

# University of Texas iSchool D&I Committee Report 2020-2021

Our active and committed Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) Committee was involved in planning and delivering a number of services for our iSchool community during the 2020-2021 academic year. Although our work was altered due to the impact of COVID-19, we were still able to offer support.

## Committee Members

- Ahmer Arif, Faculty
- Ali Gunnells, MSIS Student
- Ayse Gursoy, PhD Student
- Bo Xie, Faculty
- Carla Criner, Staff
- Dajae Fryer, MSIS Student
- Elle Carnley, MSIS Student
- Emily Simpson, MSIS Student
- Emma Hetrick, MSIS Student
- Gabrielle Roth, MSIS Student
- Ida Rahnamai, Staff
- Keisha Brown, Staff
- Rachel Van Middlesworth (Chair), Staff
- Raivynn Smith, MSIS Student
- Sarah Varenhorst, MSIS Student

## Committee Charges

**Item #1:** Mandatory training in anti-racist pedagogy and cultural competency for all TAs and faculty. The D&I committee will work with other units at UT to identify training resources and host iSchool training session(s) focusing on more inclusive classroom strategies.

**Status:** Investigated, but not completed. The Faculty Innovation Center and other UT entities are equipped to provide training on these topics, but without top-down, enforced attendance from the Dean, engagement and turnout will likely be very low.

**Item #2:** Investigation of racial climate in grad programs/department. The D&I committee will survey and review other data as appropriate, summarize what they find, and present the findings to the General Assembly (all faculty, staff, and researchers) with recommendations for action by the beginning of Spring 2021.

**Status:** In progress, will be completed in late Spring/early Summer 2021. See "Completed Projects and Events - Ongoing" for more information.

**Item #4:** Increase awareness of systemic racism and ways to engage in dismantling it. The D&I committee holds events regularly and will seek additional opportunities to host events and speakers in the areas of anti-racism and information studies, either in-person or remotely. The D&I committee has funding from the Mary R. Boyvey Chair for Excellence to promote events of this nature.

**Status:** Complete (for this year), see below for exact events supported.

As identified in the “An Update on Anti-Racism Efforts at the iSchool” e-mail from Dean Meyer on August 28, 2020. That e-mail also included other Items of anti-racist work to be completed, identified from conversations between students and iSchool administrators in the summer of 2020. The e-mail and items within should be revisited by the Dean and leadership team to avoid “death by committee”.

## Completed Events & Projects

### Fall 2020

- Funded the SAA book club for their discussion of *A Black Women's History of the United States*.
- Created and shared a [student resource guide](#) for pandemic support and more.
- October 30, 2020: Hosted a screening of the documentary *Change the Subject* in collaboration with UT Libraries.
- December 5, 2020: Funded a group of students for a virtual [Black Austin Tour](#) organized by SASI.

### Spring 2021

- March 26, 2021: iSchool hosted Allies Training from UT’s Gender and Sexuality Center, attended by 20 UT community members (4 iSchoolers).
- Funded two \$500 Diversity and Inclusion awards for Open House projects.

### Ongoing

- [CARE Counselor](#): Acquiring a Counselor in Academic Residence was finally made possible through the efforts of Gabrielle Roth coordinating with CMHC. The iSchool will be splitting a CARE Counselor with the LBJ School, and the Deans of each respective school are following up with Chris Brownson of CMHC regarding next steps.
- iSchool DEI Assessment: Completed by Camellia Falcon of Codices Consulting. The committee chair also reached out to ideas42 and other UT departments to ask for services, but Camellia was the only one able to provide services in a timely and cost-effective manner. See Codices Consulting’s final report for more on outcomes and findings.

## Pivots & Abandoned Projects

- Support for Student Conference Attendance and Participation: while the D&I Committee has traditionally offered financial support in this category, we reallocated our budget this year to pay for the DEI Assessment, since many conferences were cancelled due to COVID-19.
- External guest speakers: As mentioned elsewhere, COVID and other factors resulted in very low turnout for events. Given that, and the effort required to conduct the DEI Assessment, we did not bring in any external speakers this year. We did compile [this list](#), which could be a good starting point for next year’s committee.
- Student resources, including a food pantry and direct student financial support: In the fall, much of our efforts focused on how to offer direct and immediate support to students. Upon further investigation, we realized that many of our ideas (such as a food pantry) would duplicate services already provided elsewhere on campus, and that others (such as direct student financial support) were prohibited by UT financial guidelines as they exist currently.
- disABILITY Advocate Training (offered by Services for Students with Disabilities): repeated training requests were never fulfilled; office appeared to be undergoing some staff turnover. Worth revisiting next year!