

## Walking the Talk: Workforce Diversity at Cal State Fullerton

**W**hen it comes to student enrollment, California State University, Fullerton (CSUF) is one of the country's most diverse universities, designated as a Hispanic, Asian-American and Native American/Pacific Islander-Serving Institution and ranked ninth in the nation in terms of baccalaureate degrees awarded to minority students by *Diverse: Issues in Higher Education*, based on data from the U.S. Department of Education. However, diversity within the institution's staff and faculty ranks is lacking and does not reflect the student population it serves.

When Mildred Garcia assumed the presidency of CSUF two years ago, one of the first things she set out to do was to change this reality. By including the recruitment and retention of a diverse faculty and staff as one of four goals laid out in the university's five-year strategic plan, Garcia ensured that her institution wouldn't just be paying lip service to diversity and inclusion. Instead, she opened the door for real and lasting change, and she empowered human resources to lead the charge.

### Setting the Stage

To nurture this vision, President Garcia moved HR out of the administrative unit in which it was housed and created a stand-alone division of human resources, diversity and inclusion (HRDI), encompassing both staff and faculty personnel functions. In doing so, she elevated the head of HR to a vice president level, and subsequently hired Lori Gentles to lead the new division.

"When I joined CSUF last July, I knew I had my work cut out for me — as the new head of a new division, working under a new president, charged with implementing a workforce diversity strategy for the largest campus in the Cal State System, I'd be lying if I said I wasn't overwhelmed," says Gentles. "But when I saw how supportive President Garcia was and how important this work is to her and that she was willing to allocate the funds and resources that would allow real progress to be made, I breathed a sigh of relief and jumped in with both feet!"

### Making Strides

CSUF is planning to hire more than 130 new faculty members over the next two years, "so this is the perfect opportunity to really change the landscape of our faculty



makeup," says Gentles. By leading several new programs and initiatives related to workforce diversity, Gentles is confident HRDI can help the university achieve this goal.

### Diversity Recruitment Training

Over the past year, HRDI has conducted training sessions across campus with college deans, department chairs and faculty search committee chairs to educate them about best practices in recruiting and onboarding. Training topics have included several critical aspects of the recruitment process, such as how to develop applicant feeder programs; guarding against unconscious bias in search and screening; finding funding for recruitment initiatives that focus on underrepresented groups; coordinating recruitment with community, government and academic associations; creating faculty position descriptions which attract highly qualified candidates; and best practices in retention strategies.

### E-Recruit for Faculty

HRDI implemented an e-recruitment program that has resulted in close to 95 percent of faculty candidates self-identifying their ethnicities (previous efforts achieved only 30 percent to 50 percent self-identification rates). While e-recruiting has been in place for many years for management and staff positions at CSUF, faculty recruitment remained paper-based due to the complexity of the process. However, the evolution of technology and a growing acceptance of e-recruitment in higher ed provided

# inclusion cultivates excellence

an opportunity for HRDI to test a new approach that also resulted in a better diversity metric. “Since e-recruitment was implemented last fall, we’ve seen dramatic increases in both the number of applicants and the overall diversity of candidates,” says Gentles. “In fact, the diversity rates in most demographic categories are exceeding national averages. And these results will impact the classroom experience for years to come.”

## ***Campus Climate Survey***

In March, HRDI launched a campus climate survey to assess the learning and working environment at CSUF. The survey was designed to assess the experiences and behaviors of faculty, staff and administrators and their perceptions of institutional actions including administrative policies and academic initiatives that impact campus climate. “The survey will help us determine how well we are doing to promote and maintain a positive, inclusive and supportive campus climate where all individuals and groups feel welcomed, safe, respected and valued,” says Gentles. “The results will identify institutional strengths and challenges relating to campus climate issues and should provide valuable data to help us improve recruitment and retention and to foster an inclusive environment.”

Results of the survey will be made available to the campus community in the fall and will drive the university’s next steps in its workforce diversity plan.

## ***Entrance Survey and New Employee Orientation***

An “entrance” survey given to each new hire assesses the factors that attracted the individual to CSUF as a place of employment and his or her experience during the application, interview, onboarding and new employee orientation processes. “We use data gleaned from these entrance surveys to inform continuous improvement in our recruiting, hiring and retention efforts,” says Gentles.

HRDI also recently revamped its new employee orientation, with the program focusing on the fact that each individual, from the hourly employee to the faculty member to the senior executive, has the same primary duty: to support student success. Another component to the new employee orientation program is a new hire “mixer.” Twice per year, faculty and staff hired within the previous six months are invited to a mixer to discuss how they are acclimating to the environment and to share with HRDI any concerns or feedback they may have about the workplace. It is also a time for co-workers to network and build a sense of community, says Gentles.

## ***University Awards***

In April, HRDI hosted the inaugural University Awards program, which celebrated the accomplishments of both staff and faculty (prior to this year, staff and faculty had always had separate employee recognition programs). “For many years, CSUF’s employee recognition program had been focused exclusively on time served at the university,” says Gentles. And while she acknowledges that recognizing time served is important, “it’s what we do in those 10, 15, 20 years to advance the university’s goals that is real cause for celebration.” The new awards program recognizes accomplishments in leadership, teamwork and collaboration, and diversity and inclusion.

## ***HR’s Role As Cultural Architect***

CSUF has undergone tremendous change over the past two years — a new president, a new executive leadership team, a new strategic plan, and an increased focus on workforce diversity. And, as Gentles puts it, “a new direction, new priorities, a different focus — all require a new mindset for our campus community.” And Gentles is committed to helping her division shift that mindset and shape a new campus culture.

“I am a true believer that HR can and should serve as the compass of an organization, shaping and guiding its culture through policies, practices, programs and positioning,” says Gentles. “I’ve been working with our HR folks to try and shift the mindset about the work we do — to help them realize that the reach we have is bigger and broader than just about any other campus division. By reframing the significance of what we do (instead of saying, ‘we have 3,700 employees,’ it’s ‘we manage more than \$400 million in assets’), we have begun to take our role as cultural architects more seriously. Now that ‘diversity and inclusion’ is part of our division’s name, it has lit a fire — DE&I work is now part of the fabric of what we do on a daily basis.”

## ***On the Fast Track***

The diversity work at CSUF has been going at break-neck speed. “Thanks to President Garcia’s commitment to creating a more diverse and inclusive workplace, we’ve been able to accomplish more in nine months than many organizations do in five years,” says Gentles. “Instead of talking things to death, we’re actually *doing*, and I think the campus community is really beginning to understand the benefit that is derived from the breadth of views and the unique contributions that a diverse workforce brings to our university.” 