

# Diversity, reality, strategy coalesce at March 10-11 event

By Angela McManaman



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## Inclusive Excellence at-a-glance schedule

### Thursday, March 10

- 2-4 p.m., Union Theatre: “Out of Respect.”
- 6-7:30 p.m., Union Ballroom: Conference Overview and Reception. Includes past task force reports updates.

### Friday, March 11

- 9-10 a.m., Union Wisconsin Room: Welcome remarks, followed by a review of current initiatives being implemented at UWM as examples of best practices and tools to promote inclusivity and enhance diversity and climate at UWM (LLCs, bullying response, Safe Space Training, Hate/Bias Incident Reporting).
- 10-11:30 a.m.: Facilitated work sessions. What should UWM look like in five years?
- 11:45 a.m.-1:30 p.m.: Working lunch, “Next Steps.” What are effective strategies and discussion? Outcomes from these workshops will be posted and available for viewing and additional feedback from the campus community.

**C**ome prepared to roll up your sleeves and get involved in “Diversity and Climate at UWM: A Campus Conversation,” March 10-11.

From faculty presenters and student panelists, to those sitting before them, every member of the UWM community present will be expected to listen, to learn, and to share ideas during the day-and-a-half event. This campuswide dialogue is organized by the Diversity Leadership Council in the Office of Diversity and Climate, Division of Academic Affairs.

“This will be the easy part,” says Cheryl Ajirotutu, interim associate vice chancellor for diversity and climate. The challenge will be to take all the workshop outcomes delivered through March 11 and begin to develop a strategic diversity plan for UWM that is “dynamic, real and informative.”

“I understand that people may be skeptical of diversity plans, but today we have an opportunity to make institutional changes at UWM. We are not starting from scratch; lots of things have been talked about; some things have been accomplished. Let us take this opportunity to begin the work on building a diversity plan that effectively helps us to become a diverse and inclusive campus,” explains Ajirotutu.

As the most diverse institution in the University of Wisconsin System, and with full support of Interim Chancellor Michael Lovell and Interim Provost Johannes Britz, UWM will look at what this campus can take from the existing Inclusive Excellence (IE) framework and effectively implement here, says Ajirotutu. Since 2008, IE has been the official diversity framework of the UW System.

But there will be attention paid to what already has been done regarding diversity and climate at UWM. For example, on March 10 at 6 p.m., representatives of the LGBT, Women’s Studies, Race/Ethnicity and Climate task forces will recap their recent findings and work.

## THE UWM ADVANTAGE – AND CHALLENGE

Engaging the constituencies of students, faculty and staff at an institution remains key to diversity development in higher education. This university’s role as the state’s most diverse institution is an advantage that will inform a UWM-specific strategic diversity plan, says Ajirotutu.

“But as the state’s most diverse campus, we can and should do better, and the planning that we develop coming out of the IE process should help us to develop a nationally relevant model of an urban and diverse campus.”

To do that, the IE process can guide university administrators to develop a framework that looks beyond compliance-oriented and recruitment-driven diversity practices.

A more progressive and outcome-driven strategic diversity plan would continue providing outreach and academic support to be more expansive and inclusive of student diversity. But it also would expand and diversify the curriculum across the university’s 14 schools and colleges to be more inclusive of nontraditional approaches to student learning and success. Service learning, study abroad and online learning are examples of such educational practices that already have proven successful in helping the university’s nontraditional students achieve academic success and a more favorable work-life-school balance.

## A DIALOGUE-DRIVEN PROCESS

The conference, the IE process and the strategic diversity plan that will be the outcome of these efforts is dialogue-driven, adds Ajirotutu, and not bound to one easy-to-remember or carefully categorized definition of “diversity.”

“By inviting the entire campus to review, discuss and inform the work of the Diversity Leadership Council and task force reports from more than a decade, we can build a more integrated approach to diversity and climate issues,” she explains.

“We’re already looking deeper into dimensions of diversity that consider structural, multiculturalism and context diversity; this moves us beyond past models of gender and race mandates to identify the themes that cut across the work of the task forces. Improved diversity and climate can’t be achieved if any one constituency is interest-bound only.”

The conference’s opening event is a screening of “Out of Respect: A Story of Five” – a look at identity intersections among Milwaukee’s homeless youth. A growing subset of them are homeless after trying for years to find acceptance from their families, stability in foster care, or success and safety in school as LGBT teens.

The 2 p.m. screening in the Union Theatre is free to all conference attendees. Directed by documentarian and UWM alumna and journalism instructor Tess Gallun, crew members include nearly a dozen UWM students.

“This film is an educational moment that addresses identity issues many of us may not be aware of – the homelessness factor facing LGBT youth,” says Ajirotutu.

## TO REGISTER

Registration for “Diversity and Climate at UWM: A Campus Conversation” is available through EmployeeDev: [mydevelopment.uwm.edu/campusconversation](http://mydevelopment.uwm.edu/campusconversation).

Future events include a presentation for classified employees and others whose work assignments preclude them from participating in the March 10-11 proceedings.