

INCLUSIVE EXCELLENCE PLAN, JULY 2021 – JUNE 2024

June 7, 2021

I. Introduction

During the first half of 2021, University Communications engaged in a comprehensive process to review our department's mission, priorities and culture to understand opportunities for advancing our commitment to Inclusive Excellence.

Through the development and implementation of our three-year Inclusive Excellence plan, we endeavor to demonstrate and expand University Communications' commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging in the work we produce and stories we tell on behalf of the University; we also commit to deepening these values within our own organizational culture, where people of varying backgrounds have ongoing opportunities to flourish and succeed.

University Communications' Mission

University Communications is committed to supporting the initiatives outlined in the University's 2030 Strategic Plan. The department serves the institution broadly and is charged with strengthening UVA's positive reputation and increasing awareness of its many accomplishments. This includes:

- Highlighting the academic rigor, collaborative research, vibrant student life, contributions to our community, commitment to service, achievements of the health and medical enterprise, athletic prowess, and the overall successes of our broad University community, including students, faculty, staff, alumni, patients, and others.
- Emphasizing the University's founding mission to cultivate an educated and informed citizenry, and its animating principle of service.
- Sharing the University story with key audiences by using owned, earned, paid and social media programs.
- Developing strategic communications, content, marketing plans and campaigns that support the institution's highest priorities and address market challenges.
- Stewarding and increasing the value of the UVA brand through a robust brand platform, a coherent visual identity system, and participation in a mature licensing and trademark management program.
- Bolstering the University's reputation by leading an effective and proactive issues management program.

Inclusivity and Diversity as Core to This Mission

In concert with our mission, University Communications' Inclusive Excellence plan will serve as a guide for our department as we continue to celebrate the rich diversity of our University community through the stories we tell and work we produce. Our plan encourages us to look internally to strengthen our own foundation as we continue to cultivate a staff culture that promotes connection and a sense of belonging. If our plan is successful, our products will be more meaningful, and our current staff and the talent we attract will be more open, curious, and engaged.

Inclusive Excellence Plan Development

To develop this plan, the University Communications [Leadership Council](#) served as its working group. This team embodies the diverse backgrounds of our staff and includes representative voices from each of our functional areas. Our discovery process included a written assignment for all working group members, focused working group discussions over the course of several months, and facilitated focus group engagement sessions with our entire staff. This process of self-assessment led us to identify strengths and opportunities for improvement. These findings have helped us chart our three-year Inclusive Excellence goals.

II. Self-Assessment

At the outset of this assignment, our working group affirmed that to be successful, Inclusive Excellence is a commitment to giving diverse points of view agency, to being introspective, and to not believing any one of us has all the answers. It is a priority that should be threaded through our organizational culture and proactively monitored. As such, the development of our Inclusive Excellence plan required candid self-appraisal, allowing opportunities for every staff member across the organization to provide input and feedback about how we are doing against each of the dimensions of the Inclusive Excellence framework in the current state. This process helped define our strengths and reveal new opportunities for the future. A summary of this assessment is outlined below.

Access & Success: Reviewing Approaches to Recruitment, Retention & Long-Term Outcomes

PERCEIVED STRENGTHS:

- When it comes to ideology, gender, sexuality, lived experiences, age, professional backgrounds, etc., our staff represent a diverse mix of talent, even if this diversity was not expressly achieved through systematic planning.
- Our Leadership Council includes a diverse mix of people which sends an important message about the inclusivity of our leadership culture and the ability of people from diverse backgrounds to succeed.
- In the past few years, we have made hires that contribute to our ethnic diversity. We also have created opportunities and promoted/hired women into leadership roles. Of note, in recent years, promotion and hiring of women has outpaced rates for male employees.
- There is general opportunity for career growth. If you continuously demonstrate that you are both "willing" and "able," you are given new opportunities and challenges.
- Staff reported feeling that our organization encourages us to develop our skills and that career progression is valued. Professional development opportunities are encouraged.

AREAS OF OPPORTUNITY:

- One of the more difficult challenges we have had as an organization has been recruiting talented employees that are more ethnically heterogeneous. Continuing to recruit from more diverse communities is an ongoing priority as increased diversity on our teams offers added depth and value to our organization.
- Over the years, we have added more women to supervisory roles and to our internal Leadership Council, but overall, we have more men serving in management roles.

Climate & Intergroup Relations: Measuring Feelings of Respect, Belonging and Affirming Relationships

PERCEIVED STRENGTHS:

- Staff felt we are open-minded about different viewpoints and are sincere in our desires to be inclusive. We strive to continue the dialogue and open the door for difficult discussions so that we can continuously grow and improve.
- We also value each other's talent. Creativity and ideation are encouraged at all levels. Some degree of autonomy is given. Staff report feeling supported and a sense of comradery among their colleagues.
- Our culture is committed to providing staff members regular access to leadership. We consistently engage in listening exercises to better understand that pulse of the staff. Managers rely on their team members' views for planning and decision-making.
- When creating our office's five-year strategic communications plan in 2019, we defined "Teamwork," "Integrity," and "Curiosity" among our core values, all of which are needed to be truly inclusive.

