



**President's Diversity and Inclusion  
Advisory Council:**

**COVID-19 Equity and Inclusion  
Ad Hoc Committee**

**Fall 2020**



**ILLINOIS STATE  
UNIVERSITY**

*Illinois' first public university*

# **Table of Contents**

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<b>President’s Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Council .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>COVID-19 Workgroup for Diversity and Inclusion .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Guiding Principles .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Culturally Responsive Decision Making .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Guidelines.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Health and Well Being.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Teaching and Learning.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Student Accessibility .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Faculty Performance and Expectations .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Campus Climate and Community Building .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Redbird Family Caregiving.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>COVID-Related Outcomes Specific to     Underrepresented Communities.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Student Technology Access .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Student Financial Support .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Student Athletics, Club Sports, and Recreation .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Outreach, Relationships, Marketing, and Messaging.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Endnotes.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Appendix I: Fall 2020 Updates .....</b>	<b>15</b>

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## Introduction

While the long-term impacts of COVID-19 in the U.S. have yet to be fully realized, the ways in which the socio-economic, racial, and gender-based disparities have revealed themselves in the midst of this pandemic cannot be denied. Members of Black, Latino/a/x, and Indigenous communities are more likely than others to contract COVID-19, to have complications related to it, and to die from it.<sup>1</sup> Asians and Pacific Islanders have reported experiencing increased anti-Asian racism, verbal harassment, physical violence, and social isolation in the wake of COVID-19.<sup>2</sup> Early indicators also document widening racial and gender gaps that have the potential for long-term setbacks in educational attainment, employment access, income equity, and health-related outcomes.<sup>3</sup> Research suggests that the pronounced vulnerabilities of underserved and marginalized groups to both COVID-19 and its devastating socio-economic impact, can be attributed first and foremost to long histories of systemic inequities and structural barriers within the United States.<sup>4</sup>

Institutions of higher education have long been acknowledged as social and economic equalizers. College degree earners have increased opportunities for upward mobility, career advancement, and generational wealth building. Compared with those who only earn a high school diploma, people with college and university degrees experience up to a 61% increase in their wages or salaries.<sup>5</sup> The current global COVID-19 pandemic, however, risks off-setting recent gains made by degree-seeking students from underrepresented groups, who now face a greater risk of not completing their degrees, due to financial and health-related stressors. Many of these risks are historically rooted in (and inherited from) complex systems of oppression such as white supremacy/racism, anti-Blackness, anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim violence, classism, heterosexism/homophobia, ableism, and sexism.<sup>6</sup>

Dual language learners, recent immigrants, and undocumented individuals also face new risks and uncertainties in our current environment.<sup>7</sup>

Faculty and staff from underrepresented and marginalized groups face similar vulnerabilities related to their earned income, health, social-emotional well-being, and the growing impact of additional caregiving responsibilities and interrupted work schedules.<sup>8</sup> For example, COVID-19 related gender inequities have been recently documented.<sup>9</sup> Women’s vulnerabilities to COVID-19 are a function not only of their concentration in low-wage sectors of the economy, but also of their over-representation among paid and unpaid caregivers.<sup>10</sup>

Over the past six months, institutions of higher education such as Illinois State University have been working diligently to meet the uncertainties and histor-

students, faculty and staff are exposed to at present. Our Redbird Community is our greatest resource—they are not expendable. These at-risk populations include, but are not limited to, people whose lived experiences are regularly marginalized because of their age, area of origin, culture, (dis)ability, educational background, family structure, gender identity/expression, military service, race/ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender, and social class.<sup>11</sup>

