SPREAD INCLUSIVE JOY THIS SEASON

This time of year is characterized by celebrations of life, family, and values, regardless of the practiced traditions of faith. Yet, during this time of celebration, we must avoid missteps by remembering that everyone does not observe and celebrate the same way or during the same time.

As you attend or coordinate festivities for the season, consider the following best practices to promote inclusivity for all:

- Make it voluntary. Others may have personal reasons for wanting to steer clear. (Grief, finances, religious practices, or preference)
- Provide food options. Consider the food that meets kosher, halal, vegetarian, and restrictive dietary needs.
- Choose decorations carefully. Seek ways to make them festive and inclusive of multi-faith colors and symbols.
- Create awareness. Invite community members to share information about their faith practice as part of the festivities.
FALL SEMESTER SUCCESS AT SAM

While the return to normal operations at SHSU seemed out of reach following widespread stay at home orders in May, we did it! We survived and ultimately thrived with the efforts of many. Of course, surviving is no great feat. However, in the year of a pandemic, an unstable economy, an administrative transition, a social divide, and the threat of natural weather disaster, achieving something resembling normalcy is spectacular.

On the heels of a remote spring and a socially distant summer of planning, we physically welcomed students, faculty, and staff back to campus for the fall and completed the semester with flying colors. Despite a frightening transition from in-person to remote everything, we saw an impressive number of students enroll this semester. Multiple units across campus created successful on-campus experiences safely and in excellence. As a socially distant campus community, we stayed connected, kept students engaged, and committed to becoming an inclusive, equitable institution.

All campus efforts and planning paid off. Despite some positive Covid-19 cases, SHSU was able to contain and appropriately manage them. Our general population stayed healthy thanks to a lot of support from our Covid-19 team and other university leaders. SHSU faculty quickly pivoted to remote instruction and worked hard to learn how to deliver hybrid classes with all digital technology resources. Campus services, student affairs, and support programs also optimized operations for digital delivery to maintain service standards. It was challenging and uncertain but together, we succeeded and charted a path for an even brighter future. Go Kats!

CELEBRATING THE SHARED SUCCESS OF A SAFE FALL RETURN TO CAMPUS

"There are no great people in this world, only great challenges that ordinary people rise to meet."

-William Frederick Halsey, Jr.
"We each have a role to play in strengthening diverse representation."

- Anonymous

THE MARRIAGE OF INCLUSIVITY AND DEMOCRACY IN THE 2020 ELECTION

When we think about what it means to be inclusive we seldom consider politics. Though, this year, the varying views of diverse communities were on the election ballot. Political candidates and platforms worked hard to examine and engage everyone in the community in the political processes. Acknowledged or not, inclusive practices undergird democracy because civic education, voting, running for office, and offering input on legislative policies create a sense of agency and belonging to each member of society.

For whom we voted is not as important to diversity and inclusion as the power of being included and heard in the race. Though divided, the country in a unified voice spoke loudly about their interests when provided the opportunity to have a say in our beloved democracy. Each vote cast demonstrated the involvement of citizens from all viewpoints and reminded us of the rich diversity required to balance the power of our societies.

Regardless of the outcome of any election, when every vote and voice matter, we create a reflective view of the real dimensions of diversity in our societies for elected leaders to use as a guide for innovative strategies and bi-partisan solutions for all. Voice and visibility win - even if political candidates do not.
Given the current socio-political climate, the growing diversity gap between students and faculty, concentrated poverty, and the demands on faculty members to address students’ social-emotional needs, classrooms today are challenged with multi-layered complexity. New tensions and quick escalation of issues have also been magnified in the remote learning environment as a result of the pandemic. Depending on the situation in play, it is more likely than not that an impulsive response from the faculty member could be perceived by students as racist, insensitive, or discriminatory, regardless of the intention.

Therefore, it is critical that faculty members participate in and ascertain the tools to respond to students appropriately and effectively, creating an inclusive classroom with the help of resources provided by practitioners in the DEI realm. Fortunately, Sam Houston State University supports and provides extensive resources and training for professional development designed to enhance the collective ability of our faculty to handle race, equity, and diversity issues in partnership with the Office of Institutional Diversity & Inclusion.

