Last summer I began my fourth academic year as Vice President and Chief Diversity Officer at Oregon State University, and I continue to be thankful to serve you during a time when we have had to confront two incredible challenges: the COVID-19 pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement. Both have exacerbated gaps in equity and yet created opportunities for us to accelerate our efforts to become a university that reflects our mission and vision.

For many, the experiences of isolation from loved ones and community have been challenging, especially given that these communities have served as a lifeline of support and sense of belonging. I know what it has been like to struggle with that isolation, and I am so grateful for the many creative ways our communities have come together during this unprecedented time. Your actions have not gone unnoticed, and I thank you.

Each edition of Taking Action introduces you to the efforts of many people working across the university. Highlights include:

Our students, faculty and staff have directed university leadership to take action on multiple initiatives. The response to the call to action from several communities resulted in the Moving Forward Together Initiative. The initiative will help us realize our commitment to ending systemic racism within Oregon State University. The President and Provost’s Leadership Council on Equity, Inclusion and Social Justice is working on the implementation and completion of action items that are outlined on the Moving Forward Together website.

I am very grateful to all who have contributed to supporting universitywide diversity, equity and inclusion efforts. A special thank you to our partners at the OSU Foundation who have a laser-like focus on this area of philanthropy. Your efforts have generated the positive momentum needed to launch this campaign.

Oregon State’s Diversity Strategic Plan continues to move ahead. We are especially focused on efforts to increase the number of faculty and staff who can contribute to mentoring and supporting underrepresented students and contribute to DEI scholarship.

Community engagement during these times can be challenging. However, we have increased our support and work with Partners in Diversity, an organization committed to attracting, retaining and developing diversity influencers and professionals of color in Oregon and Southwest Washington. This year, Oregon State hosted and contributed to the Say Hey! event to welcome those new to Oregon, and we supported the most recent Breakfast of Champions event. A special thank you to...
Allison Davis-White Eyes for advancing our work with Partners in Diversity.

This year also saw the launch of the President's Commission on the Status of Black Faculty and Staff Affairs. Under the leadership of Terrance Harris and Tenisha Tevis, the commission is working to advocate for the recruitment and retention of Black faculty and staff at Oregon State. To learn more about the commission and to become a member, please visit the website.

Finally, I invite you to learn about the many actions and initiatives reported in this edition of Taking Action. These actions represent the hard work and commitment of many faculty, staff and students across our community. These efforts move us closer to achieving our universitywide Inclusive Excellence strategic goals. To learn more about our progress and for a list of upcoming events, please visit diversity.oregonstate.edu.

I look forward to a time when we can sit across the table from each other, laugh and connect in the ways that celebrate our common humanity. Until then …

Charlene Alexander, Ph.D.
Vice President and Chief Diversity Officer
The prospect seems daunting: four six-hour in-person modules, plus 12 hours of online lectures, readings and discussion boards. An ambitious curriculum that requires unlearning old habits, learning new skills and relearning concepts at a higher level. And the end result isn’t mastery of the subject, but a commitment to address it with rigor and reflection for the rest of your career.

And yet? Participants in Leading Change for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion have responded with enthusiasm. The course, intended for academic and unit leaders across the university, is helping them make foundational changes in their organizations, addressing DEI issues and communities in conflict and crisis with care and empathy.

Leading Change is a collaboration between the Office of Institutional Diversity and Oregon State’s Academic Leadership Academy, the result of a two-year effort by Vice President and Chief Diversity Officer Charlene Alexander. The course aligns with both the university’s Strategic Plan 4.0 and its diversity strategic plan. Two OID leaders, Jeff Kenney, director of institutional education for diversity, equity and inclusion, and Scott Vignos, assistant vice president for strategic diversity initiatives, facilitate course sessions.

Following last year’s pilot programs, OID will offer Leading Change twice a year, with 15 participants in each cohort. Kenney says another goal is to train facilitators who can lead the course within their own units. For example, Teresita Alvarez-Cortez, director of diversity initiatives and programs in University Housing and Dining Services, has run the course for UHDS leadership.

Transforming learning into action

Leading Change builds on other diversity education programs at Oregon State, including the ADVANCE Seminar. The program is intended as an action-based complement to ADVANCE, with sessions focused on real-world case studies, including active challenges participants are facing in their leadership roles, which they can then workshop with colleagues, Kenney says.

