

# **PLANNING, DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION (DEI) PLAN**

**February 5, 2021**

*“Watch your thoughts, they become your words; watch your words, they become your actions; watch your actions, they become your habits; watch your habits, they become your character; watch your character, it becomes your destiny.” - Lau Tzu*

## **CORE BELIEFS AND PRACTICES GUIDING THE WORK IN THE OFFICE OF PLANNING, DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION**

The Office of Planning, Design & Construction's mission is to provide innovative, holistic, and integrated management oversight for all campus construction projects to support the College's goals for academics, sustainability, equity, diversity, and inclusion.

These interrelated goals further reflect our department's mission:

- Strive to create a department culture where all ideas and contributions are valued no matter how or from whom they may originate.
- Develop projects utilizing the College's design standards with design and project management approaches that foster creative and forward-thinking solutions.
- Successfully manage project budgets and schedules to achieve results cost-effectively and expediently.
- Work collaboratively with building committees and the Design Review Committee to not only assure that Williams' architecture is high quality and contextually appropriate but that the identity or unique characteristics of the building or space create meaning for the occupants.
- Encourage the adaptive reuse of our older buildings as a way to preserve the rich history of our past and reduce the demand for environmentally costly new building materials and decrease the amount of waste dumped in landfills.

### **DEI GOALS AND MEASURES:**

The Office of Planning, Design and Construction (PDC) staff embrace diversity, equity, and inclusion and continue to take meaningful action toward that end. The PDC Office culture encourages inclusion by embracing unique ideas, perspectives, experiences, and each other. It is vital to all of us in PDC that new employees feel welcomed and valued, but also, all staff members feel welcomed and appreciated. Our inclusive approach respects and values the differences that diversity brings and encourages and embraces an atmosphere that allows us to celebrate inclusion by creating an environment where respect, collaboration, accountability, and positive recognition of differences are cultivated. We have strong feelings that although our office currently lacks ethnic or racial diversity, we have staff from very different backgrounds, cultures, and experiences. We all make a concerted effort to listen to each other and ensure everyone feels like they are an essential part of the team.

### **ACTIONS WE HAVE TAKEN AND GOALS FOR THE FUTURE:**

#### **1. TAKE STEPS TO INCREASE ETHNIC DIVERSITY IN THE DEPARTMENT INTENTIONALLY**

We would very much like to increase the ethnic and racial diversity in the department. To that end, we recently participated in a hiring process with the HR Department for a Project Management Information Specialist. We worked closely with HR to redact all personal information from submitted resumes. In conducting this blind search, we were hopeful that we might engage a qualified diverse candidate. The pursuit ended with two candidates as finalists; both were men, one Caucasian, and the other Asian. Ultimately, the final selection came down to a hypothetical project and the candidate's approach to this project and demonstration to the group. The successful candidate not only had impeccable qualifications but also gave an exemplary presentation. The consensus from all PDC staff members is that this was a successful search. Our review of resumes and subsequent phone interviews did not bring race into the conversation or the consideration of candidates and that ultimately the College gained a very qualified employee. **MEASURING SUCCESS:** We would like to continue to partner with HR to conduct searches free from biases related to a candidate's age, race, gender, sexual orientation, and other personal characteristics unrelated to their job performance. In this way, we can continue to work toward increasing our department diversity.

## 2. CONTINUE TO WORK WITH OUR CONTRACTORS TO INCREASE GENDER AND ETHNIC DIVERSITY IN THE WORKFORCE

One of the most important issues of inclusion in construction relates to gender; males dominate the workforce (i.e., at a 91% rate in 2018, as reported by the National Association of Women in Construction (NAWIC), Statistics).

To encourage females' inclusion in the construction industry, the Office of Planning, Design and Construction has been very diligent during the past 7 1/2 years when hiring internal staff members to ensure that qualified women receive serious consideration. As a direct result of this diligence, females currently comprise approximately 43% of the PDC office staff, all holding higher-level positions.

