



Rowan University

# Diverse, *by Design*

DEVELOPING A DIVISION OF DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION



## TABLE OF **Contents**

**2** *Creating community*

**4** *Listening and learning*

**6** *Critical first steps*

**8** *University-wide leadership and initiatives*

**10** *Speaking up, locally and beyond*

**12** *The work's not done*



# Creating meaningful change

GREETINGS FROM ROWAN UNIVERSITY'S DIVISION OF DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION

Like many institutions, Rowan University struggled with how to effectively address issues of diversity, equity and inclusion.

## **TWO YEARS AGO, WE FULLY COMMITTED TO IT.**

Rowan created an entire division whose goal is an inclusive, equitable university for everyone—a big lift considering our fast-growing university of three campuses, two medical schools and nearly 20,000 students.

Getting there started with listening to our community to determine its needs and concerns. We merged related offices under the umbrella of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, recruited faculty, students and staff to a University-wide DEI Council, formed committees, built a working collaborative with law enforcement and, most importantly, committed to University-wide action!

I know this work is as important to you as it is to me and hope you'll take a few minutes to read about what we did.

In service,

**MONIKA WILLIAMS SHEALEY, Ph.D.**  
*Senior Vice President for Diversity,  
Equity & Inclusion*



# Creating community

BREAKING INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS TO ATTAIN DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION




“

Thoughtful discussions about community happen everywhere.

*We should not even have to have a conversation about equity and inclusion for everyone, but people are not always inclusive.”*

ALI HOUSHMAND



**IN WORKING TO BUILD A COMMUNITY** that's welcoming and inclusive of everyone, Rowan leadership realized that wishful thinking wasn't enough and that tough choices, commitments and actions were needed.

As an Iranian immigrant, President Ali Houshmand experienced bigotry in college in England and here in the United States. As president, he had an opportunity to influence change.

"We should not even have to have a conversation about equity and inclusion for everyone, but people are not always inclusive," Houshmand said. "Whether intentional or not, people sometimes do not welcome people of color, or people of a different sexual orientation, or a different country of origin, or those who have different abilities, speak a different language, or worship a religion that differs from their own. We needed to make a big change."

While Rowan, a rapidly growing public research university, had long pursued initiatives to increase diversity and inclusion, the efforts were noteworthy but disparate.

Centralizing the effort, Houshmand appointed a president's fellow for diversity and inclusion to identify issues and help address concerns. But within one year it became clear that a broader approach was needed.

To remedy that, Rowan became the first university in the state, and one of just a few in the nation, to create an entire Division of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion. Creating a safe and welcoming environment for historically marginalized populations and people of all abilities became an institutional priority.

## ***Taking action***

In 2019, Rowan's Division of DEI was charged with fostering universal acceptance, inclusion and belonging regardless of ability, race, gender, sexuality, age, faith, national origin or political perspective.

"Our belief in developing Rowan as a place of acceptance and diversity goes well beyond a clichéd perception that this is just about race," said Dr. Monika Williams Shealey, the division's senior vice president. "We're focused on every student, faculty member and staff member, every one of whom wants to be valued for who they are—without having to worry about identity being an issue."

In addition to addressing attitudes about race, changing demographics, current events, even the evolving nature of social media, the new division committed to addressing data that revealed disparities in graduation rates, student debt load, enrollment trends and interactions with police.

Armed with that info, a mission became clear: the division would need to involve every department and office, from facilities and academics to human resources and procurement.

"For far too long, the work of DEI has fallen on marginalized populations to explain it or to create opportunities," said Dr. Penny McPherson-Myers, the division's vice president. "DEI is everyone's responsibility because it impacts us all."

# Listening and learning

ROWAN EDUCATORS KNEW THAT PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES HAD TO BE IDENTIFIED BEFORE MEANINGFUL CHANGE COULD OCCUR. TO DO SO, ROWAN DEI LEADERS HELD A SERIES OF CROSS-CAMPUS LISTENING TOURS TO GATHER DATA FROM STUDENTS, FACULTY AND STAFF.

*Students showed their support for Asian American and Pacific Islanders in Spring 2021.*



## ***DEI Listening Tour***

Results from our initial tour recommended addressing the recruitment and retention of diverse students, faculty and staff, particularly from racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds; establishing some common language for DEI; and a commitment to DEI from University leaders.

## ***Neurodiversity Listening Tour***

This tour identified a need for training and education on neurodiversity for faculty, staff and students; providing resources and environments for neurodiverse populations; and neurodiversity representation and celebration across campuses. To help address these issues, Rowan is creating a Center for Neurodiversity and Accessibility Services.