“The underpinning of every session is, ‘What are you going to do?’ ‘What does this mean for your job today?’” Kenney says. “There’s some DEI work that doesn’t require any more preparation, any more training. You’ve just got to pull some levers. The audience that we have in Leading Change are people with a level of power and autonomy in the institution that those levers can be pulled relatively quickly.”

Kenney says an expected learning outcome from Leading Change is that administrators “can imagine, and take steps to propel, an organization toward its values of diversity, equity and inclusion.” Such steps include building coalitions, bringing in people beyond executive leadership and promoting learning within their teams to advance strategic DEI priorities.

Also critical is “showing up as a compassionate leader,” Kenney says, to believe people’s experiences with racism, sexism and classism, recognize they’re hurt, and respond with care and urgency. DEI leadership, he says, requires the ability to both zoom in to the people you’re directly working with and then zoom out to see the larger impact on the institution and society.
Connecting and learning from one another

A common thread among participants is how much they learn from each other. Rebecca Mathern, associate provost and university registrar, and Toni Doolen, dean of the Honors College, found Leading Change exposed them to ideas they wouldn’t have seen otherwise.

“It was really helpful to hear about the work being done by others and the challenges others face in this work,” Doolen says. “The creation of the community through the learning process was for me a highlight.”

Mathern says people in privileged positions often don’t understand the work that’s needed to support those who are marginalized. Leading Change helped her to reframe her thinking about the dominant structures within the university. She cites an example in Oregon State’s priority registration system, which determines when students can register for classes based on their credits earned.

“Our job is to make sure everybody has access to the tools, and we want it to be as fair as possible,” Mathern says. “I walked out of this class feeling like we have more opportunities to improve how we serve all students, particularly marginalized populations. Where we can really have an effect is in how we communicate, being accessible and meeting students where they are.”

Leading Change to make change

For Ana Lu Fonseca, diversity, equity and inclusion development specialist for the OSU Extension Service, completing the Leading Change course helped her determine a clear alignment between DEI goals across Extension’s statewide operations and with the university’s overall commitment and goals. She says having tangible steps helps create a sense of success when they’re accomplished and keeps the momentum going.

And action is vital to Leading Change, Fonseca says. Taking the course “is a good thing, but it’s not the change. You actually have to change things in your program, your recruitment practices and your education curriculum. Each of us as leaders have the responsibility to move the needle.”

Kenney recognizes the Leading Change subject matter and curriculum is challenging, but he also wants to emphasize that it’s fun, and Fonseca agrees. “You will enjoy it so much. I enjoyed it so much,” she says.

“I think the sell to people is, this is a lot of hard work, and it’s always going to be a lot of hard work,” Kenney says. “And it’s worth it.”

“You actually have to change things in your program, your recruitment practices and your education curriculum. Each of us as leaders have the responsibility to move the needle.”

Ana Lu Fonseca, diversity, equity and inclusion development specialist for the OSU Extension Service
The death of George Floyd in May 2020 sparked outrage and concern in communities everywhere. In the Oregon State University community, we rededicated our efforts to strengthen the way we fight systemic racism — on campus and beyond.

The Moving Forward Together Initiative was created to achieve the vision of an anti-racist institution, and to empower and elevate all students, staff and faculty of color, particularly those from Black and Indigenous communities who are historically underrepresented at Oregon State.

Developed under the guidance of the President and Provost’s Leadership Council on Equity, Inclusion and Social Justice, the initiative includes action items in eight categories — staff and faculty, public safety, immigration, teaching and learning, student services, leadership, marketing and communications, and bias response — to build a more equitable university.

Because the United States has a deep-rooted history of marginalization, it’s more important than ever to begin to change the tide. This involves difficult conversations, education and empowerment to ensure that every member of our community knows they are seen, heard and welcomed at Oregon State. While work on the initiative is just beginning, progress is already being made in multiple areas:

**Signature education programs**

The Office of Institutional Diversity supports two education programs centered around social justice. Offered every fall and spring term, Leading Change for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion is a 24-hour, research-based curriculum that aims to build capacity among academic and administrative leaders to facilitate organizational change. The Dialogue Facilitation Lab, which began in 2018, is designed to prepare faculty, staff, post-docs and graduate students to start critical conversations in learning and working environments. It is offered every winter and summer term.

