

ACADEMIC CONNECTIONS

THOUGHTS AND UPDATES FROM DR. W. P. ANDREW LEE

December 8, 2020

Dear Colleagues,

As the end of the year approaches, I would like to take time to review the progress that we have made in our continued efforts to build an equitable environment that serves all who learn, train, and work at UT Southwestern. Heeding the calls for social justice heard across the country this year, we have focused further on promoting programs and organizational changes that lead to long-term improvement in the diversity and experience of our students, post-doctoral fellows, residents, and faculty. We do not underestimate our tasks, as racial bias can be pervasive and insidious, and no one is immune to it.

Our legacy of excellence stems from recognizing and cultivating bright individuals to achieve innovative discoveries in science and medicine. We encourage a broad spectrum of ideas and experiences in our learners, which fuels the strength of the talent at our institution.

Student Diversity and Inclusion efforts are focused on recruiting and supporting our diverse student body by embracing an inclusive environment. In 2020, this direction has yielded remarkable results. Twenty-seven percent of our Medical School class of 2024 consists of underrepresented minority students. Moreover, underrepresented minority students make up 30 percent of U.S. students in the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences and 25 percent of students in the School of Health Professions.

We continue to be intentional about increasing diversity in our faculty. Dr. Quinn Capers has joined us this month from Ohio State as the new Associate Dean for Faculty Diversity and the inaugural Vice Chair for Diversity and Inclusion in the Department of Internal Medicine. In January, Dr. Arnaldo Diaz Vazquez will begin his tenure as our inaugural Assistant Dean for Diversity and Inclusion in the Graduate School, after a 7-year tenure in a comparable position at University of Pennsylvania.

During this challenging year, leaders have taken a reflective look at our policies and practices while welcoming the input of students to understand how we might better serve the community and build stronger alliances with communities of color. As a result, we have come up with a series of initiatives focused on inclusion that leverage collaboration with the student body to support each of our three schools.

In the Medical School, we are committed to revising the curriculum to embed emphasis on cultural humility, anti-racism, and health equity. We are also revising the cultural education in the School of Health Professions, and a new Assistant Dean position is being established to enhance diversity and inclusion. Implicit bias training will be conducted for all search committees for leadership positions across the institution.

In the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences, the new Assistant Dean for Diversity and Inclusion, Dr. Diaz Vazquez, will strengthen our focus on recruitment, retention, and mentoring for learners. An important program that he will help to expand is our Provost's Initiative for Diverse Emerging Scholars (PROVIDES). The recently launched program aims to close the racial diversity gap that persists at most academic institutions nationwide in the sciences by offering resources to early-career scientists. Additionally, it will increase the diversity of the postdoctoral community at UTSW and support the transition of postdoctoral fellows into independent faculty positions.

In collaboration with UT Dallas, we are also responding to an anticipated application from the National Institutes of Health for the Faculty Institutional Recruitment for Sustainable Transformation (FIRST) program, which seeks to enhance and maintain cultures of inclusive excellence in the biomedical research community.

Going forward, we will continue to work heavily alongside colleges, high schools, and elementary schools to build the pipeline for a diverse community of students to matriculate into UT Southwestern. This year, we celebrate wins for two of our outreach programs, Science Teacher Access to Resources at Southwestern (STARS) and Health Professions Recruitment and Exposure Program (HPREP), which were recognized by *INSIGHT Into Diversity* magazine with 2020 Inspiring Programs in STEM Awards.

Great progress is being made in our community to ensure both learner and faculty success, but we must continue to remain vigilant in recognizing racial bias and seek equity for our staff, learners, and faculty. With your support, we will strive to make further strides in increasing diversity and inclusion throughout the organization.



Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andy". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

W. P. Andrew Lee, M.D.

Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost
Dean, UT Southwestern Medical School

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