PDC has also worked with Senior Staff members to establish a goal for workforce participation on the job site that includes minority and women workers. For minority workers, the goal is 7%, and for female workers, it is 5%. We insert this goal, along with contractual language that stresses the importance of contracting with M/WBE firms and vendors on our capital projects. **MEASURING SUCCESS:** We have implemented a Dashboard process for all capital projects. All construction contracts include a copy of this Dashboard with the requirement for monthly submission to the College by the Construction Manager. Including these diversity goals in our construction contracts, on all capital projects, will enable us to assess the success of our efforts.

## 3. INCREASE OUR AWARENESS OF THE CHALLENGES THAT OTHERS FACE

We have discussed becoming more self-aware of our own biases to see better where our thoughts and emotions are directing us, which will assist us when interacting with the various constituencies on campus during our design and construction projects. We want to visit, when appropriate, other institutions such as Perkins School for the Blind in Watertown, MA, or Willie Ross School for the Deaf in Longmeadow, MA, to better understand these physical challenges and how we might improve our building designs for these marginalized groups. **MEASURING SUCCESS:** Continually asking ourselves what we are doing that is working for us and what we are doing that might hinder our success.

## 4. BECOME MORE AWARE OF HOW WE CONDUCT OUR JOB MEETINGS

We will make a conscious effort to conduct our job meetings in a fashion that allows for openness and collaboration and allows everyone to feel comfortable talking and offering their opinions. **MEASURING SUCCESS:** Tracking this goal translates to the respective project manager continually taking the project group's pulse to ensure they all feel heard. By openly addressing this at the start of a project, we can ensure that we correctly communicate this goal to the project's stakeholders.

## 5. WORK WITH OIDEI TO DISCUSS AND REVIEW OUR BUILDING PLANS

Similar to how we engage Ops, EH&S, CSS, OIT, the office of Accessible Education, and the Director of Sexual Assault Response and Health Education, we would propose to meet with staff of OIDEI to review our building plans early on in the design process (end of Schematic Design Phase) for any glaring issues from an equity, diversity, and inclusion perspective. We would also be open to the idea of including a staff member from OIDEI on all building committees for capital projects. We currently contract with Kessler McGuinness & Associates, LLC, to review our plans for compliance from an accessibility and universal access perspective on all capital projects. **MEASURING SUCCESS:** Collaborate with OIDEI to determine success.

## 6. CONTINUE TO PROMOTE AND ADVANCE DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION IN OUR OFFICE THROUGH PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING

In our line of work, proper and respectful communication is essential, not only in our building process but in our everyday lives. It is crucial for successful projects that our team understands the right questions to ask and the proper ways to ask those questions. We are all very western-centric. We need to better understand other ethnic cultures' needs and how their unique strengths and perspectives can benefit our building process to ensure our designs better accommodate more diverse groups of people.

Understanding the influence that various cultural groups have had at Williams will help our department do a better job planning and designing for the future. We feel strongly that a department with no ethnic or racial diversity may have difficulty framing these conversations without some guidance and assistance.

**MEASURING SUCCESS:** Incorporating unconscious bias training into our practice as a department could be a place to start. However, this should ultimately become a cultural practice in our office supported by PDC staff and the policies we set for our office. It is crucial to have engagement and commitment from within the department but also across the institution as a whole. To ensure diversity remains at the forefront, we need to challenge each other to broaden our thinking regarding various conversations with campus constituencies. While we are currently unclear as to a definitive metric for this goal, we recognize that this is a long-term initiative where accountability can play a huge role in determining future metrics.