AREAS OF OPPORTUNITY:

- Some staff reported that our office atmosphere felt too masculine. We should spend more time reflecting on our culture and ensure that it is not unintentionally framed by male norms of behavior and speech that could make female staff feel excluded.
- University Communications should continue to prioritize opportunities to have meaningful dialogue around inclusion beyond this discovery planning exercise. Having a meaningful dialogue and plan for living this idea is a critical area for perpetual improvement.

Education & Scholarship: Promoting Intercultural Awareness and Competence

PERCEIVED STRENGTHS:

- UVA Today serves as a platform for sharing content that amplifies the important initiatives, progress and scholarship around diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives across the University community.

AREAS OF OPPORTUNITY:

- While we encourage staff professional development opportunities, these are usually directly geared to an employee's role and not to cultural awareness and competence. We should explore professional development opportunities specifically focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- Internally, we also could improve in overall business and operations literacy, including continuing to look for new ways to educate staff on the work of other teams working within University Communications.

Infrastructure & Investment: Informing and Enabling Intentionally Inclusive & Innovative Organizations

PERCEIVED STRENGTHS:

- Our work is themed around the University's mission of Great and Good. The stories we tell, the videos we produce, and the advertising we place are intended to show the University's overall values and commitments – including diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- Our visual representation (in photography, video, websites, print collateral, etc.) includes people of diverse interests and backgrounds. Our storytelling content and news coverage represents and regularly features our diverse population and audiences.
- In recent years, we have spent significant time and resources reviewing and refining our internal team structure to best meet our needs. "Collaboration" is a theme at the core of our departmental strategic plan, and we have seen great success in projects requiring cross-team collaboration.

AREAS OF OPPORTUNITY:

- While we have made significant strides, there is an opportunity to continue to invest and explore ways to define and foster a stronger culture of community. The pandemic has greatly impacted the ways in which we interact. Our organization has continued to grow and evolve in recent years, adding new colleagues to the team. Our offices' collective sense of self should evolve and grow, just like the work we do.
- We should continue to explore new opportunities for input from staff at all levels in setting work plans and other priorities to ensure inclusivity and avoid a sense that at times they are executing directives.
- Much of the work we create lives in the digital space, which is constantly evolving. Our team's digital developers, designers and social media staff will need to stay up to date with accessibility standards in order to ensure users, regardless of disability or impairment, can interact and navigate within our web presence.

Community & Partnership: Understanding our Communities & Partners with which We are Engaged

PERCEIVED STRENGTHS:

- As communicators for the University, we have the responsibility and privilege to tell stories about areas across our University and surrounding community.
- We have worked hard and been successful in demonstrating our impact across the University enterprise. This includes diverse storytelling from across schools, units, athletics, student experiences, strategic priorities, and beyond.
- For years, we have also been in charge of communications for and coordination of important initiatives events such as the Commonwealth of Virginia Campaign, the Community Bridges 5K, the Concert for Charlottesville, participating in the annual UVA Day of Caring, and more.

AREAS OF OPPORTUNITY:

- As storytellers and primary communicators for the University, we have an important opportunity to continue emphasizing underrepresented people and communities. Based on the University's history and in today's environment, it is indisputable that there are more stories to tell. It is our responsibility to do this boldly.
- We should also consider if there are new opportunities to share our content and advertising on more media outlets that are specifically aimed at diverse audiences.

III. Our Three-Year Goals

Based on the observations from our self-assessment and reflections on our concurrent [departmental strategic communications plan](#), University Communications established the following goals to advance our commitment to Inclusive Excellence over the next three years.

These initiatives are distinguished as “internal” or “external” goals. As the University’s central communications hub, our commitment to Inclusive Excellence should be represented in both external-facing messaging as well as embodied within the internal culture of our organization.

Access & Success: Reviewing Approaches to Recruitment, Retention & Long-Term Outcomes

INTERNAL

1. *Improve recruitment process to strengthen ethnic diversity within our applicant pools.*

Through future hiring processes, we will continue to strive to build a team that represents diverse backgrounds and ethnicities, offering needed value to our organization. We will work with UVA HR to develop comprehensive recruitment plans at the outset of each new hiring process, including focused diversity outreach. We will continue to refine onboarding processes to help new hires feel supported and accepted.

EXTERNAL

2. *Develop communications that support the institution’s efforts to: attract and support exceptionally talented, diverse, and service-oriented students; recruit and retain excellent and diverse faculty; and attract and support the most talented and passionate staff.*

As outlined in our department’s five-year strategic plan, annually develop communications initiatives and campaigns that support the University’s efforts to strengthen its foundation to recruit and retain talented and diverse faculty, staff, and students.