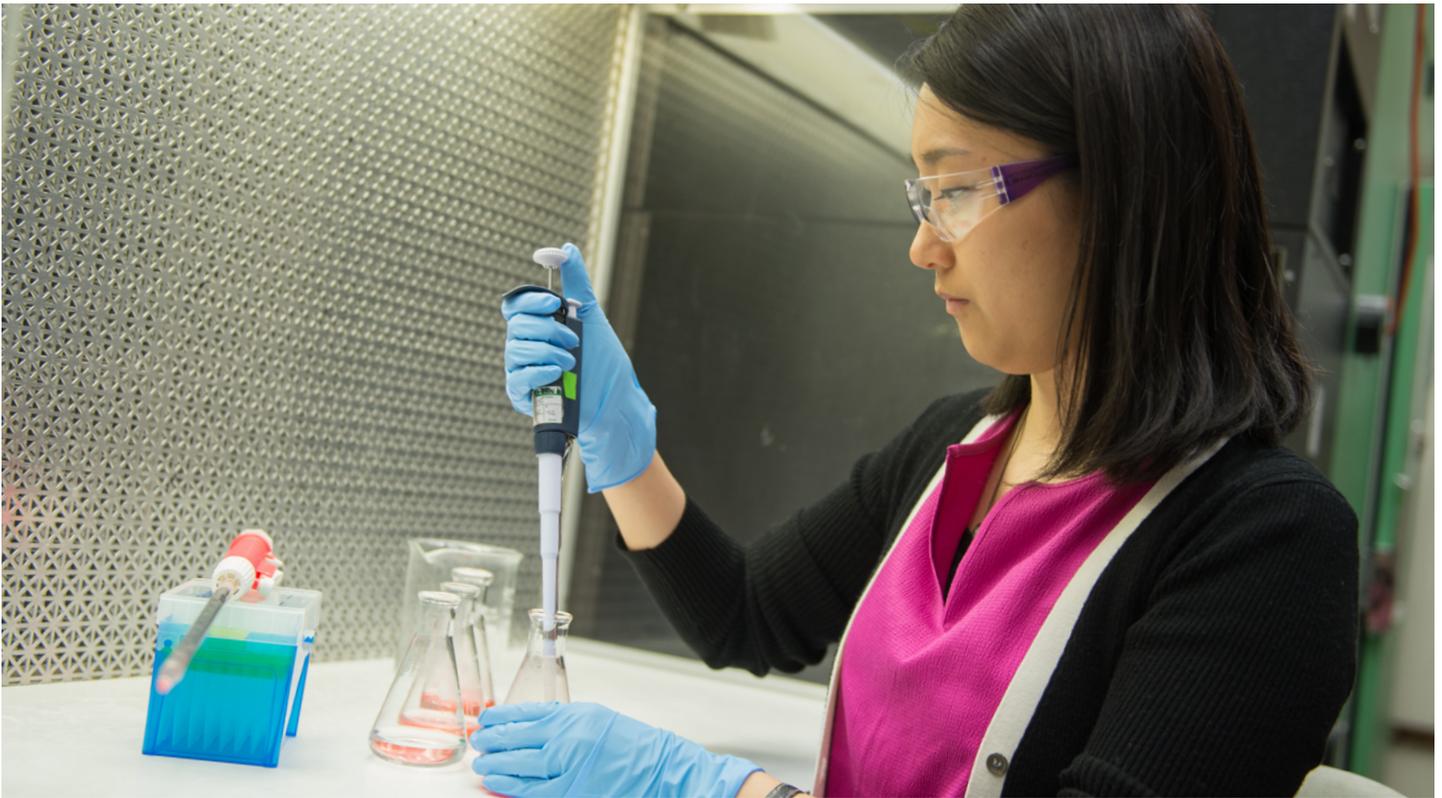
The recommendations offered within this document represent the collaborative contributions of the COVID-19 Workgroup on Equity and Inclusion at Illinois State University. This workgroup was convened on June 29, 2020 as an Ad Hoc Committee of the

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ically unprecedented challenges related to COVID-19 for the FY21 academic year. Our decision-making process has been undeniably daunting. The stakes related to expenditures of human capital, social capital, institutional sustainability, and the safety and well-being of the university community are extremely high. The purpose of this report is to offer well-reasoned and compassionate guidance for moving forward and centering the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion in ways that protect ISU faculty, staff, students, and the larger community. This means constructing our policies from the perspective of those who are most vulnerable. Centering the experiences and elevated risks of underserved, minoritized, and vulnerable student and faculty/staff populations is the only way to ensure that our decisions account for the different levels of risk that our

President’s Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Council. The group also includes members of the University community with specific expertise and interest in equity, health, mental health, faculty/staff support, and student advocacy.

It is important to note that equity and inclusion do not happen in a vacuum. The guidelines in this report intersect with the collective efforts of dozens of campus workgroups. They also draw heavily on the scholarship, research, best practice recommendations of national experts, as well as the lived experiences of report contributors.



## **Guiding Principles**

- Alignment with Illinois State University’s stated campus values and mission
- Culturally responsive decision making that collectively addresses the needs and concerns of underserved, minoritized, and vulnerable students, faculty, and staff
- Respect for the voices, testimonies, expertise, and lived experience of diverse campus community members
- A commitment to the continued growth and stability of all diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives
- Reinforcement of the sense of community and shared support for all campus members
- Active advocacy to eliminate behaviors and language that marginalizes groups and individuals from diverse populations as “others” in the wake of COVID-19
- Collaborative decision making across campus units
- Acknowledgement of and commitment to the mutual relationship between the campus and Bloomington-Normal communities

# Culturally Responsive Decision Making

***Culturally Responsive Decision Making refers to a set of organizational values, policies, and practices that enable an institution to engage in equity-minded decisions that take into account the resilient qualities, systemic barriers, environmental conditions, and social realities of diverse cultures and populations.***

One way to ensure that principles of inclusiveness and cultural responsiveness are adequately addressed, is to consistently evaluate the extent to which diverse leaders and members are at the table at every step of the planning and implementation process. If there is difficulty identifying decision makers with diverse backgrounds and experiences, this is a challenge that should be addressed as a capacity issue that should be rectified by the institution before planning and decision-making activities ensue.

Dr. Damon A. Williams, Chief Catalyst, Center for Strategic Diversity Leadership and Social Innovation suggests that universities adopt a “Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Action Framework. The DEI Action Framework integrates four planning components that should be evident in all phases of COVID-19 planning and preparation. Those components include: 1) Making culturally relevant decisions; 2) Supporting diverse communities; 3) Communicating thoughtfully and inclusively; and 4) Digitizing inclusive excellence. Other important guidance provided within the DEI Action framework, include taking a stand against intentional and unintentional behaviors and language that creates an environment of “othering” that exacerbates the sense of marginalization among diverse individuals and groups. The DEI Action Framework also advises universities to establish a “Tiger Team” charged with advocating on behalf of underrepresented and under-

served groups. The DIAC COVID-19 Workgroup on Equity and Inclusion is committed to serving in this role as Illinois State University continues its fall and spring crisis planning in the wake of COVID-19. However, it should be noted that while the “Tiger Team” of the DIAC will be able to offer the most up-to-date information on equity and inclusion, it is the responsibility of all members of the campus community to gain a deeper understanding of equity needs, issues, and best practice solutions.

With the above stated framework and principles serving as the foundation for this workgroup, the following COVID-19 recommendations will focus on the following areas:

- **Health and Well-Being**
- **Teaching and Learning**
- **Student Accessibility**
- **Faculty/Staff Performance and Expectations**
- **Campus Climate and Community Building**
- **Redbird Family Caregiving**
- **COVID-19 Related Outcomes Specific to Underserved Communities**
- **Student Technology Access**
- **Student Financial Support**
- **Student Athletics, Club Sports, and Recreation**
- **Outreach, Relationships, Marketing, and Messaging**

# **Guidelines**

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## **HEALTH AND WELL BEING**

### **Students**

- Continue to build and sustain additional capacity for online therapy groups and make students aware of options for social and emotional support. Online services will also help to create a “surge capacity” for counseling beyond standard Student Counseling Services hours.
- Implement peer-led supports groups to supplement student counseling sessions (with appropriate training, supervision and funding for peer leaders). If implementation is not possible with Student Counseling Services, then empower students to build networks to provide peer mentoring with the support of alternative campus units (e.g. social work, psychology, dean of students, housing).
- Provide instructors and staff with list of crisis and non-crisis campus resources and contacts to respond to students who ask about mental and health needs. They should also contain information about confidentiality.
- Increase opportunities for diverse students to access campus-based or community-based counselors from their identity group.
- Begin to implement suggestions of resources such as the Steve Fund for understanding of the disproportionate impact of COVID on students of color.
- Encourage students not to waive the student insurance so mental health services are covered.
- Offer and actively promote student wellness and community building programs to offset the effects of stress and anxiety. Programs may include virtual art, reflective writing, yoga, dance, resilience strategies, and mindfulness.
- Provide parents of students with suggested activities/strategies, and communication techniques to remain engaged with their college-age students.
- Amend student code of conduct to support enforcement of safety requirements that help keep our campus community healthy and thriving. Provide additional protections to medically vulnerable individuals.

