

Equal Opportunity Staff Diversity and Inclusion Success Stories

University:

Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences (FYCS) at the University of Florida, Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) Committee: Tracy Irani, Professor and Chair, (352) 273-3446; irani@ufl.edu

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Faculty of the University of Florida's Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences (FYCS) currently lead 21 NIFA-funded Hatch projects, 10 of which are multi-state projects, and many of them study vulnerable and minority populations. Additionally, the FYCS Department has one of the largest minority enrollments in the UF College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. Their students come from diverse racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds.

Despite the expertise and experience of the faculty, in early 2016 they realized that Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) was an area where improvements were needed. To address this need, they developed a new process model for creating a climate for D&I work within the department that is being considered collegewide.

The FYCS Department's D&I Committee established a firm foundation and brought D&I to the forefront of departmental discussions and planning. The Committee's key accomplishments include developing a department survey based on an Appreciative Inquiry framework, and faculty and staff retreats, during which discussions helped department members identify specific priority areas for growth. With a foundation in the Appreciative Inquiry framework, survey data, and department priorities, the department transitioned from a committee model to a "Diversity Opens" phase of the model.

The "Diversity Opens" (DO) model moved beyond traditional power structures, such as committees, and put the responsibility of D&I growth into the hands of all department members. The goal of DOs were to:

- break down the barriers to engagement, allowing any faculty or staff to suggest and/or lead smaller activities;
- diffuse the responsibility for D&I improvement from the centralized committee to the broader network of faculty and staff; and
- establish a culture of prioritizing D&I throughout all department activities, particularly research.

Lowering the barrier to engagement has been especially important for faculty from minority backgrounds, as research suggests that diversity-related service often falls to these faculty and can be detrimental to their careers.

Based on the leadership provided by the D&I Committee, the FYCS Department adopted a unique framework of Appreciative Inquiry for guiding equity efforts and developed an innovative model for continuing this work - Diversity Opens. While many departments focus on diversity policies or procedures, FYCS emphasized embedding diversity and inclusion within the culture of the department.

Over time, these efforts will have long-term, positive impacts on the quality of faculty and staff work, particularly research with diverse, vulnerable, and marginalized populations.

These efforts were recognized in October 2020 by the Experiment Station Section and the Association of Public and Land Grant Universities (APLU); The University of Florida, FYCS Department received the National Experiment Station Section Diversity and Inclusion Award.