When there is increased knowledge about sensitive issues, engaging in these conversations becomes easier and confidence is enhanced when setting inclusive norms and rules for the term of instruction. At a minimum, faculty are encouraged to learn more about and disrupt patterns of unconscious bias, reduce encounters and responses where students do not feel safe and comfortable contributing, and develop a deeper understanding of self and the toxic effects of discriminatory behavior on a student's academic and mental health. For support, resources, and DEI training events visit shsu.edu/inclusion or contact inclusion@shsu.edu

“As you move outside of your comfort zone, what was once the unknown and frightening becomes your new normal.”
- Robin S. Sharma
PRACTICING INTERFAITH ALLYSHIP

Interfaith allyship involves re-learning the way you see the world, viewing situations not from the lens of your own experience or perspective, but based on the realities and experiences of others. That awareness includes teaching yourself to notice discrimination or insensitivity—not just overt actions like the use of derogatory language, but also inequity and exclusion in subtle forms.

Listen to feedback and lean into your missteps. Effective allyship requires being open to feedback, constantly evolving your thinking, and embracing discomfort. As an interfaith ally, you will encounter many situations that make you uncomfortable, whether it’s receiving feedback about your behavior, learning information that challenges your perspective, or occupying a space where you are the numerical minority.

Coexist

“Having faith in ourselves and in the goodness of the universe allows us to see life in an optimistic way and to act confidently in any circumstances.”

- Unknown

CREATING COMMUNITY WITH INTERFAITH ALLYSHIP

Living and working alongside individuals with different religions and traditions can be a wonderful experience, but it can also have its challenges. Problems can arise when there is a lack of understanding, so it is important for varying faiths to come together and engage in discussion to better understand one another.

As the holiday season approaches and as a myriad of traditional practices is on display it is important to remember the following:

- Interfaith allyship involves re-learning the way you see the world, viewing situations not from the lens of your own experience or perspective, but based on the realities and experiences of others. That awareness includes teaching yourself to notice discrimination or insensitivity—not just overt actions like the use of derogatory language, but also inequity and exclusion in subtle forms.

- Listen to feedback and lean into your missteps. Effective allyship requires being open to feedback, constantly evolving your thinking, and embracing discomfort. As an interfaith ally, you will encounter many situations that make you uncomfortable, whether it’s receiving feedback about your behavior, learning information that challenges your perspective, or occupying a space where you are the numerical minority.
The Office of Institutional Diversity and Inclusion is pleased to invite academic and administrative departments, organizations, students, and alumni to join us in our annual event series affirming the #BearkatsBelong Creed values through engagement in exciting educational activities! Save the Date: January 25th-28th and learn more about the 2021 National Inclusion Week focus here: https://www.shsu.edu/dept/diversity-inclusion/creedweek.html

The Office of Institutional Diversity & Inclusion invites you to the 2nd Annual Inclusive Excellence Awards Ceremony on January 25, 2021, from 2 PM-3 PM. The Inclusive Excellence Award recognizes individuals and departmental units at Sam Houston State University that demonstrate a passion for diversity and inclusion. If you have any questions about nominations or this award, please contact Nu’Nicka Epps (936-294-2680 or nepps@shsu.edu).

The upcoming 17th Annual Diversity Leadership Conference is going VIRTUAL and will be held on February 26 & 27, 2021. The Diversity Leadership Conference is an annual student-led event designed to address diversity and leadership issues and their application in student development, higher education, and global society. For more information contact diversity@shsu.edu.

"It is never too late to learn new things and think new thoughts."

- Unknown
DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION TRENDS & ENHANCEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

Across multiple DEI associations and through collaborative consultation with practitioners it has been revealed that there is a growing trend of organizations ditching the traditional, compliance-driven “sensitivity” training approach. Rather, universities and colleges have opted to adopt a more interactive, skills-building training program that is continuous.

Additionally, many human resource teams and campus leaders have already begun to examine and assess existing manager training or onboarding programs to include the current or developing DEI values of the institution. While others who have obtained success in retention and promotion of diverse students and talent are embedding inclusive leadership competencies directly into their learning and merit programs.

Some best practice recommendations from the 2020 National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education are as follows:
- Design a holistic learning journey that moves beyond unconscious bias training
- Integrate critical inclusive leadership skills into core manager competencies.
- Provide specific skills-development training programs covering topics such as inclusive hiring, debiasing feedback and performance evaluations, allyship, and creating a culture of psychological safety.
- Enhance the structure of DEI teams and roles with campus authority.
- Articulate specialized roles for DEI objectives (e.g., recruiting, program management, benefits, analytics, operations, communications, etc.).
- Infuse inclusion and accessibility expertise into strategic planning efforts to keep up with faculty, staff, and student demographic and customer expectations.

