



7/26/2021

From: Dr. André V. Ritter, candidate, VCU School of Dentistry, Dean
To: Virginia Commonwealth University
Re: Statement of Contributions to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) is critical in fostering a healthy academic environment. Each of those words mean something different, but my philosophy about DEI can be summarized in four elements which encompass a continuous process: (1) assessment and recognition of the institution's shortcomings and deficits in this area, (2) open internal dialogue to build trust through transparency and community engagement, (3) intentional efforts towards reducing gaps and enhancing culture and morale, and (4) constantly reassessing these efforts through feedback and feedforward mechanisms. As a latino naturalized American citizen I have lived experiences that help frame my knowledge, awareness, and experiences with DEI as well as belonging. As examples of my recent contribution in this area as a leader, during the COVID-19 pandemic and despite a university-wide hiring freeze, I recruited nine full time faculty (7 female, 2 male; 5 from underrepresented race/ethnic groups). Additionally, I have strived to create safe spaces for the faculty and staff in my department at NYU to voluntarily participate, share experiences, learn from each other, and dialogue about DEI. These sessions were possible thanks to a grant which I secured from the NYU Inclusion, Diversity, Belonging and Equity Advisory Fund, through the NYU Center for Faculty Advancement and the Center for Strategic Solutions at the NYU Metro Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools. Topics covered were *Impact of race, power, and privilege on our campus climate*, *Developing a critical consciousness*, *Fostering an anti-bias workplace climate*, and *Confronting racism in furtherance of fostering an anti-racist climate at our college*. These sessions were instrumental in shifting the narrative and enhancing the culture at our workplace. The work on DEI has to be intentional and with a long-term view. It is also critically important to keep everyone accountable for respecting institutional policies that protect and foster diversity, equity, and inclusion. This later point is important, and although this is not something I am proud of, I have had to dismiss faculty members both at UNC and at NYU for disciplinary issues related to DEI.