

Advancing Diversity Gathering (January 11, 2022)
Video Link: https://video.vt.edu/id/1_Ov2ptk1q
SOE Update Script

Hello.

Thank you for joining us for an update on the Virginia Tech School of Education's efforts to advance diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice.

Probably all of you watching work in education—at whatever levels—so you know that education stands as perhaps the most important social institution for tackling social injustice in societies around the world. Education has played a big part in creating inequities, of course. Yet we also believe that education at every level and in every context remains one of our best hopes for challenging and fixing social injustice. The School of Education's administrators, staff, faculty, and students have been working hard to make this promise more of a reality through our teaching, research, service, and outreach.

ADMINISTRATION & HIRING

First, diversity and equity have been set as a top priority by our director, Dr. Kristin Gehsmann. And it's not just rhetorical for the school's administrators. At each decision point, a common question for everyone to answer is "Are we being inclusive? Have we considered ways that this impacts diverse members of our community?"

The School of Education's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee has stepped up concerted activity toward our commitments to making our Virginia Tech community and the surrounding communities more inclusive and aware of diversity issues. This includes hosting gatherings and film showings to commemorate DEI events and partnering with local organizations that fight for equity and justice. In the Spring of 2022 we will be hosting a workshop to help faculty make their syllabi and courses more diverse and inclusive.

The School of Education has also utilized the support of the University's wonderful Future Faculty Diversity Program to great advantage. This year we secured commitments from three new faculty members in science education, indigenous education, and civil rights education history to join us in coming years.

RESEARCH

Diversity, equity, and inclusion are cornerstones of nearly all faculty's research in the School of Education. Here are just a few highlights.

Carol A. Mullen, professor of educational leadership, has recently edited the *Handbook of Social Justice Interventions in Education* from Springer Press. It's 57 chapters takes seriously the notion that social justice can't just be general ethical precepts, but instead educators must have

interventions as a critical component. The numerous chapters then provide concrete ideas and case studies for many groups and identities in need of interventions.

Brett Jones, professor of educational psychology, is conducting one study examining how female and non-White students' motivation and engagement varies in a computer science course. In another study, he and colleagues examined how undergraduate students' motivation-related perceptions affect their engagement in different countries.

Bonnie Billingsley and Tom Williams, professors in the Curriculum & Instruction program, have focused recent research on the problems of underrepresentation of teachers of color in special education.

Marcus Weaver-Hightower, professor in the Foundations of Education, recently co-edited a handbook on gender and gender identity in higher education from Wiley. He also has a book coming out in 2022 that considers the many political, cultural, environmental, and social justice issues related to school meals in the United States and England.

Claire Robbins, associate professor of Higher Education and Student Affairs, has recently published with colleagues and former students on how we might reorient college educators and student affairs officers toward building our collective capacity for institutional change, equity, justice, and liberation. They have also studied the experiences of racism for non-tenure-track faculty members of Color, including negative evaluations, different treatment than White colleagues, and feeling unsafe in the classroom.

Amy Azano, professor of Literacy Education and Foundations of Education, focuses her diversity efforts on rural education. This includes working to increase diversity focus in the rural education field through five webinars for the American Educational Research Association. Her publications have focused on the needs related to place and related to the special needs of gifted students.

Dana Robertson, a new professor in literacy education, is currently part of a collaborative research team with indigenous peoples seeking to develop a dual immersion school and pre-service residency site on Wyoming's Wind River Reservation in efforts to revitalize the Northern Arapaho language and culture.

Numerous School of Education professors are working in STEM fields to improve the inclusion and achievement of diverse learners. Brenda Brand, professor of Science Education, works to actualize STEM potential in the Mississippi Delta and coordinates other NSF grants to support Black doctoral students in STEM fields who are instructors at Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

David Kniola, assistant professor of practice in Educational Research and Evaluation, is working with Dr. Brand on the HBCU project, and he submitted in December to host an ECR Hub titled "Actualizing Social Justice in Culturally Relevant STEM Education and Research." In

collaboration with Engineering Education, he is working on a funded pilot study on culturally responsive assessment in engineering.

