DIVERSITY TO ACHIEVE INCLUSIVE EXCELLENCE

BU’s Office of the Senior Diversity Officer steers our university toward an equitable future.

DIVERSITY. EQUITY. INCLUSION. BELONGING. EXCELLENCE.
Traditionally, Boston University has opened its doors to all, regardless of race, gender, or religion. We led the nation in admitting women to medical school and awarding a PhD to a woman. The Jim Crow era that preceded the Civil Rights Movement attracted many African Americans to BU. Martin Luther King, Jr. (GRS’55, Hon.’59), perhaps BU’s most well-known graduate, completed his training during the tenure of Howard Thurman (Hon.’67), a distinguished theologian and the first African American dean of chapel at a leading university. In 2020, a racial reckoning led the Board of Trustees and President Brown to establish the Office of the Senior Diversity Officer (OSDO) and the Trustee DEI Committee to further our commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB). Today, we aim for even greater realization of these goals because we are confident that diversity—of people, ideas, experiences, and approaches—leads to excellence.

OSDO’s mission is to be an active, engaged liaison between the University’s senior leadership team and the broader BU community. Building on the University’s existing diversity efforts, we review current policies and recommend systemic changes that address issues of bias. The OSDO is committed to promoting inclusive excellence and maintaining an environment where everyone feels welcomed, respected, and supported.

MAKING CHANGE HAPPEN.
The OSDO manages three committees that engage in ongoing dialogue on DEIB-related initiatives throughout the entire BU community.

The Antiracism Working Group (AWG) is responsible for examining policies and practices across the University and making recommendations to the president and other senior leaders on how to remove systemic bias from our practices to create a truly diverse, equitable, and inclusive environment focused on excellence and research.

After conducting several listening sessions, the AWG proposed that new and revised policies include an assessment form describing how the proponents considered DEIB factors in their policy recommendations. Advocates will work with University leadership to gain support for a policy’s content and adoption.
The Community Safety Advisory Group (CSAG) seeks to enhance responsive and preventative efforts for community safety at BU through collaboration with different departments on campus to inform the development of community infrastructure, including alternatives to policing that address a broad range of safety concerns.

Nationally, students’ mental health is in crisis, and colleges and universities are called upon to take comprehensive approaches to support students’ well-being and address their mental health more effectively. In spring 2022, CSAG conducted a campus-wide survey of undergraduate and graduate students about their perceptions of, experiences with, and future priorities for campus safety and policing. The committee then developed recommendations that promote the physical and psychological safety of all members of our community. In fall 2022, CSAG submitted a recommendation for BU to enhance the current police-led response to mental health emergencies by adding on-site clinicians or mental health professionals. CSAG is currently focusing on prevention of and response to sexual misconduct at BU.

The Task Force on Workplace Culture (TFWC), co-led by Human Resources, is assessing the University’s existing diversity practices and other indicators that reflect staff perceptions of their welcome in the work environment and making recommendations for systemic improvements that address gaps in perceptions.

In July 2022, the TFWC conducted an all-staff survey to gauge the perception of flexible work options. The preliminary results were shared with key constituents in the fall, and the final results were shared with the larger BU community in spring 2023. The TFWC presented recommendations to senior leadership regarding work schedule options and ways of building community, teamwork, and morale in a remote/hybrid work environment. The TFWC additionally recommended and received approval for implementation of a BU Staff Advisory Council. This governing body will foster communication between staff and University leadership to identify and address issues that affect our workplace culture and opportunities to improve it.

SHARING PERSPECTIVES. BUILDING COMMUNITY.

OSDO’s goal is to have the University’s work, communications, and events reflect the needs of our students, faculty, and staff to promote inclusive excellence. We strive to be thoughtful and intentional about the stories and voices we highlight. We aim to spearhead campus-wide events that are relevant to the interests of the BU community, aligned with our values, and hosted in partnership with diverse departments and organizations.

Our inaugural event in February 2022, a panel on Critical Race Theory, engaged with the topic from a multidisciplinary approach to promote constructive dialogue and equip the next generation of leaders with a deeper understanding of the scholarship in this area. In the fall of 2022, we hosted a panel for Indigenous Peoples’ Day where experts from varied disciplines discussed the importance of Native American representation through the lens of community, culture, and connection. The OSDO and Human Resources launched the Workplace Culture: Innovation to Action Speaker Series in November 2022, which explores workplace culture practices and concepts by gathering significant thought leaders from varied fields of work.

OUR FUTURE: NEW CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES.

Looking to the future, BU has a unique opportunity to help our students, staff, and faculty become leaders and engage in their communities. Improving campus climate and expanding opportunities through recommendations in policy and practice allow us to build on our institution’s founding legacy to welcome all without restrictions based on gender, race, or religious belief.

Find DEIB resources and contact information at bu.edu/diversity-officer.