## ***Equity Audit***

Feedback from the Equity Audit recommended campus training on embedding DEI in content, reframing and redesigning assessments, encouraging classroom communities to better understand students, and making a commitment to view students through strengths-based lenses. Dialogue about privilege and oppression was recommended for students, including more cultural awareness seminars, investigating STEM barriers for students of color, experiential learning, equitable housing and commuter student needs.



*In and out of the classroom, students seek ways to connect in a diverse, inclusive community.*



# Critical first steps

## *Coordinating resources, collaborating on strategy*

The division created a DEI Council with more than 40 representatives from across the University, and the council meets monthly. In its first year, the division also launched a DEI blog to share activities, goals and progress; restructured the Title IX Office to address additional bias and harassment claims; created a popular DEI certificate program; developed unconscious bias training; and launched a Neurodiversity Task Force to ensure that students and staff with neurological differences are recognized and supported. Most importantly, every department across the University adopted DEI-related annual goals and a year-end audit measures progress institution-wide.

*“With this division, we’re not just addressing the symptoms. We’re addressing the root causes.”*

MONIKA WILLIAMS SHEALEY

After a kick-off at the town square, the Juneteenth march carried on with campus and community supporters.



*Campus neighbors and others participate in the Rowan community demonstrations.*



### ***Rallying for human rights***

In June 2020, following the May 25 killing of George Floyd, the division developed a five-part series of public discussions in response to the ensuing turmoil. Held virtually, more than 600 people participated.

“It was an inflection point,” Shealey said. “We expected a response, but having that many log on and join us was surprising and gratifying.”

Also in 2020, in observance of Juneteenth, some 300 marchers, including University administrators, employees and students, protested racism in law enforcement while also celebrating the 155th anniversary of the end of slavery in America.

### ***Certificate program***

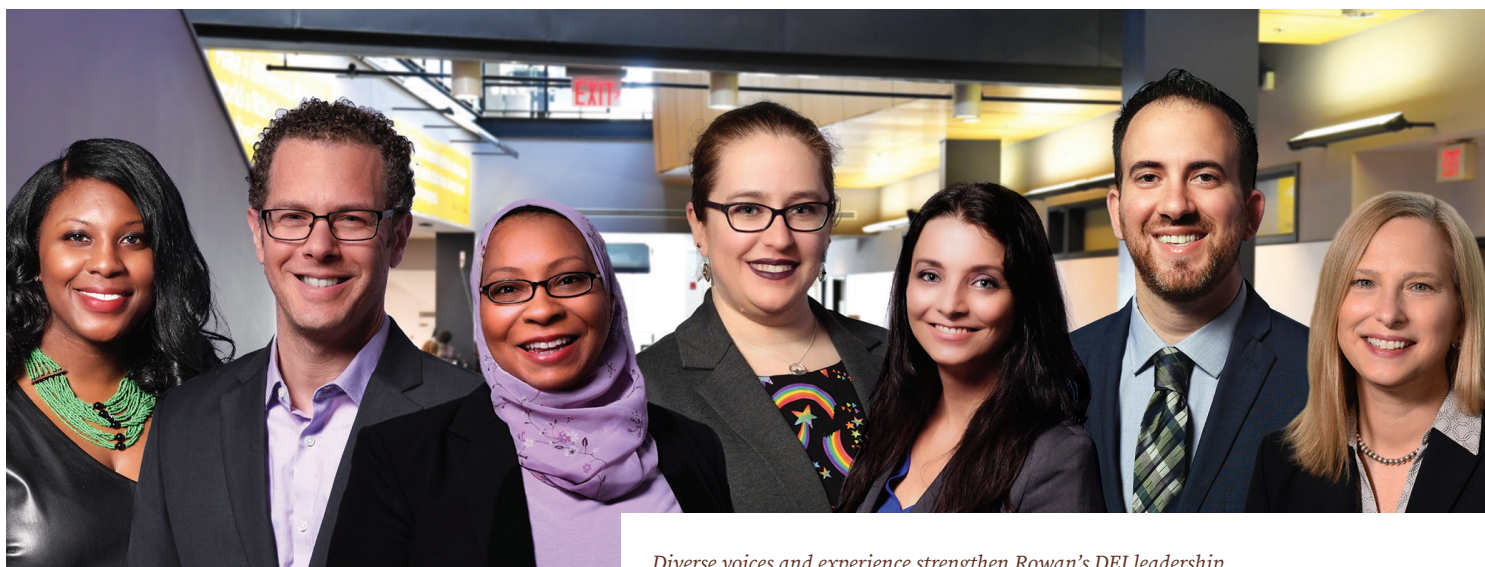
Today, cohorts for the DEI certificate course quickly fill each time it’s offered and the Division provides professional development for business, industry and other institutions.

### ***Building understanding***

A book study group challenges readers to think deeply about anti-racism each semester.

“Rowan’s South Jersey community is reflective of our nation,” Shealey said. “Yes, we’ve come a long way in this country. But until we address the roots of our issues—particularly as it relates to race, class and gender—we will continue to put on Band-Aids. With this division, we’re not just addressing the symptoms. We’re addressing the root causes.”

# University-wide leadership and initiatives



*Diverse voices and experience strengthen Rowan's DEI leadership.*

**A CRITICAL COMPONENT TO INCREASING DIALOGUE ABOUT DEI, ROWAN'S DEI COUNCIL MEETS MONTHLY TO DISCUSS CURRENT TRENDS AND WAYS TO IMPLEMENT BEST PRACTICES. COUNCIL MEMBERS SHARE KNOWLEDGE DEVELOPED DURING THESE MEETINGS WITH CO-WORKERS AND FELLOW STUDENTS.**

In addition to the main monthly meeting, the Council created three Strategic Priority Committees that research diversity, equity and inclusion issues within the Rowan community and strategies to address them.

#### **THE STRATEGIC PRIORITY COMMITTEES INCLUDE:**

1. Creating a More Inclusive and Equitable Campus Community
2. Recruiting, Retaining and Supporting a More Diverse Campus Community
3. Promoting and Supporting Inclusive Teaching, Scholarship and Professional Development

#### **LAW ENFORCEMENT AND COMMUNITY COLLABORATIVE**

An offshoot of the Council is the Law Enforcement and Community Collaborative (LECC), which includes members of the Rowan community, local law enforcement professionals and faith leaders. The group was commissioned to address the following priorities:

1. Professional development for law enforcement rooted in a commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion;
2. Identifying and disseminating evidence-based practices that facilitate engagement with diverse communities;
3. Developing infrastructure to research, grants and program evaluation for LECC members and the broader community.

*Rowan's vibrant student life culture builds and celebrates diversity and inclusion.*



The Division of DEI brought together several disparate offices under one umbrella, including:

**THE OFFICE OF STUDENT EQUITY & COMPLIANCE**, which provides students support and protection under Title VI and Title IX.

**THE OFFICE OF SOCIAL JUSTICE, INCLUSION AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION**, which cultivates leadership, identity development and global citizenship through the Dr. Harley E. Flack Student Mentoring Program; the Interfaith and Spirituality Exploration Center; the LGBTQIA+ Center; the Multicultural Center; and the Women's Center.

**ACHIEVING SUCCESS THROUGH COLLABORATION, ENGAGEMENT AND DETERMINATION**, which includes the University's state-funded Educational Opportunity Fund, providing financial assistance and academic support for low income, first generation, academically promising New Jersey residents, and RISE, a scholarship program for highly motivated first gen students.

**THE CREATING HIGHER ASPIRATION AND MOTIVATION PROJECT**, a state- and federally-funded pre-college program serving 6th-12th grade students, many from underserved communities.

**THE ROWAN UNIVERSITY FACULTY CENTER FOR EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING AND LEARNING**, which is shared with the Division of Academic Affairs

**THE DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION COMMITTEE AT ROWAN'S SCHOOL OF OSTEOPATHIC MEDICINE**

# Speaking up, locally and beyond



Students organized and led the 2020 Juneteenth march for justice.

*It was an opportunity to bring national issues that are impacting our campus to a space where we could talk openly and work toward healing and action.”*

PENNY MCPHERSON MYERS

**IN THE AFTERMATH OF GEORGE FLOYD’S DEATH** at the hands of police in May 2020, Rowan’s Division of DEI, along with the divisions of Academic Affairs and Student Affairs, organized a five-part virtual series, “We Are Not OK: Injustice, Action and Healing.”

“It was an opportunity to bring national issues that are impacting our campus to a space where we could talk openly and work toward healing and action,” said Vice President for DEI Dr. Penny McPherson Myers.