David Hicks, professor of History and Social Science Education, is part of a transdisciplinary team, History Lab, with colleagues from across the University. History Lab seeks to use extended reality technologies to make visible hidden and hard histories. Hicks and other colleagues have also published research on using films to teach about “hard histories” of inequality and inequity throughout history, and they are exploring the use of virtual interactive technologies to learn about the Holocaust and Civil Rights movements.

SERVICE AND OUTREACH

A gem of the School of Education’s outreach efforts is The Training and Technical Assistance Center (or T/TAC), whose mission is to improve educational opportunities and contribute to the success of children and youth with disabilities (birth–22 years). T/TAC places equity and diversity at the forefront of the assistance they provide to school divisions across our region. They provide professional learning resources on equity and diversity on their websites for [Administrators](#), [School Counselors](#), and on the [Teaming for Wellbeing Community of Practice](#).

Amy Azano coordinates the SAFE (Supporting Autism Friendly Environments) Program, which hosts a variety of events and environments aimed to promote inclusivity for neurodiverse individuals along with their family and friends. They recently partnered with VT women’s basketball for a SAFE / autism awareness event.

The Graduate Music Education program will be hosting a lecture series in the Spring of 2022 featuring speakers and topics related to diversity and inclusion, such as Culturally Responsive Teaching in Music Education, teaching music to learners with disabilities, and social justice in music education.

Professor Dana Robertson is a Board Member-at-Large for the International Literacy Association, an organization with 300,000 international members, and he is helping to lead an equity audit of all the organization’s procedures and policies with an eye to diversity and equity, to help set directions for the future of inclusive literacy education.

Barbara Lockee, professor of Instructional Design and Technology and faculty fellow in the Office of the Provost, serves as the co-chair of the American Indian and Indigenous Alliance (the university’s caucus of Native faculty, staff, and students). She also serves as a member of the Virginia Tribal Education Consortium, a group engaged in addressing the unique education and culturally related academic needs of Virginia’s Native youth.

TEACHING

Of course, the School of Education takes very seriously the preparation of the next generations of teachers, counselors, and leaders in K-12 and higher education, as well as the public, private,

and non-profit sectors. These professionals need to be at the forefront of knowledge and practice about diversity, equity, and inclusion. Here are just a few examples of how we've improved the inclusiveness and diversity of our teaching.

In social studies education, Dr. David Hicks introduces the Frameworks to teach history via black historical consciousness, exploring textbook representations of slavery and race over time and using the Facing History educational resources. He and his History Lab colleagues have also developed a new transdisciplinary experiential undergrad course *History Lab, Creative Technologies, Hidden Histories, Informal Learning*- that will be taught this spring.

In the Foundations of Education, Dr. Weaver-Hightower has revised courses to ensure that the voices of Black, Brown, Indigenous, differently gendered, and Disabled peoples and their educational histories and philosophies are both present and understood. Dr. Azano is also currently developing a sequence of courses on rural education.

In Educational Psychology, Dr. Jones' courses include several diversity-related activities, including helping students better understand the challenges faced by students who are underrepresented, providing students with strategies to teach diverse students, and helping students understand how to motivate diverse groups of people.

In Research Methods and Evaluation, Dr. Kniola has revised his courses to include DEI themes including indigenous methods and critical quantitative analysis.

Dr. Billingsley has created a course, Educating Exceptional Learners Across the Lifespan, and special education courses are taught to various undergraduate programs, in ways that both challenge the barriers people of differing abilities face and provide practices for respectfully and effectively working with the intersecting identities of people with disabilities.

Thanks again for watching this presentation. We hope you will contact us if you have questions or might be interest in collaborations on diversity and inclusion work that you're doing.