

Proposal to form an Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, & Access (IDEA) Standing Committee within the Soil and Water Sciences Department

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Background

There is growing body of literature showing that a more inclusive and diverse community enhances institutional research and educational quality (e.g., Bensimon and Malcolm 2012, Museus 2014, Hurtado et al. 2015). Efforts have been undertaken at the University level and within IFAS to advance the diversity, equity, and inclusion within academia at all levels, including undergraduate, graduate, postdoctorate, staff, and faculty levels. A few examples of these efforts include:

- In 2018 Antonio Farias joined UF as UF's first chief diversity officer and a senior advisor to the president
- In 2018, UF|IFAS HR organized an initial search advocate training program to enhance IDEA considerations during all stages of the faculty search and screen process. In summer 2019, the search advocate program became a mandatory component of all faculty searches within IFAS.
- In 2019, UF|IFAS HR formed the Diversity and Inclusion Committee, which has initiated multiple programs (including the expansion of the search advocate program). Details are available at: <https://hr.ifas.ufl.edu/diversity-and-inclusion/committee/>

Although these steps should be acknowledged, this work is just beginning. According to the US Census Bureau, the state of Florida has a larger minority population than the United States as a whole (Table 1). The degree to which UF reflects national or state diversity diminishes with career stage at UF as a whole, within IFAS, and within SWSD. The percentage of female (note: non-binary or trans- genders are not included in data from UF Institutional Research and Planning) representation is slightly above state and national averages for undergraduate and graduate students as well as staff across most levels, but females are underrepresented in post doctoral and faculty roles. Representation of Black and Hispanic individuals is below state and national averages at most levels, and the disparity increases within career stage.

Forming an Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access (IDEA) Committee

Enhancing the inclusion, diversity, equity, and access (IDEA) within the Soil and Water Sciences Department (SWSD) will make our department more resilient and productive while enhancing the education we provide to students and strengthening our research and extension programs. The first step in this process is the formation of an official departmental committee focused on these issues. While we acknowledge that simply forming a committee and making performative statements will do little to move the needle, we also recognize that taking this first step is necessary in order to codify the importance with which the faculty of our department treat these issues. Upon formation, the committee will develop and recommend specific, actionable items/programs which the department can undertake to enhance IDEA throughout SWSD.

The proposed committee would be responsible for providing input to the Department Chair on IDEA matters. The committee will perform an initial review of the current status of IDEA within the department using a quantitative approach and will use the results of this review

to develop action items. The committee will repeat this review process a minimum of once every three years and will provide an annual update to department chair on the status of IDEA within SWSD.

Table 1. Selected demographics of the United States, the state of Florida, the entire University of Florida (UF), the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS), and the Soil and Water Sciences Department within IFAS.

		% White	% Black	% Hispanic	% Female	% International ⁶
U.S.A. ¹		60	13	18	51	
Florida ¹		54	17	26	51	
UF ²	<i>Undergraduate</i>	51	6	20	56	8
	<i>Graduate</i>	41	3	8	49	37
	<i>Post Doctoral</i>	28	3	5	40	50
	<i>Associates</i>					
	<i>Staff³</i>	61	11	14	58	4
	<i>Faculty</i>	67	4	8	43	5
IFAS ²	<i>Undergraduate</i>	56	5	18	64	8
	<i>Graduate</i>	47	2	10	54	34
	<i>Post Doctoral</i>	20	1	7	40	65
	<i>Associates³</i>					
	<i>Staff</i>	67	5	12	59	7
	<i>Faculty</i>	75	2	8	38	4
SWSD ²	<i>Undergraduate⁴</i>	33	17	17	42	8
	<i>Graduate</i>	45	0	16	61	29
	<i>Post Doctoral</i>	50	0	0	50	50
	<i>Associates</i>					
	<i>Staff</i>	55	8	11	65	6
	<i>Faculty (main campus)⁵</i>	68	0	4	36	4

¹Source: United States Census Bureau Quick Facts: <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/sis/resources/data-tools/quickfacts.html>

²Source: UF Institutional Planning and Research: <https://ir.aa.ufl.edu/uffacts/workforce/>

³Staff numbers reflect all paid personnel other than graduate students, post doctoral associates, and faculty. OPS adjunct faculty are included as staff.

⁴SWSD Undergraduate numbers reflected Soil and Water Science majors only, not EMANR majors (I was unable to find those data on the UF IR website)

⁵Faculty numbers only reflect current main campus faculty. I was unable to easily assess REC numbers within our department.

⁶International individuals are included as a separate group. Therefore black or Hispanic international faculty, for example, are only counted as international and are not included in their respective racial/ethnic group.

The proposed IDEA committee will consist of a minimum of six members. Four members should be faculty, one member should be a graduate student (likely elected through the SWSD graduate student association), and one member should be from departmental staff. The four faculty members should represent a range of career stages, including both pre- and post-tenure faculty. Additionally, the faculty members should include at least one individual to represent each of the three IFAS mission areas (research, teaching, and extension). The process of electing members and committee processes are currently TBD, but we will strive to develop a

diverse committee while avoiding tokenizing individuals from underrepresented minorities or expecting these URM individuals to carry the load.

While specific objectives of the committee will be determined following creation of the committee, potential objectives or responsibilities of the committee include:

1. Develop mission statement for the committee and an IDEA statement for the department
2. Review the state of IDEA within the department by surveying undergraduate and graduate students, postdoctoral associates, staff, and faculty.
3. Coordinate annual workshops focused on IDEA issues, such as by-stander intervention training, allyship, implicit bias, etc.
4. Develop specific, targeted, materials to recruit URM individuals at every level (undergraduate, graduate, postdoctoral, staff, faculty)
5. Decolonize and diversify the teaching, research and extension programs through intentional, anti-racist activities and approaches. For example, ensure that courses with heavy primary literature foci are including black authors and authors from the global south.
6. Increase the diversity of invited speakers for departmental seminars.

References

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