

UC SANTA BARBARA

Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

THRIVING IN THE ACADEMY THROUGH REFORM, TOGETHER

Dear UCSB Community Members:

I am pleased to join the UC Santa Barbara community as the inaugural Vice Chancellor for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. I appreciate the vision that Chancellor Yang demonstrates through his ongoing commitment to grow, expand, and support the Office for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion that reflects his embrace of the core principles that the Office represents.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, and INCLUSION are more than just words, they are our CORE principles that must guide our vision and, more importantly, our actions. They must serve as pillars for community building. These CORE principles guide how we at UC Santa Barbara must build our teams, cultivate our leaders and create an organizational culture that values diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice as the **building blocks** of excellence.

During my first days on the job, I have met many administrators, faculty, staff, and students who are equally committed to these principles. You have been working tirelessly, and I am humbled by your efforts and accomplishments. I am also appreciative of the groundwork laid by my predecessor, DEI Associate Vice Chancellor, Maria Herrera Sobek.

In 2015, UCSB became the first member of the Association of American Universities to be designated as a Hispanic-Serving, Native American-Serving, Pacific Islander-Serving, and an Asian-American-Serving Institution by the U.S. Department of Education. My vision is to build a truly diverse and inclusive campus that fosters an environment where each member is empowered to bring their unique differences, points of view, and contributions to the University; where they will experience acceptance, respect, inclusion and the support needed to achieve their full academic, personal, and professional potential. As was made clear at the 2020 Black Student Forum that was organized by the UCSB Center for Black Studies Research, we must create a space where *All* voices are heard, and where no one feels the need to edit their identity, much less render it invisible completely.

This vision is in keeping with that of the University of California mission. The system's mission is that "Diversity should be **integral** (my emphasis) to the University's achievement of excellence." To do so, we must embrace this historic promise "to recognize and nurture merit, talent, and achievement by

supporting diversity and equal opportunity in [our] education, services, and administration, as well as research and creative activity.” And we must, at the University of California, Santa Barbara, make it a reality.

From my point of view, the University of California has yet to live up to this vision, to fulfill the mission, or to adhere to the principles of community. **We must hold ourselves accountable!** To that end, our mission must include strengthening historically underrepresented communities both on campus and beyond. With diversity, inclusion, equity and social justice at the **forefront** of the University of California’s core values, we must strive to promote a culture that celebrates these principles and fosters a sense of belonging for ALL members of the UCSB community.

We profess to value diversity, inclusion, equity, and social justice. These terms are used often, as though their use can be a substitute for a strategic plan to tackle the **deep** and **pervasive** systemic injustices that are driven by racism, sexism, homophobia, ableism, anti-indigeneity, anti-Semitism, transphobia, xenophobia, Islamophobia, genderism, and many other exclusionary beliefs as they manifest through daily institutionalized practices.

As an African-American woman who was born in South Central Los Angeles during the Jim Crow era, I and many in my family experienced anti-Black racism. Every man in my family was arrested or harassed by the police. While driving home from work, my brother’s vehicle was descended upon by multiple police cars. Guns and rifles were trained on him as he, oh so carefully, left his vehicle and followed the commands. Face down on the ground, he could hear the voice of the only Black police officer, “It’s not him. It’s not him.” The police slowly withdrew, muttering that he was free to go. No apologies, but my brother is lucky to be alive.

I have lived through the Civil Rights Movement, the Black Power Movement, the Watts Riots, and the 1992 L.A. riots that were sparked by the acquittal of police officers who were filmed viciously beating Rodney King. No justice. NONE of what is happening today is new.

Like many of you, I am horrified and deeply saddened by the murder of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Tamar Rice, Trayvon Martin, Ahmaud Arbery, Atatiana Jefferson, Tony McDade, Philando Castile, and Sandra Bland. Of course, they are not alone. Since the advent of slavery, countless African Americans have died at the hands of government sanctioned authorities – whether civilians or police officers. The problem, then, isn’t that there are a few bad apples. Rather, anti-Blackness is deeply rooted in all of our institutions, our daily practices, and the ideological underpinnings that drive our ethical values and moral perspectives.

Also troubling is the rise of anti-Asian racism and xenophobia that have been fueled by politically motivated scapegoating in the wake of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. Several months ago, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights warned that the rise in such sentiments could lead to increased hate crimes against the Asian American and Pacific Islander community. Sadly, several organizations that track hate crimes show an increase in anti-Asian verbal harassment and physical assaults.

Similarly, according to the FBI’s 2019 annual report, hate crimes against Latinas/os reached a 16-year high in 2018. The rise of these attacks are correlated with political fear-mongering against individuals without U.S. papers, and drives anti-immigrant sentiments. These attacks are also supported by the militarization of immigration enforcement and border security that has torn children from the arms of their parents, many of whom have yet to be reunited. These current policies as well as several recent executive orders negatively impact international and undocumented members of our community.

