

DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP YEAR END REVIEW 2019-20

We need to stop thinking of our diversity efforts as disparate and distinct capacities sprinkled across campus and begin thinking of them as a connected network of capabilities that, if deployed in a more cohesive manner, could lead to even greater levels of diversity-related change on campus.

–Damon A. Williams, *Strategic Diversity Leadership*

In its [final report](#) in spring 2019, the Interim Coordinating Council recommended to President Crutcher a framework of distributed leadership designed to advance the University's commitment to Thriving, Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity (TIDE) in bold, comprehensive, and enduring ways. Citing numerous scholarly sources affirming comprehensive, multi-dimensional, or ecosystem approaches as more transformative and effective than even the “best” of practices pursued in isolation (Golom, 2018; LePeau, 2015; Ahmed 2012; Hurtado et al., 2012; Milem et al., 2005), the Interim Council advocated a distributed approach that would enable UR “to reframe [our] current infrastructure or strategic framework to become more cohesive” (Williams 2013 pp. 132-3); to enact TIDE practices and equity-mindedness “as a pervasive institution-wide principle” (Witham, et al 2015, p. 33); and to identify institutional leaders charged to build a sense of campus urgency around TIDE initiatives (Witham, et al. 2015 p. 34).

In summer 2019, President Crutcher adopted the Interim Coordinating Council's recommendations as “three mutually reinforcing elements” in the University's [Making Excellence Inclusive Report](#):

1. ongoing investment and engagement of the University's leadership in both short-term actions and long-term commitments to Thriving, Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity
2. a standing Institutional Coordinating Council for Thriving, Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity
3. an interim Senior Administrative Officer with membership on the President's Cabinet

As the Interim Coordinating Council explained in its report, the distributed leadership approach is meant to enable new institutional capacities for generating coherency, urgency, and accountability for TIDE work at all levels and for all campus functions and constituencies. Despite its institutional commitment to TIDE, until this year, the University lacked the *capability* to pursue long-range, ecosystemic change related to TIDE. This document describes the progress made and challenges confronted in academic year 2019-2020, the first year of the distributed leadership model's implementation.

[Piloting a Distributed Leadership Model](#)

Building on the work and recommendations of the [Interim Coordinating Council](#), on August 1, 2019, the University of Richmond began piloting a collaborative, distributed leadership model to advance our [commitment](#) to making excellence inclusive and our [goals](#) around representation, belonging, and capability. This unique, dynamic approach to embedding diversity, inclusion, thriving, and equity broadly and deeply across our campus has yielded successes and insights during the inaugural year. The model distributes the responsibility for and ongoing attention to the University's TIDE work across the President and his leadership team—the cabinet and deans—the Interim

Senior Administrative officer who serves on the cabinet and reports to the Executive Vice-Presidents, and the [Institutional Coordinating Council for Thriving, Inclusion, Diversity and Equity \(ICC\)](#). Together these leaders collaborate and engage staff, faculty, and students across campus to participate in the ongoing work of making the University of Richmond a community where all members can thrive and reach their full potential.

A bold experiment in process, the distributed leadership model both centers collaboration and accountability for TIDE efforts while expanding the networks of faculty, staff, and students engaged in the critical and ongoing work of culture change. In short, it is not one person's job to attend to diversity, equity, and inclusion at UR. The entire cabinet, the deans, and the ICC form a nucleus of over 35 people actively leading on our MEI goals and growing the capacity of others to collaborate on and contribute to our efforts. In the model, senior leadership is focused on actions and results around the three-year MEI goals while the ICC focuses on the longer-term TIDE vision. The interim SAO serves as the bridge between these efforts and a consistent advocate and organizer for both the short-term actions and long-term planning. This multi-dimension, collaborative approach is an essential part of the infrastructure that will enable the coordination of TIDE efforts and practices and increase institutional coherency, urgency, and accountability. During the 2019-20 year, despite the disruptions caused by COVID-19, the distributed leadership team accomplished a number of year-one actions set forth in the MEI plan while also prioritizing and adding new work in response to the racist and xenophobic incidents on campus and students' response to them. Other leaders on campus also stepped up during the year, taking actions to further our MEI goals of representation, belonging, and capability. A snapshot of the work completed through the spring can be found [here](#).

[The Role of the ICC](#)

The Council [members](#) brought a depth and breadth of expertise in inclusive-excellence related efforts, familiarity with institutional process, and broad representation from across the University. The MEI plan is designed for important actions to take place over three years. The University understands this is long-term work and that reaching our goals and making systemic changes will take a longer time. Against the grain of resolving crises or urgent issues as they arise, the ICC's job is to look beyond the three years and keep the institution focused on the intentional long-term vision of systemic change: an anti-racist institution where homophobia, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and xenophobia have no place and in which members of all groups that have been historically restrained, excluded, or oppressed are fully included. The Interim Senior Administrative Officer serves on the ICC which is led by a faculty and staff co-chair.

[The Role of the Interim Senior Administrative Officer](#)

The SAO role promotes and affirms our priority to practice diversity, equity, and inclusion and serves as strategist and the bridge between senior leadership and the ICC and other TIDE work happening across campus. The SAO centers TIDE efforts and the goals of the MEI report serving as a resource and organizer for efforts across units and divisions. Working closely with the assistant to the president who has the knowledge, capacity, and a mandate to partner on MEI has been essential to the distributed leadership model. The opportunity to connect senior leadership with the ICC has resulted in informed decision-making, community and trust building, and demonstrated ways to apply inclusive and equitable practices into UR's culture in more intentional ways.

The Role of the President's Cabinet and Deans

Senior leadership has actively asserted a [commitment to inclusive excellence](#) and stepped up to demonstrate accountability for the MEI goals. Leadership has continued to center MEI as a key, sustained priority. Members of the President's Cabinet and the academic deans have direct accountability for specific action items in the MEI plan and have addressed representation, belonging, and capability through responsive school or unit-specific initiatives throughout the school year.

Over the past ten months, the distributed leadership model has resulted in a number of successes, which, viewed together, demonstrate the potential of an eco-systemic approach to TIDE. In support of MEI goals, and in response to student input following the [January 2020 incidents on campus](#), University senior leaders have taken a [number of actions to address our goals](#).

- Despite the disruption of Covid-19 in March, **senior leaders** were accountable for and accomplished a range of actions to meet the stated MEI goals. Leaders made significant progress on the action items in the MEI report while also pivoting to prioritize and create new actions in response to the racist and xenophobic incidents on campus in January. While there is still much to be done, a sample of the accomplishments this year include:
 - \$100,000 (\$50,000 per year) allocated to 2020–2022 SOBAC funding process to provide additional funding for recognized cultural, political, and social student organizations
 - Presidential commitment to finding a long-term home for the pilot Multicultural Space
 - Online [portal](#) created to provide a comprehensive guide to financial and other resources that undergraduate students can access if in need of support and assistance
 - Recruitment for the inaugural President's Student Cabinet beginning in August 2020, to facilitate open dialogue among students and University leaders
 - New Director of Disability Services hired in April 2020
 - Research [report](#) on burying ground completed and disseminated; [Burial Ground Memorialization Committee](#) started in January 2020; working to [share research and listen to input from campus](#), community, and descendants on design for permanent memorial
 - Significantly updated and clarified process for filing and handling [student complaints](#) generally, with particular attention to bias-related complaints in academic settings

For more information on other actions accomplished and underway across campus see the updated [Making Excellence Inclusive draft work plan](#). This work plan will be updated quarterly to respond to emerging needs and priorities and to demonstrate our progress. (Some plans may be delayed by the interruption to University operations due to COVID-19.)