To learn more about the best inclusive practice guidance, visit https://www.nadohe.org/.

“We all should know that diversity makes for a rich tapestry, and we must understand that all the threads of the tapestry are equal in value no matter what their color.”

- Maya Angelou
M. Brandon Cooper, Director for the Department of Student Activities is a native of Huntsville, Texas. He obtained his bachelor’s degree in Journalism/Public Relations with minors in Mass Communication and French from Sam Houston State University in 2005. As Director, Brandon oversees policies, budget, collaborative programming, facilities management, personnel and strategic planning for the department. He is Co-Chair of the SHSU Ring Ceremony, a member of the SHSU Homecoming Committee, the Battle of the Piney Woods Committee, the University Special Events Committee, the Free Speech Committee and the Re-Imagining the First-Year Experience (RFY) Interdivisional Committee.

Brandon is a past member of the Board of Directors for the Huntsville/Walker County Chamber of Commerce, past executive board member of CASA of Walker & San Jacinto Counties and a member of the Huntsville Hospital Auxiliary. He is a member of Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA) and College Student Educators International (ACPA); and a graduate of the 2016-17 SHSU Leadership Academy.

Brandon received his Master’s degree in Instructional Leadership with an emphasis in Higher Education Administration from SHSU in May of 2011. Currently he is enrolled and has just completed his first year in the Higher Education Leadership Doctoral Program at SHSU.

He is a passionate advocate and vanguard for diversity, inclusion, and social justice at SHSU, and as part of his current role as Director, helped to establish, and currently oversees the Center for Diversity & Intercultural Affairs at SHSU. In his leisure time, Brandon enjoys spending time with friends and family as well as traveling.
EDITOR'S CORNER

NUNICKA EPPS, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, INCLUSION INITIATIVES & ASSESSMENT
Office of Institutional Diversity & Inclusion

There is always the fear of the unknown when we attempt a new thing. For example, I had the same haircut since my parents first allowed me to cut and layer my hair in 9th grade. I didn't realize it until I moved from Atlanta to Houston and packed all of our family pictures for transport. As I sorted through pictures from the past I noticed the same hair length, the same lip color, the same style, and the same forced smile. Though, what I did not see was what I felt in my heart and my soul in those pictures. I knew that I was a smart, colorful, bold personality, combined with a conservative edge. However, I showed up in life pretty bland in appearance and style because I wanted to fit into an image of what “they” (family, spouse, partner, friends, clergy, colleagues, peers, etc.) expected me to look like to be accepted. What “they” would be comfortable with at work. What “they” felt was normal for a professional woman of color. I was stuck and it was because I was too afraid to be my authentic self for fear of judgment and ridicule. That was the breakthrough moment for me because it empowered me to become more empathetic, inclusive, kind, and curious about people in my circle of influence. It is why I am here at SHSU and engaged in the work of creating a safe space for everyone to belong, learn, and grow because I vividly remember what it felt like when I believed I could not.

DIVERSITY RESOURCES
for Higher Education Faculty & Staff

The Association for the Severely Handicapped (TASH)

TASH is an international leader in disability advocacy. Founded in 1975, TASH advocates for human rights and inclusion for people with significant disabilities and support needs – those most vulnerable to segregation, abuse, neglect and institutionalization. TASH works to advance inclusive communities through advocacy, research, professional development, policy, and information and resources for parents, families and self-advocates. The inclusive practices TASH validates through research have been shown to improve outcomes for all people.

RECOMMENDED READING
by James A. Banks Allyn & Bacon

There is a wide and growing ethnic, cultural, social-class, and linguistic gap between many of the nation’s teachers and their students. Multicultural Education: Issues and Perspectives, 9th edition, is designed to help current and future educators acquire the concepts, paradigms, and explanations needed to become effective practitioners in culturally, racially, linguistically, and social-class diverse classrooms and schools. An important goal of the 9th edition is to help educators attain a sophisticated understanding of the concept of culture and to view race, class, gender, social class, and exceptionality as interacting concepts rather than as separate and distinct.

NEWSLETTER PUBLICATION SCHEDULE

- December 2020
- March 2021
- June 2021
- September 2021

To submit content for the Diversity Digest Newsletter contact nepps@shsu.edu.