**Retention of Black staff and faculty**

The President’s Commission on the Status of Black Faculty and Staff Affairs, led by Terrance Harris, director of the Lonnie B. Harris Black Cultural Center, and Tenisha Tevis, assistant professor in the College of Education, was recently developed to ensure Black-identifying Oregon State employees have access to personal and academic support, advancement opportunities, mentoring and professional development.

**Strengthening partnerships with tribal communities**

Memorandums of understanding are being reviewed and revised to ensure they meet the needs of Indigenous people and create more opportunities for Oregon State and local tribal communities to work together. In addition, the Tribal Communities Initiative — a partnership between Oregon State Ecampus and the Office of Institutional Diversity — continues to help Indigenous students navigate college life. By assigning each student to an Ecampus success coach, they are able to set goals, maintain work-life balance and build connections with fellow Indigenous students.
Public safety
The university is considering a public safety model in which 911 calls can be routed to mental health professionals rather than armed police where appropriate. This approach is modeled on CAHOOTS, Crisis Assistance Helping Out On The Streets, a mental health intervention program launched in Eugene in 1989 that is now being replicated nationwide.

Immigration protection
Oregon State’s Division of Student Affairs has collaborated with the OSU Foundation to increase funding for the Dreaming Beyond Borders Resource Center, where undocumented students and students from mixed-status families can gain access to student advocacy groups, academic, legal and health resources and other services.

Bias response
Oregon State’s Bias Response Team reviews incident reports regarding discrimination toward a person’s background or identity, and it provides campus resources that can support those who are negatively affected. To better serve Black and Indigenous communities, the Bias Response Team is gathering feedback to determine how it can improve response to issues related to racism on campus.

All in for making change
Charlene Alexander, vice president and chief diversity officer, says none of this work would be possible without the willingness and participation of Oregon State departments and leadership.

“We have multiple partners who are doing this work every day, on the ground. Whether it’s in housing and residential life, in all of our cultural centers in Diversity and Cultural Engagement, the Educational Opportunities Program, the OSU Alumni Association or the OSU Foundation,” she says. “They are the real heroes behind this effort.”

In addition to the Moving Forward Together Initiative, Oregon State has hired a new talent acquisition specialist to help with recruiting and onboarding — especially staff and faculty of color. And the staff in the Lonnie B. Harris Black Cultural Center take the lead in helping Black students feel at home at OSU and developing their leadership skills.

Oregon State wouldn’t be the university it is today without the people who relentlessly move it forward. We will continue to show up, look after one another and advocate for an anti-racist institution.
The doctor was not good; she did not want to believe that we had the coronavirus. We were the first Oregon cases. No isolation rules, nothing,” says a Latina mother of two quoted in a Public Health Insider webcast on combating social isolation in vulnerable populations during the COVID-19 pandemic.

College of Public Health and Human Sciences Assistant Professor Jonathan Garcia, doctoral student Nancy Vargas and alumna Cynthia De La Torre, B.S. ’20, led the discussion and are each involved in ENLACE, which stands for Engaging the Next Latinx Allies for Change and Equity. This program builds solidarity and amplifies youth voices, connecting Latinx and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning youth in fighting social isolation.

“We need to reframe the problem of social isolation,” Garcia says. “Current models place the problem on the individual, suggesting that social isolation is a consequence of their identity. The individual is not at fault; the social context and the system are problems.”

In efforts to address how COVID-19 has made isolation and health disparities even worse for Latinx communities, Vargas began interviewing Latinx parents to see how they were coping. Areas where the community felt most concerned included food security and housing, work, education and health care.

“I want you to think about the mother who was not believed, not tested, not told to isolate,” Vargas says. “Not only did this instance of discrimination affect the Latinx community, this affected each and every one of us. Discrimination doesn’t hurt a select few. It hurts all of us.”

De La Torre says Latinx communities learn to rely on one another to help find care and support, which the pandemic has made more difficult due to social distancing guidelines. As a community health worker at Casa Latinos Unidos, she is on the front line helping Latinx communities receive resources related to pandemic assistance in Linn County.

“When systems fail, it is in the community where sustainability and resilience occur,” De La Torre says. “We cannot do things alone. We need each other.”

This story originally appeared in Synergies, a newsletter from the College of Public Health and Human Sciences.