- **The ICC co-chairs and Interim SAO** met with over 300 staff and faculty to share the goals of the MEI report, discuss the distributed leadership model, and create a space for units to discuss how to incorporate diversity, inclusion, and equity work into their work that support their daily operations and reflect their current needs. In our sessions we asked how specific units can incorporate the MEI's call into the fabric of their work. Through these sessions we learned about the different ways units are thinking about and implementing TIDE as well as challenges

individuals and units face as they deepen their commitment to TIDE efforts. Sessions across campus have yielded important data points about how each unit envisions MEI informing, shaping, and making sense in their daily work. The ICC co-chairs, SAO, and executive assistant to the President are compiling, analyzing, and sharing back this data

- Some **members of the ICC** met with the General Education Committee, at their request, to share ideas for diversity, equity, and inclusion in the curriculum. .
- **ICC** provided feedback on HR's draft approach to launching an affinity group program, to University Museums on a new TIDE intercultural program grounded in the arts, and to Communications on an inclusive style guide.
- A subset of the **ICC** is working on a bibliography on TIDE in higher education for leaders and managers to access.
- **ICC** began convening leaders planning and conducting orientations and trainings across campus for shared learning and alignment. (Stalled by Covid-19)
- **President and interim SAO** provided information on the University's MEI report and efforts to AACU, ACE, and VFIC
- **Interim SAO** provided thought partnership to senior leaders on MEI goals and work
- **ICC co-chairs and interim SAO** provided expedient input into events on campus including BRT participation and input into communications and advice for how to address the crisis.
- **ICC co-chairs and interim SAO** provided expedient and collaborative co-leadership of the President's Community Forum in the wake of racist and xenophobic events on campus.
- **ICC co-chairs and interim SAO** collaborated on the community forum, attended multiple listening events with students to hear their concerns, shared back the themes we have heard, and provided individual support for students and input into communications plans to leadership.
- Throughout the year, **senior leaders** shared their work on MEI, both the stated actions in the report, and other steps their units took--some in response to the racist incidents on campus, with the **Interim SAO**, for alignment and broader communication.
- In practicing distributed leadership, the **President, ICC co-chairs, Interim SAO, Provost and EVP, and executive assistant to the President**, collaborated and co-presented on our experiment with the model at the American Association of Colleges and Universities annual conference in January 2020, including the successes and challenges over the first six months of trying out distributed leadership

Practicing Distributed Leadership

It is not enough to have a distributed leadership model in place. We have also learned it is critical to facilitate the conditions conducive for the emergence of successful distributed leadership by practicing shared leadership as part of our day-to-day work activities. To practice distributed leadership means that we are all agents in creating an inclusive culture at UR regardless of our position or discipline. The goal is not only to increase the number of leaders working towards inclusivity and equity but also to increase DEI leadership quality and capability (Joslyn, 2018: 186). Distributed leadership intentionally creates a social fabric immersed and engaged in equity-minded practices. This work relies on relationship building, trust, and members across the organization working on shared short-term and long-term goals.

Relationship and Trust-building

Over the first couple of months, the ICC focused on orienting members to build a council with a shared understanding of our MEI work, and the ICC's role in coordination, communication, and thought partnership. Significant effort went into building and maintaining trust within the group

and of the administration. While creating a high-trust culture is often perceived as a "soft-skill," we see it as a necessary action step toward cultivating an inclusive and equitable community (van Ameijde et al., 2009). We focused on building relationships based on trust and reciprocity with our Council members and paid close attention to how we interacted and worked together so that we can learn from each other's differences and draw upon one another's talents, energies, and experiences. Creating bonds of trust fosters a culture of respect for expertise, collaborative activities, and more importantly creates a stronger collective that can address the pressing social, cultural, economic, and environmental challenges we face as an institution.

