

Statement of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

I was raised in a family where prejudice of any form was not tolerated. My parents came from dramatically different parts of this country with different educations and were of different religions which they practiced in parallel with one another. My parent's friends were of diverse backgrounds and I learned to respect others' alternative backgrounds with the insufficient understanding of a teenager. It wasn't until my sophomore year of college that I understood prejudice's impact. I chose as my roommate who was of different race, religion, and socioeconomic background and soon thereafter I had no other colleagues. My next college roommate also followed a different path than the majority and I was probably the only one who was unaware or did not care. Why should anyone be excluded from any opportunity based on race, religion, socioeconomic status, physical ability or sexual orientation? In my youth, I failed to ask or answer this question because the question was simply foreign to me. Today, I am proudly the father of an adult son who was raised against the odds of a challenging physical handicap with experiences that again alert me to the prejudices that demean our society.

Today, diversity, equity and inclusion are not only personal matters, but matters of social, economic, and political consequence that spill over to or emerge from our academic institutions. They raise questions that must be answered. It became apparent to me decades ago that diversity and inclusion were forces that could energize and strengthen our institutions. As a graduate program director, I took the opportunity to address gender equality in my specialty of Prosthodontics as a direct way to improve the quality of students in my program, a program that has produced two female graduate program directors and other full or part-time faculty members. At UIC College of Dentistry where more than 17 languages are spoken daily, I have learned the value of cultural competence and its importance in building trust in the academic setting. As the current director of the PhD Program in Oral Sciences, I have worked to competitively recruit outstanding DACA and African American DMD/PhD students. I believe my past record indicates that I am fully aligned with VCU's goal "to continue to explore new ways to improve our diverse and inclusive environment".

Declaring that a School of Dentistry's door is open to diverse faculty, staff and students is generous, but insufficient. The pathway to dental school is most challenging for marginalized and underrepresented individuals. Faculty applicants are few and must be developed. Diversity must be fostered and efforts to expand the pipelines, assist and accommodate the marginalized underrepresented individuals can be woven into the College culture. Institutions must be safe and comforting to all races, religions, disabilities, and members of the LBGQT community. As the Dean, I will work closely with the VCU community to achieve diversity of faculty, staff, and students within the School of Dentistry and beyond. I note that the city of Richmond holds a unique place in the history of racial relations, and it is an aspirational goal that I may contribute to solving any local discriminatory challenges that impact the wellness of the community.

I am involved in building pipelines for underrepresented minority students at UIC, a University recognized as an underrepresented minority -serving institution. I am a member of the University Cancer Center's Cancer Center Training and Education Committee that is charged with promotion of student/trainee diversity. I have learned of local, state, and federal programs available to help fill the pipeline. I understand the importance of programs that reach out to our middle and high schools to identify a next generation of successful professionals. As an academic administrator, I have become more knowledgeable of my community's diversity challenges to and see how the UIC-owned Federally qualified health centers, HRSA grants, and PCORI grants engaged a diverse community. Community engagement is an essential for trust that stimulates progress in recruitment. For patients, improving access to care is structural; it requires both strengthened association with primary health care and filling the oral health care provider roles with a diverse workforce. I have served on many search committees and know the challenges of not only finding diverse applicants, but also comprising diverse search committees. VCU has an historical role in training dentists of color and continued progress must continue to be made. This challenge of increasing diversity is one that requires time, commitment, and perseverance. I am prepared for the journey.

Looking at the exciting possibility of leading the VCU School of Dentistry, I am aware that social, political, economic impacts of diversity, equity and inclusion on academic dentistry will present new challenges to the faculty, staff, and students. These challenges cannot be overcome by administrative mandates but will require complete engagement. I will learn, collaborate, innovate, and communicate in my efforts to promote diversity, equity and inclusion at the School of Dentistry. We can make VCU School of Dentistry and VCU Dental Care a 'better, place, a stronger community partner, deserving of the trust of all'.