Oregon State’s TRACE-COVID-19 project has sent researchers and volunteers into communities across Oregon to collect prevalence data on the virus, testing people who might not otherwise get tested for COVID-19.
Two of the most common questions students ask their advisors are “What can I do with this degree?” and “Are there any jobs for someone who majors in this field?” Social Action Works aims to help activist-minded students find informed, empowered answers about their futures.

Launched in 2019, Social Action Works is a professional development initiative and design space in the College of Liberal Arts. Students can explore and integrate their emerging professional identities, fields of study and interest in advancing social change, says program director Liddy Detar.

Detar, an advisor in the College of Liberal Arts, says most students she advises find themselves living a disappointing dichotomy between what they study and care about and the often limited, service-industry jobs they have to pay for their studies.

“The old adage, ‘Don’t worry; someday you’ll get a real job,’ is not reassuring or kind,” she says. “And the urgent need for a degree that will change their relationship to their current working lives is profoundly tangible.”

Another common answer, “You can do anything you want with a liberal arts degree,” is no longer sufficient, she says. It doesn’t offer students anything in particular they can do with their degree, and the notion of being able to do anything you want implies a great deal of individual power, privilege and entitlement.

“For students coming from historically underrepresented communities, for students of color and low-income students, this answer is inadequate for how it obfuscates our responsibility to communicate the value of our disciplines in a real-world setting,” Detar says.

Social Action Works creates opportunities for students to explore their professional futures in the context of their majors and interest in public action. An undergraduate student-led group, Communities of Purpose, offers mentoring from faculty, community members and career development specialists, with proposed theme areas such as community health and reproductive justice, popular culture and social media, environmental justice and sustainability, globalization and others.

Also part of the initiative is a speaker series and digital story collection, Stories That Change Us, which highlights the personal stories of people who have created distinctive careers that incorporate social change projects. Speakers participate in campuswide discussions, hold smaller focus groups and visit classrooms.

Social Action Works partners with professional development programs in the College of Liberal Arts, as well as programs in the colleges of Business, Education and Public Health and Human Sciences. It also participates in campuswide career development initiatives such as the Diversity Careers Collective.

For more information or to get involved, contact socialactionworks@oregonstate.edu.
THE STORIES WE TELL ARE POWERFUL.

OUR STORIES HELP US TO SEE THE HUMANITY IN ONE ANOTHER.
As Diversity Coordinator for OSU-Cascades, Erin Rook draws on his training as a journalist and his personal experiences to create a sense of connection and keep him grounded. Read more of his story.

Q: What brought you to OSU-Cascades?
A: I had been doing diversity, equity and inclusion work informally in my professional and personal life for many years — as a journalist, an anti-violence worker and as a board member for a volunteer-run nonprofit. This DEI experience allowed me to create connections in the Central Oregon community across many different identities, experiences and perspectives. I couldn’t pass up the chance to immerse myself in social justice and organizational change work. I was excited about getting to be in a place where the focus is on learning and sharing knowledge.

Q: What are your responsibilities?
A: I am responsible for working with students, staff, faculty and community partners to create a campus climate that is diverse, equitable and inclusive. This work takes a variety of forms including strategic planning, DEI education, advocacy, collaboration and support.

Q: Why is this work meaningful?
A: As someone who holds both privileged and marginalized identities, social justice work is both a moral responsibility and a survival tactic. As a white, masculine-presenting person who grew up middle class and went to college, I feel a sense of responsibility to use my privilege and access in support of those who are marginalized. As a queer and nonbinary trans person who is neurodivergent and chronically ill, I recognize that my liberation is tied up in the liberation of all marginalized people. This work feels urgently important. But I also do it because it’s interesting and impactful. I am constantly learning and witnessing the power of creating and sharing knowledge.

Q: How does your training as a journalist and past work to advance equity and inclusion through storytelling shape your work?
A: As a journalist, I learned to stay curious and be led by the story, rather than imposing my own narrative or expectations on the experiences of others. I learned to really listen to, and develop trust with, those whose stories I aspired to tell. It’s a really humbling experience to have a stranger share their deeply personal story and trust you to tell it in a way that honors the truth of their experience. I also learned that there are always multiple perspectives and usually more questions than answers.

Q: What does an inclusive university look like?
A: An inclusive university is one in which people of all backgrounds and identities are welcomed, valued and meaningfully and equitably engaged. It looks like one’s potential for success not being limited by aspects of identity, background or life circumstance. An inclusive university strives to be universally accessible, multilingual and multicultural, not just in its assortment of clubs or course offerings, but also in its way of doing things.

