A Summer and Fall Focused on Becoming an Anti-Racist Institution

On the first day of the 2015-16 academic year, President Bierman emailed the campus with an update on the college’s efforts to answer and energize efforts aimed at making Beloit an “anti-racist institution” that best serves all of its students and community members, and their future prospects.

Below are substantial excerpts from that message to campus from President Bierman. While some details, including opening comments, have been removed, the text that appears has not been altered except for the addition of well-marked updates.

Aug. 24, 2015 at 7:35 p.m.

Subject line: [President] Welcome Back

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Inclusive Living and Learning

Just before commencement, Students for an Inclusive Campus (SIC) – a group of concerned students seeking to promote productive change – occupied the May Faculty Senate meeting and presented the college with a list of demands. SIC’s demands, reinforced by similar demands made by another group of concerned students, and those prepared by senior staff and our community a month before (and still available here), helped bring focus to what meaningful change at Beloit could look like; how it is that we can become more inclusive and diverse, a place where more people feel a deeper sense of belonging.

- As I mentioned at that senate meeting, Professor of Religious Studies Debra Majeed has agreed to put aside some of her coursework this fall and spring to lead a taskforce comprised of faculty, students, staff, and trustees. They have been asked to provide leadership in the development of a college agenda towards strengthening our commitment to inclusion and success for all of our students, faculty and staff. The 12-member team provides recommendations and feedback on developing and on-going campus activities, forms collaborations with other offices and programs, participates in and contributes to activities related to inclusivity, and highlights partnership possibilities among other campus groups. They are identifying ways to collaborate in their work across campus. One important example is the creation of “cells” to strategically, intentionally, and creatively inform us on how we can collectively create a framework to become an anti-racist, all-inclusive campus and community. I am grateful to learn – though in no way surprised – that faculty, students, and staff at all levels have eagerly embraced the invitation to join these cells. Additionally, the task force will be inviting your participation in these conversations, seeking your wisdom and ideas, as the semester and year unfolds.

- Cecil Youngblood has been promoted to Associate Dean for Inclusive Living and Learning; he will continue as the college’s Title IX Coordinator. While this promotion recognizes the effective leadership role that Cecil has played in promoting a healthier culture of inclusivity, it also reflects an increase in his programmatic work focused specifically on our residential life and other out-of-class learning environments.
• Dr. Nicole Truesdell has been promoted to **Senior Director of Academic Diversity and Inclusiveness.** This new office is charged with building capacity around, and embed practices in, understandings of diversity, inclusion, and equity within curricular and co-curricular programs. It also houses two of our federally funded TRiO programs -- Student Excellence and Leadership (SEL) and McNair Scholars – as well as the Wisconsin Alliance for Minority Participation (WiscAMP) program that works with minority students interested in Science, Technology, Engineering and/or Math. Employing an assets-based model, the Academic Diversity and Inclusiveness office will provide targeted programming to ensure all students have an inclusive space and place to live and learn at Beloit College. In collaboration with others, it will also establish benchmarks and measure progress around diversity, inclusiveness, and equity on campus. Finally, this office houses our **Inclusive Success Initiative,** which focuses more broadly on persistence and institution-wide work around diversity and inclusiveness within academic affairs.

• The positions of **Associate Dean for Inclusive Living and Learning and the Senior Director of Academic Diversity and Inclusiveness have been added to Senior Staff.** Both positions will be working together to help bridge the work being done within Academic and Student Affairs around intercultural literacy, inclusion, and equity.

• A new position was approved under the Inclusive Success Initiative titled **Inclusive Success Coordinator.** This person will report to Nicole Truesdell. Part of the charge of this new position includes creating programming for students from populations traditionally underserved by higher education who may not qualify for TRiO programs, coordination amongst and between various offices around the campus to ensure student success, and working on larger issues of persistence.

• Sarah Tweedale was hired, with key financial support from two members of the Board of Trustees, as **full-time Coordinator of Sustained Dialogue** in order to provide direction and leadership for this fast growing initiative. We just learned from the Sustained Dialogue Institute that we are the first college or university to hire a full-time coordinator.

• This summer, staff in security, residence life, and information technology worked hand in hand to select and install more than a dozen **security cameras on the north end** to aid in investigations. Accompanying this was a carefully constructed **security camera use policy.**

• Dean of Students Christina Klawitter led a process that yielded a **draft policy regarding hate crimes,** specifying reporting mechanisms and a response plan. Dean Klawitter will seek community feedback, especially from students, before finalizing the policy.

• **Five honors terms projects are underway that address important issues of inclusivity:**
  
  o Reine Lucus is working on “Sustaining the Dialogue and Beloit College;”
Namoonga Mantina is “Investigating the Impact that Social Identity Can or Will Have on Student Wellness,” in part, through the creation of a Sustained Dialogue group around wellness;

Sarah Miller is “Exploring the Experiences that Sexual Assault Survivors Attending Beloit College During their Road to Recovery;”

Caitlin Patterson will be “Evaluating and Increasing the Engagement of Men in Sexual Assault Prevention Programming at Beloit College;”

Haleigh Thomas will be “Developing a Bystander Intervention Education Program that Focuses on the Prevention of Sexual Assault.”

- Hiring processes for staff and faculty are being reconceived to promote more diverse outcomes and new anti-racist language to accompany all job ads is being developed (and was approved—see that language here).

- The 2015 Fall Conference (an annual event that brings together all faculty and many administrative staff) on Aug. 21, 2015 focused on Equity, Inclusion, and Anti-Racism: Cornerstones of Liberal Education. It included evidence of how students are experiencing Beloit, evidence of why inclusion matters, and evidence of practices that help with success.

- #BlackLivesMatterBeloit has programmed a number of events for this Fall. The theme is “Whiteness.” The kickoff for 2015-16 will be September 2nd, 12:30-1:30 in Moore Lounge. (See www.beloit.edu/campus/events for all scheduled events.)

- New Student Days and the First Year Initiatives Program continued its emphasis on exploring social identities with new students.

- Prompted by the good work of students in the Transcendentalist Task Force, work is underway to turn a restroom on the second floor of the Science Center into an all gender restroom; and better signage for current all gender restrooms is on its way. (See additional updates on this work from the early fall here: Aug. 31 Senior Staff Report.)

- Focus groups of international students will be organized this year to consider ways to help better familiarize international students with Western cultural norms and codes.

- Conversations have begun and recommendations are being received about the use of physical space and the messages communicated about the campus as a welcoming environment.

More work is in development and we will continue to discover new knowledge and needs moving forward. While our aspirations for an inclusive living and learning environment and our recognition of the educational benefits of diversity are not new, the events of last spring reminded us of their urgency. Today we work with greater unity and focus in actively pursuing the aspiration of becoming an anti-racist institution.

The Beloit Project
The team of students, faculty, and staff led by Professor of Philosophy and Associate Dean of the College Matt Tedesco concluded its August retreat with a commitment to complete its development of drafts of experiments in (1) making appropriate student work opportunities intentional liberal arts in practice experiences; and (2) identifying a small number of specific liberal arts in practice opportunities to connect students and alumni.

Importantly, members of the Beloit Project Team will be working closely with Professor Majeed’s Task Force to make sure that their thinking around the “being here” part of the Beloit Project is connected to the inclusive living and learning developments.

--excerpted from Aug. 24, 2015 message to Beloit College students, staff and faculty from President Bierman