



**Western Oregon University Board of Trustees:
Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Accessibility Committee (DEIAC)
Meeting No. 16– January 30, 2025
1:00pm – 2:30pm**

Minutes

I. CALL-TO-MEETING AND ROLL CALL

Chair Ambris welcomed everyone to the January 30 meeting of the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Accessibility Committee, called the meeting to order at 1:06pm and asked Secretary Sorce to call the roll.

Committee Members Present: Chair Jerry Ambris, Trustee Paige Jackson Trustee Viviana Romero, Trustee Jim Vu

Others Present: President Peters, Executive Director of the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Dominique Vargas, Board Secretary Evan Sorce

II. COMMITTEE CHAIR Welcome:

Chair Ambris acknowledged the recent political climate and developments from Washington DC and expressed appreciation to President Peters and his team for the communication regarding the changing political landscape. Chair Ambris mentioned that he has full faith that President Peters and his team will continue to monitor the situation. President Peters has emphasized that this is an uncertain and tumultuous time for many people in Higher Education based on Federal changes through executive orders, including situations where the state and federal laws are going to conflict, and we will have to seek guidance from the State on how we proceed.

Secretary Sorce announced that this will be the first meeting where we record and post online in compliance with state law.

III. CONSENT AGENDA

1) [Approval of the October 17,2024 Meeting Minutes](#)

Chair Ambris asked for any corrections or discussion on the October 17, 2024 meeting minutes. Trustee Jackson pointed out that she is marked and being present and excused at the same time. Secretary Sorce mentioned he will get that fixed. Trustee Romero moved to approve the October 17, 2024 meeting minutes as presented in the docket, Trustee Jackson seconded the motion. There was no additional discussion.

Roll Call Vote:

Chair Ambris;	Aye
Trustee Jackson	Aye
Trustee Romero	Aye

Motion Passes 4-0-0**IV. REPORT & DISCUSSION ITEMS****1) Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Update | Dominique Vargas**

Executive Director Vargas presented her board update, which can be found on page 4 of the docket. Executive Director Vargas discussed the ongoing work on the equity assessment action plan, the development of a digital accessibility policy, and the update of the restrooms map. She also mentioned creating a community-based advisory group and continuing work around the equity assessment. Executive Director Vargas also highlighted the inauguration of Western Oregon University's first-ever class of Tri Alpha (1st generation student honor society) induction ceremony, and we inducted 39 students.

Chair Ambris then moved the discussion to the climate survey, highlighting the importance of returning the findings to the university's strategic plan. Executive Director Vargas shared that the next steps would involve developing a new equity assessment team and revisiting the climate survey data to make recommendations for the action plan. Executive Director Vargas also mentioned the importance of communication and the need for more innovative ways to reach students. Lastly, the conversation ended with Executive Director Vargas expressing excitement about the growth potential identified in the report.

2) Climate Survey Findings and Report | Dominique Vargas

Chair Ambris then moved the discussion to the climate survey results presented earlier that week by Dr. Shelby West, highlighting the importance of tying the findings back to the university's strategic plan. Executive Director Vargas shared that the next steps would involve developing a new equity assessment team and revisiting the climate survey data to make recommendations for the action plan. Executive Director Vargas also mentioned the importance of communication and the need for more innovative ways to reach students. Executive Director Vargas concluded her initial remarks by expressing excitement about the constructive feedback and growth potential identified in the report.

The committee then had a robust discussion that included contributions from Chair Ambris, President Peters, Trustee Romero, and Trustee Jackson. They highlighted the need for improvement in student support, basic needs, faculty-staff relations, and communication. Chair Ambris emphasized the importance of setting priorities and allocating resources for these improvements.

Trustee Romero expressed concern about the negative experiences the Faculty and Staff highlighted in the report. As a student, Trustee Romero also wanted to emphasize that although the students who completed the survey are more likely to give positive feedback, it is important to consider the perspectives of students who may not have completed the survey because of fear, frustration, or other barriers. Trustee Jackson mentioned a stark difference in support levels between departmental units and the university. They expressed that it might be because they feel more supported by their colleagues, with whom they spend most of their time working, but not the university as a

whole. Executive Director Vargas suggested that the full report would provide more context and insights into these issues.

The President discussed the perception of accessibility and collaboration within the school, noting that while they strive to be present and engaged, everyone may not feel that they are. Chair Ambris and Trustee Vu mentioned that they are struggling to find that balance between being accessible and present and the perception of not being at everything. Trustee Romero shared her perspective as a student, noting that she felt intimidated by the board but appreciated their approachability. Executive Director Vargas and Secretary Sorce discussed the need for more opportunities for students to engage with alumni and family and the importance of creating a welcoming environment for all. The committee also discussed the challenges of recognition and appreciation within the university and should strive to improve.

The committee discussed strategies to increase student participation in extracurricular events and improve communication. Trustee Romero highlighted the need to focus more on physical and digital accessibility. Executive Director Vargas assured the committee that accessibility will be a focus of the action plan.

3) Interests of DEIAC Members for 2024-2025 Academic Year

Executive Director Vargas and Secretary Sorce brought this agenda item forward. Both asked the committee if there were any speakers or expanded information on any item that the Office of DEI is working on that we can bring forward to this committee. Chair Ambris mentioned that he would be interested in looking into the utilization of physical spaces on campus and identifying potential ways to make better use of these physical spaces. Secretary Sorce proposed a focus on digital access, and Executive Director Vargas suggested inviting HR and disability access services to share their work and perspectives. President Peters emphasized that the discussions in this committee are some of the most important. We need to lean into the importance of innovative thinking and the potential for significant changes, considering ideas such as offering free housing or food to students on campus.

Trustee Vu emphasized the importance of understanding the value proposition of attracting students to Western University, particularly first-time college students and those from diverse backgrounds. He highlighted the need to focus on the needs of students who aren't currently at the university rather than just those already enrolled. Chair Ambris agreed, suggesting that the university identify its target audience and cater to their needs to remove barriers. Trustee Jackson shared data from their AI Chatbot, revealing that financial concerns were a significant reason for students leaving the university. President Peters suggested innovative ways to reach potential students, such as leveraging AI or scheduling appointments in community centers. The committee agreed on a more student-centered approach to better understand their target audience's needs.

Lastly, the committee discusses the importance of focusing on a few key initiatives rather than trying to do too many things simultaneously. Trustee Vu and Trustee Jackson emphasized the need to identify areas with the best return on investment and align them with the existing strategic plan. The committee agrees on the value of doing fewer things better and intentionally improving current successful practices.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

No additional announcements were made.

V. ADJOURNMENT

Trustee Ambris adjourns the meeting at 2:36 pm.