### **Faculty and staff**

- Staff and faculty are encouraged to work with their supervisors as they wish to create and implement flexible and alternative practices to fulfill work responsibilities. Supervisors should accommodate employee preferences to work remotely as much as possible. Employees should not have to disclose health information or provide reasons for reasonable preferences.
- Make part-time faculty, staff, and GAs aware of affordable health care options if they are underinsured or if they have an out-of-network provider.
- Consistently promote the Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) and community mental health resources for employees through the Human Resources website.

- Establish a network of EAP mental health providers that includes therapists with expertise and experience working with diverse individuals who have experienced social marginalization and systemic oppression.
- Work with faculty and staff to find additional insurance coverage if they find themselves facing additional out-of-pocket expenses related to COVID-19 class modality.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

### Students

- Expand and fund tutoring resources to accommodate underserved and underrepresented students whose daily challenges extend beyond education.
- Monitor potential differences in course performance between underrepresented and first-generation students with regards to online and hybrid classes. This information should be used to implement the most appropriate learning modalities for diverse learning.
- Support applications and enrollment of underrepresented students by increasing targeted outreach to high schools and providing application support to students from underrepresented groups.
- Remove application and admissions barriers by eliminating standardized test requirements that have evidence of cultural bias.
- Secure additional funding and personnel resources for tutoring (including online) sessions at college level to support underserved, underrepresented, first-generation students.
- Encourage faculty to keep the unique needs of diverse learners at the forefront of their instruction modality plans as students adjust to new learning platforms.



### Faculty and staff

- To the extent possible, support instructor academic freedom in deciding course modality without necessitating with medical exemptions.
- Continue to offer professional development through CTLT for faculty to ensure inclusive approaches to online class modality.
- Faculty should allow students to “opt-in” to remote learning or other forms of distance learning when needed without attendance penalty (when available) if they feel that the classroom environment poses risks because of underlying health conditions, illness, mental health concerns or COVID-19 related family responsibilities or family or family illness and loss (without a formal ADA designation).

## **STUDENT ACCESSIBILITY**

- Place accessibility at the forefront of online and hybrid course planning. This includes extended support for Student Access and Accommodation Services to ensure files, images, videos, and other posted content are accessible, including providing services to faculty for adapting and converting classroom materials. This also includes alternative methods of testing and proctoring beyond face recognition features that negatively affect students of color and students with disabilities.

## **FACULTY PERFORMANCE AND EXPECTATIONS**

- Temporarily recalibrate research requirements for tenure and promotion for faculty who are pre-tenure during the COVID pandemic. Expand options beyond “stop the clock,” since this option disproportionately affects women’s career advancement and retirement savings.
- Continue to suspend use of student classroom evaluations and course surveys in pre-tenure teaching performance evaluations and faculty yearly evaluation process.

## **CAMPUS CLIMATE AND COMMUNITY BUILDING**

### **Students**

- Recognizing that students of color, immigrant students, and students who identify as LGBTQ+ may face compounded stressors associated with systemic bias and oppression, further promote the Dean of Students’ Inclusive Community Response Team (ICRT) as an avenue of diversity, inclusion, and equity response system for individuals to report broad-based concerns related to racism and bias.
- Build community among underrepresented students and other students at risk of social isolation by promoting virtual social functions such as e-sports competitions; virtual Greek recruitment events; exercise programs, and virtual movie nights.
- Develop resources for students who wish to exercise their rights to freedom of speech and assembly, and train student service staff in non-violent de-escalation tactics to ensure the health and safety of members of our campus community.

### **Students, faculty and staff**

- Work to create a formalized process to identify and address ongoing, systemic COVID-19-related challenges for marginalized and/or minoritized students, faculty, and staff.
- Continue to meet with student, faculty, and staff groups to assess impact of the COVID-19 crisis, and how the University can help them meet challenges.
- Regularly communicate the University’s stand on hate speech and intolerance by refining and publicizing the University’s policies, protocols, and student code of conduct.
- Regularly communicate the University’s stand on hate speech, hate crimes, harassment, and intolerance (including on virtual platforms) by refining and publicizing the University’s policies, protocols, and the student code of conduct.



