues. A system should be put into place to ensure that regular and transparent communication about the search occurs not only with staff and faculty, but also with students, as our communication methods often differ across these constituencies. Similarly, a system should be in place to ensure that nominations for the DEI leadership position can be obtained from all stakeholders, including students. Finally, it will be critical to establish a highly accessible and transparent system for the search committee to obtain, compile, and consider feedback on candidates from all stakeholders before making recommendations to the President regarding the position.

Current Presidential Search

The President of our university must be a knowledgeable, engaged, and effective collaborator of and advocate for the DEI leader in the development of a more diverse, inclusive, and equitable climate for members of marginalized and oppressed groups. Thus, it is critical for presidential candidates to provide compelling evidence that they think deeply about DEI issues and have considered seriously the implications of their identities for their role and decision making. Moreover, presidential candidates need to have invested substantially and successfully in advancing DEI issues in their prior positions, and they need to articulate a compelling plan to advance DEI issues in specific, impactful ways on our campus. Finally, the presidential search committee should include adequate representation of the stakeholders of Iowa with respect to DEI, including students, trainees, staff, and faculty who are centrally involved in DEI efforts on our campus.

As we conclude our service on the search committee for the University of Iowa's next leader of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, we share these recommendations in the hope that adhering to them will increase the likelihood that UI ultimately can become the diverse, equitable, and welcoming community to which we all aspire.

Sincerely,

Moala Bannavti, Former (2019-2020) GPSG DEI Chair and current delegate of GSS (Graduate Student Senate, Physical, Mathematical, and Engineering Sciences

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