Thought partnering

To practice distributed leadership means that we are all agents in creating an inclusive culture at UR regardless of our position or discipline. The ICC wants to continue to expand and build our thought-partnership and invite the UR community to engage in thought partnering as a mode of working and sharing ideas, expertise, and experiences with others to help them navigate complex challenges. Through thought partnering, we want to enable and facilitate wider participation and interactions and actively engage different voices, ideas, and experiences to bear on institutional practices, policies, and ways of being in a mutually beneficial manner. In this way, we nurture spaces for communities of practice and collaboration and are a resource for connectivity.

Critical introspection

The ICC is committed to equity as a pervasive and institution-wide practice. This means that our distributed leadership model continually develops and centers reflection as part of our work. We regularly centered key questions about what we are for and how we imagine change happening. Critical reflection on current action and reflection for further action can ensure more integrated concerted, supportive action. This reflection enabled us to connect theory and practice and grounded our work in long-term cultural change.

Distributed Leadership Case Study

Faced by the racist incidents and the pandemic, our planned trajectory for the fledgling distributed model was interrupted and also tested. In preparation for our next academic year, the university created a range of Contingency Planning working groups focusing on three possible scenarios: full residential semester, full remote learning, and hybrid. In keeping with our charge to foster alignment, communication, and best practices for inclusive excellence, the ICC created and shared the following equity-minded guiding questions for senior leadership and the contingency planning groups as points of reference for each group to consider and address equity implications as part of their planning process:

Who benefits? Who is burdened? Who is missing? How do we know? In other words, how are the perspectives and interests of under-represented groups centered in each aspect of the planning and the possible outcomes?

Executive Vice-Presidents, Dave Hale and Jeff Legro, as co-chairs of the Steering Group, forwarded the guiding questions to other group members and the Chairs of the Working Groups, and they in turn shared it with members of the working groups. Additionally, the interim SAO was assigned as an advisor to the Steering Group to help maintain an equity-minded lens. We already know that the pandemic is disproportionately affecting people of color and other vulnerable groups, and it is crucial that our own responses serve to mitigate such inequities. In posing these questions, it is our hope that our university community not only pays attention to patterns and differences but also that

we continue to center equity-mindedness in the implementation of pandemic-related plans and beyond.

In this case, the distributed leadership model was effective as there was *concerted effort* from our senior leadership and a network of groups working to practice equity in action. In our capacity to think about the long-term institutional TIDE visions, the ICC linked equity-mindedness to a policy-making process and institutional leaders supported this effort with a sense of urgency around TIDE initiatives. This interconnected, multi-dimensional, collaborative leadership approach as opposed to the single-dimension approach, facilitates institutional TIDE practices at different registers and builds momentum and sustains change efforts over time (Tuitt 2016). Studies show that equity-mindedness is more than simply being aware of inequities, but it entails creating equity by design. This work requires a shift from simply being conscious to putting into action and implementing it in our policies (Bensimon 2007; Bensimon and Harris 2012). This institutional commitment for individuals and networks to address equity in the contingent planning process helps to embed equity-mindedness in the fabric of our institution. We must continue to strive for equity to be enacted as a pervasive institution- and system-wide principle (Witham, et al 2015, p. 33).

[Next Steps for Distributed Leadership](#)

During the second year of the DL model, it is imperative to revive the recommendation from the Interim Coordinating Council's report to actively center race and anti-racism at UR. How will the DL leadership team prepare ourselves, personally and professionally, for the coming months in terms of supporting communities of color and confronting antiblackness (Kehar, Fries-Britt, and Espinosa 2020)? How will we lead our units and support the educational work needed on our campus? Opportunities to support aligned training, facilitation, and development for students, faculty, and staff as well dialogue on anti-racism for all members of the DL model are important aspects of our commitment to inclusive excellence. Other key levers for this foundational work include the student services review and outcomes, General Education curricular reform, institutional history, Race and Racism Project, the Africana Studies proposal, and building a strong program for intercultural dialogue and white anti-racism.

