

Providing Answers by Actions: The College and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion **By María Len-Ríos**

“What is the College doing to advance diversity, equity and inclusion?” My answer: More than we have ever done before, although we are well aware we still have much work to do.

As an alumna, I have seen much change in Athens and on campus since the mid-90s. We have seen an increase in the racial and ethnic diversity of our student body. We are also seeing a transformation in the make-up of our faculty. One maybe not so obvious change is that Dean Davis committed to diversity by hiring me in my role as Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, a Latina, as the College’s first senior administrator of color. Furthermore, diversity and inclusion is one of my areas of expertise (for more details, please see my [faculty webpage](#)). The primary responsibility for diversity efforts in the college falls to me as the chair of the College’s Standing Committee on Diversity, reporting to the Dean. As an alumna and as someone who cares deeply about equality, I do not take this responsibility lightly.

In my role as Committee chair, advisor to the student chapter of the National Association of Hispanic Journalists (NAHJ), and co-chair of the IDEA (Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access) Standing Committee for the International Communication Association (ICA), the largest international membership organization for communication researchers in the world, I regularly have conversations about DEI issues and learn much internationally, nationally and locally. I know that there is always more to know because I understand context and complexity are involved in diversity and inclusion conversations. Culture changes, generations change, and norms change—the thing that does not change is an ethical and moral responsibility to justice and humanity.

One thing I know to be true is that we, at the College, want DEI to be a part of the College’s DNA, which takes real change on the part of our entire family. While the way we represent the College is certainly important, we know that what we build on the inside is just as critical, if not more so: a culture of inclusion and respect, a culture of trust, a culture of equity, and, our purpose, a culture of excellence in education for all.

Currently, we are in the midst of rewriting the College’s 2025 Strategic Plan that includes core elements related to goals for diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). We have been guided by our previous DEI plan, which was called for as an element of our previous strategic plan. The current [DEI plan is available for review](#).

Here are specific things our committee and faculty have done over the past two years—you may find that you have helped us in these areas by coming to campus and sharing your knowledge (thank you!).

- **Hiring and Recruitment:** We have asked that our job search committees and chairs undergo training to ensure a diverse candidate pool and to reduce unconscious bias in the hiring process as well as ask search committee chairs to account for and document their efforts at DEI (ongoing).
- **Faculty Development:** We have held learning sessions on the topics of preventing sexual harassment; supporting first-generation students; recognizing mental health issues and suicide; advising international students about employment options; and in the Spring we chose for 2020 addressing how we have productive conversations about race and ethnicity

in the classroom.

- **College-wide and University-wide Educational Panels:** We have hosted discussions about student mental health with expert panelists, as well as have had industry professionals come in and talk about how to make media workplaces—from sports journalism to PR firms to AD agencies to film sets—safer and more inclusive of women.
- **Diversity & Inclusion Assessment:** Questions were added to student course evaluations about diversity and inclusion; undergraduate and graduate student feedback forums were held to get student perspectives on the College's environment for DEI issues; and resource sheets for students were created to connect students with financial and human capital resources.

We, as an administration and leadership team, work to advance DEI through actions, which are in no way comprehensive of what faculty do in their classrooms, or the other events organized by departments and UGA at large.

As in every endeavor, we will make mistakes as we grow, but we will always listen because it is our job to educate ourselves as much as it is to educate others. So, when you ask, "What is the College doing for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion?" know we are happy to answer your questions. We also hope that you will ask, "What actions can I take to advance DEI issues to better equip our College's educators and lay a path for future students entering the profession?" If you have expertise, insights, or resources that you can lend to our efforts, please reach out to Dean Davis or me. We can always use more help. We look forward to continuing the conversation.