Climate & Intergroup Relations: Measuring Feelings of Respect, Belonging and Affirming Relationships

INTERNAL

1. *Conduct a follow-up employee climate study to assess staff satisfaction and sense of belonging amongst the University Communications staff.*

A new climate survey will allow us to set new benchmarks for our team as we reflect on opportunities to advance office culture and deepen a sense of belonging. Assess feedback and compare developments over time, reviewing against findings from the initial study conducted in 2016.

2. *Continue to champion a workplace environment where women staff members feel supported and accepted.*

Ensure workplace leadership culture is reflective of both male and female characteristics and perspectives. Continue to look for new opportunities to incorporate female representation across our teams and our work. Collaborate with internal Employee Engagement Council to create teambuilding experiences that are developed and led by women.

EXTERNAL

- 3. *Through our initiatives and campaigns, celebrate the University's vibrancy and diversity of thoughts, experiences and backgrounds, and communicate about difficult and shared experiences.***

In alignment with our five-year strategic plan, develop communications programs and plans that elevate the University's commitment to diversity, elevating relevant stories within earned and owned media channels. Communicate a sense of belonging and the University's aspirations for the future.

Education & Scholarship: Promoting Intercultural Awareness and Competence

INTERNAL

- 1. *Create and encourage professional development opportunities that reflect and support intercultural awareness and competence.***

Grow our professional development efforts by encouraging and implementing engaging education and training offerings that are specifically geared towards intercultural awareness and competence. These offerings may span from more grassroots programs, to hosting outside presenters, to more traditional professional development seminars. All staff across the department should have access to these opportunities.

EXTERNAL

- 2. *Expand and produce new content that educates University audiences about the work the University is doing around diversity, equity, and inclusion.***

Through our communication products and campaigns, continue to share content that amplifies related DEI initiatives, progress, and scholarship across the University community.

Infrastructure & Investment: Informing and Enabling Intentionally Inclusive & Innovative Organizations

INTERNAL

- 1. *In alignment with our five-year strategic plan, continue to promote an office culture that values collaboration, ideation, celebration, risk-taking and mentoring.***

Carefully review what we have learned about how we worked with—and related to—each other during the pandemic. Develop new ways to promote collaboration across units and teams to advance teamwork and productivity.

EXTERNAL

- 2. *Ensure digital communications remain accessible to our audiences, regardless of disability or impairment.***

Seek out and regularly participate in accessibility training and other programming to ensure our sites and communications remain current. Address updates as required based on new accessibility standards.

Community & Partnership: Understanding our Communities & Partners with which We are Engaged

INTERNAL

1. *Build and strengthen relationships with key partners across Grounds, including in the Academic Division, UVA Health, Athletics, and UVA Wise.*

Continue our mission to build partnerships with our colleagues across Grounds, participating in cross-collaborative projects, leading communications forums, and providing communications advisement when called upon. Continue to deepen the mission of the Communications Council, regularly bringing together senior communications leaders from across the University.

EXTERNAL

2. *Support the local community through what we publish and produce.*

Our efforts and work products must reflect our community in ways that are authentic. Develop content that identifies and celebrates the University's involvement and engagement in the local community. Ensure that partnerships and regional relationships are recognized and celebrated. Continue to support community initiatives such as the Commonwealth for Virginia Campaign and Day of Caring.

Measurement of These Goals:

We will measure and evaluate our efforts through a variety of approaches, including:

INTERNAL

- Staff satisfaction, sense of belonging and other feedback acquired through a comprehensive climate survey and ongoing dialogue with staff.
- Recruitment, retainment, and advancement of talented and diverse employees.
- Staff participation in professional development activities geared towards intercultural awareness and competency.
- Volume of—and engagement in—office culture events and staff appreciation programs.

EXTERNAL

- Readership analytics, content consumption, viewership, social media influence, engagement, and sentiment assessments.
- Volume and efficacy of communications produced, and media earned in support of this plan.
- Market research assessing UVA perceptions associated with the strength of the institution's reputation and knowledge and recall of priorities associated with the University's strategic plan, and especially in support of diversity, equity and inclusion.

IV. Communicating Our Plan and Ongoing Assessment

Each year, the University Communications Leadership Council develops an annual work plan outlining the strategic priorities and key projects for the year ahead. Prior to publishing our annual work plan, we gather staff feedback and input to ensure collective team buy-in and support. Moving forward, our Inclusive Excellence initiatives will be included as actionable projects within this comprehensive annual work plan.

Our Leadership Council meets regularly, and it is during these sessions that progress against our Inclusive Excellence plan will be reported to the group. During a semi-annual planning retreat, the Leadership Council will formally assess status and development of Inclusive Excellence initiatives for the year. We will pivot and adjust as needed to ensure we are achieving our goals.

***We should strive not simply to be great, but also to be good,
recognizing that in the not-too-distant future,
it will likely be impossible for a university to be truly great if it is not also good.***
– President Jim Ryan, on the University Vision, The 2030 Plan