This essential focus on racial equity and anti-blackness must be accompanied by a commitment to continuously evaluate the operation of the distributed leadership model and identify opportunities for enhancing it. Distributed leadership arises from participation and interactions amongst diverse individuals and challenges the idea that an individual leader is seen as the main source of influence which shapes the emergence of collective action, and instead draws attention to the larger number of actors contributing to the process of leadership in shaping collective action (Van Almeijde et al., 2009: 765). This is what we are striving to do at UR. As we do this work, we are also aware of scholarship indicating that in practice distributed leadership can be used as an illusion of participation by calling various stakeholders in the process for advice when in fact a decision has already been set into motion (Kezar, 2012: 732). We are intentionally working to ensure our distributed leadership model does not become a utilitarian tool of work activity meant to simply dissolve tensions, resolve problems, or normalize hegemonic sameness. Doing so can legitimize division and exclusion, and reify the inequities that we are working so hard to reduce (Joslyn, 2018: 186; Youngs, 2017:144; Bolden et al., 2009).

[Next Steps for Senior Leadership](#)

The Cabinet and academic deans are continuing their work on MEI actions across units and schools and will connect more regularly with the ICC to strengthen relationship building and to align and

collaborate on the work of DEI at UR. The opportunity to connect leadership and the ICC has resulted in informed decision-making, and community and trust building, and demonstrated ways to apply inclusive and equitable practices into UR's culture in more intentional ways. Senior leadership (President, Provost, Chief Operational Officer) will continue to encourage, recognize, support and commit to practicing distributed leadership.

Next Steps for SAO

The Interim SAO will continue to work with senior leadership and the ICC to elevate inclusive and equitable practices by monitoring progress on Making Excellence Inclusive goals and actions. This work will include updating the MEI report and priority action steps for 2020-21; evaluating MEI metrics, and connecting and aligning senior leadership and the ICC toward our shared short-term and long-term goals. The creation and practice of this distributed leadership model requires a long-term effort and commitment. Given the pandemic and its impact on campus, we are recommending that the duration of the Interim SAO appointment be assessed in November 2020 to determine what is needed during this time of uncertainty with a clear eye towards a permanent position in the near future.

Next Steps for ICC

The ICC will continue to foster alignment, communication, and best practices for inclusive excellence efforts across offices, divisions, and schools, in addition to seeking input from student leaders.

Structure

As we move into our second year, the ICC will continue to establish and clarify the ICC's purpose, charge, role, function, and expected effects on University TIDE efforts. We will continue with the staff-faculty composition of the co-chair team as it is an effective way of practicing distributed leadership and incorporating the different registers at the university. Out of the thirteen Council members, eleven will be returning and we will be on-boarding two new Council members and include two student representatives. The work to level-set the group and equip them with shared knowledge leads us to suggest current members' terms should extend for up to three years, with some rolling terms.

Creating and curating resources for campus coordination

- Create guiding principles to aid the University community in acting locally to advance TIDE work in ways that connect to the larger University goals.
- Bibliographic resources for leaders and managers on DEI
- Develop tools to enable local initiatives to align with larger project

Communication/Engagement/Outreach

- Coordinate discussions among stakeholders invested in an institutional emphasis on diversity, equity and inclusion.
- Identify, convene, and connect faculty, staff, and students who have already incorporated TIDE into their planning to share challenges and successes.
- Seek information and communicate about a range of thriving, inclusion, diversity, and equity (TIDE) efforts taking place across campus to increase awareness and alignment.

- Create more strategic partnerships

Evaluation and metrics

- Collect and evaluate data related to ICC action areas.
- The ICC and interim SAO, in collaboration with IFX, plan to administer the HERI faculty, staff, and diverse learners student surveys to assess our current campus climate. This baseline data will be used to inform our continued long-term action steps toward our MEI goals along with the data collected from unit-level TIDE meetings in 2020.
- Analyze and share back HERI climate survey results and invite input with relevant leaders on actions to take in response to findings.

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