## **REDBIRD FAMILY CAREGIVING**

### **Students, faculty and staff**

- Allow dependent care needs (childcare, elder care, family care) related to COVID-19 to be an acceptable reason to offer work flexibility (e.g. work remotely).
- Explore and provide information about affordable or free-of-cost emergency childcare options for students.
- Continue to promote Health Promotion and Wellness programs with instructors and staff taking an hour of supervisor-approved time each week.

## **COVID-RELATED OUTCOMES SPECIFIC TO UNDERREPRESENTED COMMUNITIES**

### **Students, faculty and staff**

- Provide vulnerable students and instructors with communication and de-escalation tools to address situations where people surrounding them do not or refuse to wear masks without involving police authorities.
- Provide identification and alternative protective gear (e.g. face shields) to those who cannot wear masks due to a medical condition to avoid confrontation. This verification should be managed through SAAS for students and HR for employees.
- Contact-tracing plans to be implemented by trusted, multicultural professionals who acknowledge and consider the negative history of medical exploitation experienced by Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities.
- Promote a level of community and collective safety enforcement (i.e. masks) that excludes police responses or punitive measures, as people of color face a history of over-policing. due to a medical condition to avoid confrontation. This verification should be managed through SAAS for students and HR for employees.
- Recognize the University's role in partnering with community-based groups (e.g. NAACP; Prairie Pride; Black Lives Matter; Immigration Project) that seek to dismantle systemic oppression, racism, health disparities, and economic disparities in the wake of COVID-19.



## **STUDENT TECHNOLOGY ACCESS**

- Communicate the University’s plan to assist, to the fullest extent possible, low-income students in need with technology resources to help in academic success.
- Re-explore and expand the technological capability of offering hotspots to students in situations where internet is shared or unavailable.
- Provide assistance to students who reside in their home communities and who cannot access consistent internet/Wi-Fi. Assistance could include helping students to identify local resources; need-based financial assistance to support low-cost Wi-Fi services; need-based technology support.

## **STUDENT FINANCIAL SUPPORT**

- Develop a platform to use the \$1.9 million Governor’s Emergency Education Relief Funding (GEER) to offer tuition assistance to underrepresented students who are disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. This includes addressing the digital equity gaps.
- Initiate a broader marketing outreach for the Redbird Response Fund to raise funds for campus community members (students, staff, and faculty) who are or have become economically disadvantaged.
- Create a network of staff volunteers or mentors who can be available to help members of our Redbird community to apply for and access emergency funds.
- Continue efforts to assist students to reduce educational debt.
- Remove registration holds that prevent low-income and first-generation students from enrollment.
- Identify and develop an outreach strategy to help students who need funding with lab fees, art and music supplies, software, and textbook purchases required in their classes..
- Work with advisors to utilize screening questions that determine students’ ability to purchase textbooks as standard advisement protocol.
- Promote and purchase campus subscriptions to open access course materials (e.g. textbooks, videos, recordings, data bases and other learning resources.
- Extend application and enrollment deadlines when possible.

- Offer and advertise emergency housing to students in need.
- Promote access to and use of food pantries for students and ensure that there are alternative options during holidays and breaks.

## STUDENT ATHLETICS, CLUB SPORTS, AND RECREATION

- Organize/promote small group outdoor recreation activities (modeling safety precautions and social distance) such as organized runs, hikes, salsa, hip hop dance, yoga on Quad, and exercise to support health, well-being, and community building.
- Organize/promote small group outdoor recreation activities (modeling safety precautions and social distance) such as organized runs, hikes, salsa, hip hop dance, yoga on Quad, and exercise to support health, well-being, and community building.

## OUTREACH, RELATIONSHIPS, MARKETING, AND MESSAGING

- Create a resource document that will help support community building and social support (virtually and in-person) for students, faculty, and staff.
- Convene a diverse student messaging group to ensure that students, faculty, staff are aware of important resources, policies, practices.
- Communicate with students and families that any traveling, including travel home, can increase the risk for infection and need for self-quarantine.

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## President's Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Council

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