Q: What are some unique diversity challenges at OSU-Cascades vs. the Corvallis campus?
A: OSU-Cascades is much smaller and younger. The demands of the work are sometimes greater than the available resources, which can be limiting, but it also sparks creative solutions. The challenging creative work is building a campus that brings all the strengths of OSU to serve the unique needs of our region. When it comes to DEI work, that looks like drawing inspiration and support from Corvallis colleagues, as well as local knowledge, while we chart our own path. Equity, by definition, is not one-size-fits-all.

Q: OSU-Cascades is less diverse, with 18.6% students of color vs. 27.6% for the university as a whole. What is your role in attracting and retaining students of color at OSU-Cascades?
A: I work closely with my admissions recruitment colleagues to formalize a multicultural recruitment plan. I also build and strengthen relationships with community partners serving students of color and collaborate to create youth-focused social justice spaces. Retention is also a recruitment strategy. We are far more likely to attract students of color if our current students of color are having a positive, high-impact experience, and alumni of color are succeeding in their fields.

Q: What do you envision for the future of OSU-Cascades as it relates to social justice?
A: I want people in Central Oregon with marginalized identities to be able to trust that they will be welcomed, valued and supported at OSU-Cascades — that they don’t have to leave their community to have an equitable and impactful higher education experience.
Women throughout the Oregon State community are blazing the trail to create better opportunities for their students, peers and fellow women. Their tireless work and undeniable drive to facilitate change were celebrated through the third-annual Breaking Barriers Awards, created by the President’s Commission on the Status of Women, the Office of Institutional Diversity, the Office of the Provost and OSU Athletics. The awards recognize efforts in research, mentoring and advocacy. The 2020 honorees are:

**Breaking Barriers in Education**

Maude David, assistant professor in the College of Science, created the David Laboratory, which uses computational tools to explore the connections between the human gut microbiome and the brain to better understand Autism Spectrum Disorder and anxiety. Within her lab, David has created opportunities for graduate and undergraduate students.

Natasha Mallette, instructor in the College of Engineering, works to build competent, compassionate and capable engineers. As a rare female in her chosen field, Mallette is proof that women belong in engineering. She provides practical steps to build student confidence and improve engineering culture for one another — starting with understanding issues like imposter syndrome and gender bias.

**Breaking Barriers in Research**

Gender plays a large part in how society views our roles and behavior. OSU-Cascades business professor Satoris Howes is dedicated to uncovering the differences between men and women in the work-family conflict, the ways society expects men and women to present themselves and how that impacts women in traditionally masculine roles like military service. Most recently, Howes has begun examining different options for supporting transgender and gender-nonconforming employees.

**Harriet “Hattie” Redmond Award**

The 3D Dam Diverse Dance group has played an instrumental role in building community for women of color at Oregon State. Established in 2018, it gives students an opportunity to connect with others while liberating themselves from western notions of gender, race and sexuality. The group has performed at India Night, drag shows, Take Back the Night and generated conversations about gender and racial injustice.

Allison Davis-White Eyes is described by colleagues as an agent of change. She continuously advocates for minoritized communities throughout Oregon to strengthen the university’s relationships and land grant mission. She has played a key role in advancing support for Native American students via Oregon State Ecampus, creating an institution-wide Native Indigenous strategic plan and advancing a project proposal for the Native Indigenous Research Institute.

**PCOSW Community Builder Award**

The field of geosciences has the lowest representation of women and people of color in academia. But there’s an opportunity to change that, thanks to Unpacking Diversity — a College of Earth, Ocean, and Atmospheric Sciences professional learning community. It provides a safe space for discussions about equity, diversity and inclusion with expert OSU facilitators. Since its inception in 2017, Unpacking Diversity has brought in more than 700 faculty, staff, students and visitors.

**Breaking Barriers in Athletics**

Tanya Chaplin has coached the Oregon State gymnastics team for 23 years. She makes it a priority to be a mentor to her athletes during and long after their college careers. In 2019, she led the team to a sixth-place finish at the NCAA Championships — making it one of the best seasons in the program’s history. She remains committed to empowering her gymnasts to hone their skills — on the mat and in the classroom — and to define their own team culture.