## 7. MAKE A CONSCIOUS EFFORT TO INVITE MORE DIVERSE ARCHITECTURE AND CONSTRUCTION FIRMS TO BID ON OUR PROJECTS

We need to make a conscious effort to get out of our "candidate comfort zone." Including language in our Request for Proposals and Invitations for Bidders that specifically give preference to qualified firms of ethnic, racial, and gender diversity, with a diverse staff, may increase the opportunities for more diverse professional firms. PDC endeavors to always select the best and most qualified bidder for capital construction projects. Preference may be defined as follows: if, after the bid, interview, and selection process, two firms are equally qualified, we will give the more diverse firm preference. Including diversity on our internal selection committees for Architects may also help us recruit a more diverse assemblage of firms. Diversity in architecture is essential for a real connection between the professionals and the College's minority groups, raising awareness of important campus issues. **MEASURING SUCCESS:** We could devise a tracking document to track numbers of diverse professional firms contracted with for design projects; however, it might also be important and valuable to measure more than just a person's presence in a particular company. In other words, a tool that includes a way to measure a person's title and level within the company to show how much they are involved in crucial decision-making processes of the company or on a specific project.

## 8. INCREASE DIVERSITY ON BUILDING COMMITTEES AND BECOME ACUTELY AWARE OF THE EFFECT ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN HAVE ON DIVERSE POPULATIONS

Architecture affects the campus community on one level, but on a more personal level, it can have a profound impact on its occupants. For designs and programs to be successful, we must include people from different cultures in decision-making processes. Including and learning from as many people as possible can contribute to equitable and inclusive designs with a wide range of perspectives. Our office feels we can impact diversity, equity, and inclusion through various design and construction projects.

Remembering that we are not the end-users and showing empathy for the building users, from the perspective of their backgrounds, concerning the architecture and design, are fundamental ingredients for a successful project. By design, we refer to the layout, circulation, and programming of interior and exterior spaces and specifically to items like material finishes and colors that can contribute to occupant health, mood, and productivity. Building architecture, if designed appropriately, for the times and the people who will use them, can serve as an inspiration to diverse populations that fall into the end-user category and those populations that will frequent the building. **MEASURING SUCCESS:** Having a wide range of perspectives represented on building committees is crucial to ensuring that the Williams community's broad needs are represented. Including more marginalized groups/individuals on our

various building committees or as stakeholders in our multiple projects starts with us, as a project management office, having conversations and asking questions at the early stages of a building project, to hopefully broaden the thinking around more diverse representation. We can then measure the percent increase in diversity by comparing future committees' composition with some of our past committees to understand better if progress was made in this area.

**9. ENSURE THAT OUR DEPARTMENT WEBSITE IS ACCESSIBLE FOR ALL SO WE CAN PROPERLY COMMUNICATE OUR DEPARTMENT'S GOALS**

With our Project Management Information Specialist's recent hiring, we feel we can accomplish this in house. Three main points that we can undertake are as follows:

- Ensure that our website can be parsed with a screen reader, including ensuring all images have "Alt-Text" (basically a text description of any image) so a screen reader can describe them.
- Ensure that the page is navigable with only a keyboard to accommodate those who cannot use a mouse.
- Any included videos must include Closed Caption.

While those are the main points, there's much more that can also be checked against, with the most common standards being [WCAG 2.0 \(Web Content Accessibility Guidelines\)](#). **MEASURING SUCCESS:** Our webpage is reviewed and updated repeatedly throughout the year to ensure project information remains current. While updating for project information, we will also check to ensure it remains accessible for all. We can measure accessibility by adding some content to our website to solicit feedback.

**REFLECTIONS ON HOW PDC WILL HOLD ITSELF ACCOUNTABLE TO THE OVERALL PLAN**

With the creation of this DEI Plan, we feel we have established goals that are ambitious enough to encourage effort and commitment but realistic enough not to trigger negative emotions such as resistance or anxiety. This DEI Plan will be posted on the PDC web page as one way of communicating our goals to others. Our office will regularly review our goals and metrics to determine what is working and what isn't and update them as needed. We intend to treat this plan as a fluid document.