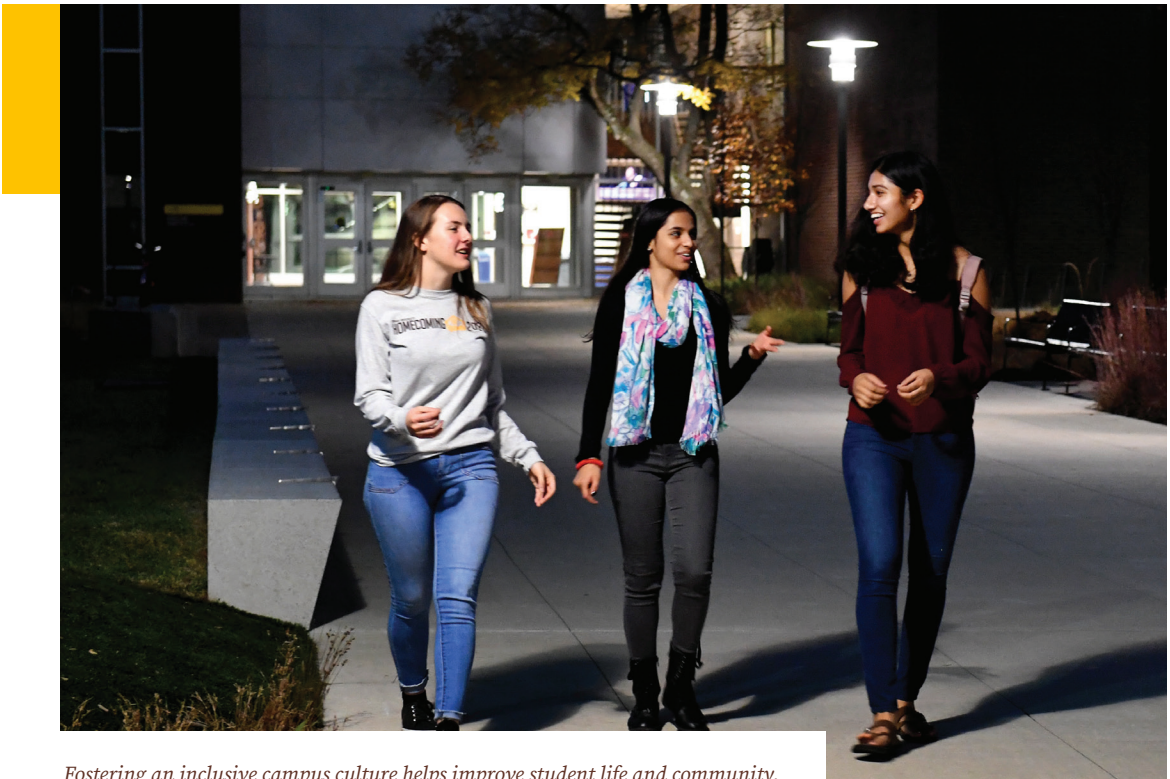
Participants discussed racism and policing, especially in Black and Brown communities, and conditions that led to Floyd’s killing.

“We need our police forces to be actively anti-racist,” said Arielle Gedeon, the first Black female president of Rowan’s Student Government Association. “When you lose that emphasis, when personal fear of someone’s skin color comes into play, that’s when you lose that goal of protection and safety for all.”

In September 2020, the Division hosted “Dreams Will Not Be Deferred: A Conversation With Chief Diversity Officers on the Status of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in New Jersey Higher Education Institutions.”

The panel included moderator Hester Agudosi, chief diversity officer, New Jersey Office of Diversity and Inclusion; Dr. Monika Williams Shealey, senior vice president for DEI at Rowan; and diversity officers from William Paterson University, Stockton University, Seton Hall University and The College of New Jersey.

“We wanted the State of New Jersey to hear from us regarding what was happening on our campuses and we wanted to tap into resources provided by the state,” Shealey said. “We also wanted to provide the state with information they may find useful as they begin to engage in DEI work statewide.”



*Fostering an inclusive campus culture helps improve student life and community.*

# The work's not done

**ROWAN UNIVERSITY'S DEI PROGRAM IS JUST GETTING STARTED**, but it's already having a huge impact. Openness, acceptance and a rejection of racist attitudes are becoming interwoven with our campus ethic. Bigotry of any form is not tolerated and a free expression of ideas is encouraged. We hope our cross-campus approach to DEI becomes a model for others to embrace. Meanwhile, our work goes on.

Learn more about diversity, equity and inclusion at [Rowan DEI](#), which provides scores of resources, including videos, data and analysis, the DEI blog, professional development support and links to reading lists, instructional materials and more.

*Our goal is that Rowan graduates leave with their own commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion.*





*Historic Bunce Hall makes a dramatic statement about Rowan's commitment to inclusion.*

## **MISSION STATEMENT**

*The Division of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion at Rowan University leads and supports initiatives that promote diversity, equity and inclusion by developing and sustaining meaningful and collaborative relationships that result in a more diverse and inclusive community and centering the voices of our community to drive university-wide culturally sustaining initiatives and equitable opportunities.*

## OUR RESPONSIBILITY

*As an institution of higher education, Rowan has the responsibility to expose students to educational opportunities that promote growth, development and appreciation of diverse perspectives through coursework, experiences, and programming. Further, we promote inclusive professional development for faculty and staff. We are committed to encouraging intellectual, academic and social interaction and engagement across our campuses.*



DIVISION OF DIVERSITY,  
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