While there was not an official award ceremony this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there are plans to celebrate 2020 and 2021 award winners virtually. "We believe the world changes when human beings dedicate themselves to the betterment of something wider than their immediate surroundings,” says Brittany Nefcy, co-chair of the President’s Commission on the Status of Women. “Celebrating those succeeding in this work sets a cultural standard for deconstructing systemic oppression, challenging bias and uplifting one another.”

WITH EACH FEMALE LEADER, THE GLASS CEILING CRACKS AGAIN.

12
Every student deserves an unforgettable first year of college. One where they can feel free to be themselves, comfortable reaching out for help and able to find belonging. Unfortunately, not everyone arrives on campus with a built-in support system that sets them up for success. Teresita Alvarez-Cortez is working to change that.

As director of diversity initiatives and programs in University Housing and Dining Services, Alvarez-Cortez ensures no student is forgotten. She has made it her mission to assist underrepresented students through outreach efforts, mentoring and UHDS programs. In celebration of her continuous work to improve and sustain opportunities for traditionally marginalized communities, she was awarded the 2020 Outstanding Diversity Advocate Award.

Creating opportunity begins with conversation. Alvarez-Cortez is active in student and faculty recruitment, including search committees and events that encourage communities of color to attend and work at Oregon State. Her knowledge of the Spanish language helps many prospective students and their families feel welcome, understood and prepared.

And her support continues long after students begin their studies. Alvarez-Cortez leads with honesty, giving students tangible, real advice that will guide them through the rest of their lives. As a leader of the annual Racial Aikido Retreat, she provides the tools they need to navigate a positive sense of self — by teaching students how to celebrate their identity while also recognizing and responding to overt and less obvious acts of racism.

She also developed and revamped the Diversity Learning Assistant program, where designated students live in the residence halls to support one another, lead activities, start conversations about social justice topics including race, religion, sexual orientation, gender, ability and more. And she has collaborated with the College Assistance Migrant Program to develop the CAMP Scholar Internship, where students of migrant backgrounds receive leadership training and financial assistance for their work in a university housing and dining unit.

Feeling supported is a critical part of building a future — in academics, our careers and personal lives. Alvarez-Cortez is making sure there will always be someone to guide the way.
What inspires alumni to return to their Oregon State community long after earning their degree? In short: each other.

For many grads, cultural and community bonds carried them through the pressures of college life. To rekindle such connections, the OSU Alumni Association is supporting four new affinity-based networks formed and led by alumni.

Along with the Black Alumni and Friends Network established in 2018, the new groups are Asian and Pacific Islander Alumni Network, the Klatowa Eena Alumni Network, Chicana/o Latina/o and LGBTQIA+ alumni communities.

Where there’s a need, there’s a way

Ellen Dishman and fellow activists helped establish the campus Pride Center in 2001. Never one to wait on the sidelines, she now serves on the leadership team for the LGBTQIA+ alumni network.

“We go back because of the people who were important to us and the networks that we built,” she says. “This is a way to continue that community and build it in a more transgenerational way.”

Each network will develop unique objectives, initiatives and events, but all have the core mission to create a welcoming space that connects alumni with each other and with Oregon State.

This year, the more established Black Alumni and Friends Network is setting an example of outreach for the newer networks.

BAFN member Temmecha Turner, ’04, plans to reach out to potential students as early as middle school. She intends to answer common questions such as “What does it take to go to college? How can I sustain my cultural identity at a predominantly white institution? How do I become market valuable after I attain my degree?”

Building an OSU that makes Beavers proud(er)

While the university is committed to the hard work of change, underserved students have at times felt uncomfortable and neglected during their years at Oregon State. Peer-to-peer alumni groups give those Beavers another chance to connect.

“Healing is a big part of what we’re going to be doing this year,” says BAFN member Jonathan Riley, ’09. “It’s about alumni being able to share a comfortable and mature space that allows them to grow, so that when they see that Beaver logo or colors, it’s something they feel proud of.”

Amid the isolation of the COVID-19 pandemic and a constricted job market, these alumni groups create a richer community of emotional support, and also provide valuable opportunities for networking, mentorship and professional development.

“It just gives us more reason to lock arms tighter and say, ‘how can we support each other?’ even though we’re hundreds of miles away,” Riley says.
HECC Summit builds community for diversity, equity and inclusion work statewide.

With the passage of HB2864 in 2017, universities and community colleges across Oregon have a statewide mandate to establish cultural competency standards for their institutions and their employees. To see how work is progressing to implement the law and build community across institutions, Oregon State hosted the Higher Education Coordinating Commission’s Digital Summit on HB2864 last October.

Jeff Kenney, director of institutional education for diversity, equity and inclusion in the Office of Institutional Diversity, was one of the organizers. The HECC Summit drew 122 faculty, staff and students from 24 colleges and universities and six other organizations from across Oregon.

Kenney says a key takeaway was a strong desire for statewide collaboration and sharing of resources, recognizing that diversity, equity and inclusion efforts vary among institutions.

“Hearing the voices of leaders who are deeply invested in the work gave many of our participants a sense of community and connection,” he says. “One of my hopes is that if folks appreciate things going on at Oregon State University, I can share what we’ve done, and I can learn from their innovations as well.”

The requirements of HB2864 are flexible for each institution, and Kenney says Oregon State’s goal has always been more ambitious than the legislation. As part of its strategic plan, OID is finalizing an online orientation for all incoming faculty and staff. Kenney also notes that compliance with HB2864 includes other diversity education efforts at Oregon State such as the Social Justice Education Initiative and Search Advocate Program.

“Our goal is to curate the opportunities faculty need to have career-long, meaningful engagement with really complex issues as it relates to their leadership, their teaching and their research,” Kenney says. “Our compliance is a collaboration of efforts across the institution, not just the work coming out of OID.”

Speakers for the morning session included Rudyane Rivera-Lindstrom, director of diversity, equity and inclusion for the HECC, and Rep. Teresa Alonso León (D-Woodburn), one of the sponsors of HB2864. Samuel D. Museus, professor of education studies at the University of California, San Diego, delivered the keynote. Yvette Alex-Assensoh, vice president for equity and inclusion at the University of Oregon, and Tim Cook, president of Clackamas Community College, spoke in the afternoon. Recordings from the plenary sessions are available online.

As all Oregon community colleges and universities continue working on cultural competency, discussions at the summit indicate strong enthusiasm for subsequent legislation to build on HB2864. Rep. Alonso León says policies focused on student success for underserved communities remain her top legislative priority.

Although the HECC Summit was not intended to be held remotely, it ended up being a plus, Kenney says. “I’m so glad it was on Zoom because we had so much more participation.”
We began by proclaiming Indigenous Peoples Day, and others followed.

Now we’re building kinship.

It’s been six years since students from the Native American Longhouse Eena Haws worked with the city of Corvallis to become among the first in Oregon, along with Portland, to observe Indigenous Peoples Day. The second Monday of October is now a regular celebration at Oregon State, with participation from Oregon’s nine tribes and national speakers.

“We’ve been growing and increasing attendance every year,” says Luhui Whitebear, Assistant Director of the Native American Longhouse.

These efforts set an example that was followed by other cities, then the state of Oregon in recognizing Indigenous Peoples Day in 2017. And although the state has never officially observed Columbus Day, a movement is spreading to end the hurtful celebration of European explorers that began the violent history of colonial oppression.

The most recent observance of Indigenous Peoples Day was virtual, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which allowed for even greater participation in workshops for students, staff and faculty. Members of the university community shared what they learned with programs, groups and in living-learning settings.

After a year of widespread demonstrations for racial justice, participation in Indigenous Peoples Day gives Whitebear hope for tackling systemic problems.

“It shows a desire for change,” she says.

As part of the virtual celebration, the longhouse hosted a Facebook livestream event, From Allyship to Kinship: Building Strategic and Structural Change by Centering BIPOC Voices and Bodies. Andrew Jolivette, a professor of ethnic studies at the University of California, San Diego, spoke about how colonists tried to strip away the self-determination of people of color.

“We are connected by history,” he says. “Inequality continues today but has led to a moment of convergence. We are witnessing another awakening in social change. We need kinship, not performative solidarity.”

Commemorations like Indigenous Peoples Day remain valuable as cultural celebrations and teachable moments. But as with Black Lives Matter and Idle No More, they must be more than just hashtags, slogans or annual events.

They must drive steady progress toward an anti-racist institution.

Office of Institutional Diversity
510 Kerr Administration Building
Oregon State University
1500 SW Jefferson Way
Corvallis, OR 97331
541-737-1063
diversity@oregonstate.edu

Oregon State University