

# CFAES: Diversity Deep Dive

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**Diversity** is like a jellyfish, according to Lanier Holt, assistant professor in The Ohio State University's School of Communication and researcher of media and race. While it's not a hunter, it is still one of the most dangerous animals in the sea. Once you cross the line, you are stung. If there isn't diversity within a university, then they are bound to be hurt by the tentacles of singularity.

To the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences (CFAES), the jellyfish of diversity is one that has proven difficult.

## ADMINISTRATIVE CHANGES IMPACT PROGRAMMING

Since January 2019, CFAES has not had an assistant dean and director of diversity, equity, and inclusion. This position has roles that span from data collection, to program management, to minority outreach efforts.

The search began in November 2019, according to Tracy Kitchel, associate dean for faculty and staff affairs. This position is anticipated to be filled by July 1, 2020.

Kitchel reports that the hiring of the new assistant dean and director of diversity, equity, and inclusion was delayed intentionally due to his predecessor's retirement, which coincided with the departure of former director of diversity, equity, and inclusion, Kathy Lechman. This choice was made so the new associate dean could be a part of the selection process.

Funding for this unit has since been saved in order to build a physical presence for the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion on the second floor of Agricultural Administration. It will comprise three offices.

After Lechman moved into another position outside of the college, Leo Taylor, program director, was hired in a part-time role that has since evolved into a full-time appointment. Alicia Baca has also been hired as a part-time program assistant. Neither of them serves as an interim director.

Taylor and Baca were appointed to create and host programming opportunities for faculty, staff, graduate, and undergraduate

students. Workshops offered by the office address issues such as implicit bias, power and privilege, and sex, gender, and gender identity.

These workshops are offered on a rotating basis once a month at the Ohio State Columbus and Wooster campuses.

"Our programming is geared towards educating people about how bias is pervasive and feeds into systems of oppression that affect marginalized populations," said Taylor.

However, workshop turnout has been low, with approximately six to 10 participants at each event. Taylor hypothesized that people within the college are not knowledgeable that there is an Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

He also expressed concern that the office was understaffed while Lechman was in her role. She was the only person to work in this unit during her time as the director.

"There is a lack of diversity in our college. It is something that we need to address," Taylor said.

## IS THE CFAES STUDENT BODY DIVERSE?

As of Fall 2019, 12.6% of undergraduate CFAES students on the Columbus campus are identified as a minority. Comparatively, 21% of the entire undergraduate student body on main campus is a minority.

Nearly 70% of minority students in CFAES major in animal sciences or are enrolled in the School of Environment and Natural Resources.

"Historically, people study animal science if they are pre-veterinary. The School of Environment and Natural Resources tends to be one of the more diverse departments



**13% MINORITY, 87% WHITE  
44% MALE, 56% FEMALE**

*This collage represents the sex and minority (people of color for visual purposes) population of the current CFAES undergraduate student body.*

because it has a less conservative history," Lechman said.

Pamela Thomas, who works with diversity, equity, and inclusion and student success within the college, shared that CFAES has not specifically recruited minority students in the past due to connecting to desired populations through traditional recruitment efforts.

However, she acknowledges that, "[CFAES is] fighting an uphill battle because if you look at underrepresented groups, [racial minority] populations have or have had in the past, a derogatory or negative association with agricultural sciences."

If a minority student decides to become a CFAES Buckeye, they have the opportunity to join a club within the college called Multicultural Students in Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Related Sciences (MANRRS). MANRRS creates a space where people from underrepresented groups are able to come together to support one another, learn, and grow. Thomas shared that this helps to retain students.

There are various other groups, clubs, and resources available throughout the University as a whole. Various resources are available for specific minority groups throughout campus, based on individual identified needs and challenges.

## HOW DO FACULTY COMPARE?

In terms of diversity of faculty within the college, in 2016, 17% were racial minorities and 32% were women. Lechman identified the lack of women in higher-level positions as a definite concern.

James L. Moore III, vice provost for diversity and inclusion and chief diversity officer for the University, shared that we need to keep diversity and inclusion at the forefront. He said, "If diversity is an afterthought or is not given the necessary attention and resources, colleges will not make adequate progress."

According to Moore, "We are a very siloed institution, unfortunately. The silos make it difficult for the university to adequately leverage its human and financial resources to make a collective impact in the diversity and inclusion space." Deans of the various colleges have a lot of autonomy and range to decide what to mandate.

According to Kitchel, "We have work to do. There are opportunities for us to continue to grow."

One method to improve these statistics in faculty and staff positions was mandatory "Inclusive Excellence Training" for search

committee members. However, this training was suspended following Lechman's departure, much to her concern. Trainings had been scheduled and instructors were identified to continue this program.

Kitchel expressed that during the interim, human resources policies and practices will address any issues that may arise. He also encouraged individuals to attend the workshops by the CFAES Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. There are also various other workshops available though other colleges on campus.

***"There is a lack of diversity in our college. It is something that we need to address."***

Additionally, a diversity advocate is selected to serve on each selection committee. They are charged with being aware of and identifying any intentional or unintentional biases. This person is not trained, but identified as someone passionate about diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Kitchel also has the ability to review the search committee's efforts and findings to ensure that due diligence was taken to recruit a diverse pool of candidates.

"Sometimes during the interview processes, certain biases keep people out of jobs," Thomas said. "I do see an upward shift [in the number of women and minorities]...[But,] our faculty is not representative of the diverse populations we want to include."

Lechman cautioned that while training is important, "...[it] does not change the culture."

## TURNING WORDS INTO ACTION?

Ohio State is committed to taking affirmative action that follows federal and state laws. This is done by means of recruitment, hiring, and advancement of disadvantaged

populations throughout the University, including qualified minorities, women, those with disabilities, and covered veterans.

The university is also an equal opportunity employer. This ensures all qualified applicants will receive consideration from the selection committee without discrimination.

However, the law of affirmative action only states that one must make "good faith efforts." This is a term that is not quantifiable or explicitly outlined.

The college and Ohio State Extension

are also held accountable is through Civil Rights Reviews due to receiving funds from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). In 2019, a review was completed, but reports have not yet been made public. The last review took place in 2005.

Jacqueline Wilkins, interim director of Ohio State Extension, shared items the USDA had outlined as areas of concern to be addressed over a six month period. These action plans and steps were fully implemented in late December 2019.

These include providing additional resources in the forms of staff training and conferences, creating committees that ensure programs are reaching out to diverse populations, teaching about discrimination complaint procedures, developing a clear and joint diversity plan between the two land grant universities in Ohio—Ohio State University and Central State University, streamlining data collection procedures, planning internal civil rights reviews, ensuring access to translators for limited English proficiency individuals, and work to strengthen the relationship between Central State and Ohio State.

In 2017, Lechman and Thomas created a 25-page, "Strategic Plan for Equity and Inclusion." However, Lechman shared, "It was submitted, but [we] never heard anything about moving it forward." According to Kitchel, this plan was shared with Dean Cathann Kress shortly after she took her new role in the collage. The document was never publicly revisited.

Despite the college's historical struggle with diversity and inclusion, Lechman assured that during her 17 years with CFAES, no one acted against civil rights laws or failed to adhere to federal equal opportunity employment practices.

Moore expressed that diversity and inclusion is not only a moral imperative, but also an economic one. With that being said, is CFAES continually being stung by the jellyfish of singularity?



*These statistics show the percentage of men vs women in the assistant professor, associate professor, and professor roles.*