According to Pew Research Center findings, in 2020, assaults against Muslims in the U.S. surpassed 2001 levels. In 2019, the *New York Times* reported that anti-Semitic incidents climbed by 12%, the largest yearly increase since the Anti-Defamation League began collecting such data forty years ago. The FBI found that in 2018, nearly 1 in 5 hate crimes were against members of the LGBTQ community, 184 of these crimes were targeted towards transgender and non-conforming people. Of course many hate crimes go unreported, suggesting that these statistics likely undercount the number of incidents. 55% of Native Americans living on tribal lands or in communities with significant numbers of American Indian residents, report discrimination by police, and 54% report discrimination when applying for a job, according to a 2017 Robert Wood Johnson Foundation/Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health report. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare racial-ethnic inequalities. African-American, Latinx, and American Indian communities lack access to health care, and comprise a significant number of our essential workers, who experience greater exposure to the disease. According to the CDC, the COVID-19 death rate, as compared to whites, is 1.4 times higher for American Indians, 2.1 times higher for African-Americans, and 1.1 times higher for Latinas/os. Thus, COVID-19 has had a devastating impact on these communities.

Gender inequality persists as well. A 2017 Pew Research Center report concludes that in the U.S., women are nearly twice as likely as men to report gender discrimination at work. U.S. women still only earn 82 cents to every dollar earned by men; and, Black women are paid 63% and Latinas 55% of what non-Hispanic white men are paid, according to a 2019 American Association of University Women report. In addition to job discrimination and wage inequality, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) report that “more than 1 in 3 women experienced sexual violence involving physical contact in her lifetime.” On college campuses, according to the results of a 2015 Association of American Universities report, 23.1% of female undergraduate student respondents reported at least one incident of sexual assault and sexual misconduct due to physical force, threats of physical force or incapacitation.” Again, this is likely an undercount, as many women do not report these acts of violence.

Of course, this brief overview is not exhaustive or comprehensive. It is merely a snapshot. Many groups experience discrimination, hate, violence and inequality. Equality and justice remain elusive.

Universities are not immune from biases, racism, or prejudice. **All** members of UCSB must be proactive and work against injustice.

Too often the vision, mission, and goals within our academic institutions are left unfulfilled because they are not perceived as **integral** to the University’s achievement of excellence. Instead, social justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts remain on the periphery, and relegated as the responsibility of a few designated groups or offices such as the Office for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

So however noble our vision, mission, and professed commitments, the status quo remains unless we forge a strategic plan that:

1. alters our daily practices,
2. creates sustained institutionalized transformation,
3. identifies immediate and long-term expected outcomes,
4. fosters accountability through planning and assessment, and
5. establishes milestones and timelines.

These milestones and timelines will be steered and influenced by community needs, input, and assessment. Collaboration with stakeholders is integral to my approach.

Only through reform, can all members of our community thrive. While programmatic initiatives designed to support underrepresented groups on the campus are essential, we must not ignore our

individual responsibilities to address inequities and injustices. Change requires a collective effort that not only seeks to alter attitudes but also the daily institutionalized seemingly neutral practices that maintain the status quo. Embracing diversity does not simply mean increasing the numbers of members of underrepresented groups, but also means fostering a culture of inclusion that entails the implementation of specific best practices and pushes the boundaries of what we conceive of as excellence.

As my mother often states, “Actions speak louder than words.” Change cannot take place, however, if we don’t act together and if we do not hold ourselves accountable.

To that end, in the 2020-2021 academic year, as the Vice Chancellor for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, I, along with my expanding staff, will:

1. Create, distribute, and analyze a Campus Climate Survey for Faculty, Staff, Graduate Students/Postdocs, and Undergraduate Students;
2. Develop a VCDEI 5-year strategic plan to address DEI issues and needs on the campus;
3. Give Voice to Community Members: Establish permanent stakeholder VCDEI Advisory Boards that are inclusive of faculty members, staff, and students. The groups will write status reports to inform the VCDEI 5-year UCSB strategic plan;
4. Further develop a VCDEI Office website to serve as a campus hub/resource center for JDEI activities across the campus, and create a data dashboard as an accountability tool;
5. Develop Diversity Education Certificate Programs for faculty, staff, graduate students, and undergraduate students.
6. Offer ongoing and readily available JDEI educational workshops on microaggressions, implicit biases, and racism;
7. Work with campus partners to assess and respond to incident reports of discrimination.

Together, through reform, we can create a campus community where ALL members will thrive.

Sincerely,

Belinda Robnett

Belinda Robnett, UCSB Vice Chancellor for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion