

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Twin Cities Campus

College of Design

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June 27, 2016

Ms. Kimberly Hewitt
Office for Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action
University of Minnesota

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Dear Ms. Hewitt,

I am honored to nominate the College of Design Diversity Committee (CDesDC) for the 2016 Lillian H. Williams Award. The CDesDC, which includes students, staff and faculty from across the college, is a tangible example of “Ms. Williams’s spirit and commitment to equal opportunity and affirmative action.” Committee members have dedicated their work to align with EOAA’s goal of “promoting a University culture where students, staff and faculty succeed professionally and thrive educationally.”

From its establishment, and especially since 2014, the CDesDC has worked strategically to improve diversity, equity and inclusion in the college. They drafted and presented to the College Assembly for approval our first ever collegiate diversity statement. The statement is posted prominently on our diversity webpage and serves as a guide to decision-making processes and activities college-wide (<http://design.umn.edu/about/diversity.html>).

The CDesDC members engaged in a self-assessment process to analyze our collegiate diversity climate from their perspectives and understanding. From the assessment, diversity goals were generated and adopted by the College Assembly in May 2015. The goals include ensuring structural support to advance diversity initiatives, improving diversity-related communications, educating internal and external stakeholders on diversity, and implementing diversity best practices throughout admissions, recruitment, retention and search processes. A final goal was to engage in a college-wide assessment to gain a better understanding of the climate within the college, and to identify stakeholder needs and recommendations for next steps. To support the goals, we hired a Graduate Assistant (GA) for Diversity Initiatives--the college’s first paid diversity position.

This past year, the GA and CDesDC examined existing college and university climate-related data. Next, they conducted eight focus groups with CDes students, staff and faculty on the extent to which attendees felt a sense of belonging and respect in the college, barriers to equity and inclusion they perceived and/or experienced, how equipped they felt to challenge instances of discrimination and oppression, and how they could assist the college in improving our diversity climate. Then, the CDesDC sent an electronic survey to all students, staff and faculty asking, “What is the one thing that you would like the CDes Diversity Committee to know about the diversity climate in our college?”

The focus groups and survey responses generated a robust set of findings about our diversity climate that were presented at an open college meeting. In the coming academic year, the CDesDC will broadly disseminate the findings to college stakeholders, engage staff and faculty in discussions, and work with students, staff and faculty to create action steps based on the report. A preliminary list of activities includes holding monthly diversity discussions, dedicated time on regular meeting agendas for cultural competence development, completion of the Intercultural Development Inventory by senior leadership, assessing diversity in our curricula, and hosting a Diversity and Design week with related lectures and exhibits.

The concrete progress of the CDesDC continues and already has influenced others who have, for example, initiated workshops on implicit bias, organized diversity training for our student employees and student leaders, and completed—by our entire student services staff—the Diversity Certificate offered by OED. Each CDesDC committee member is committed to create change so that all students, staff, and faculty have the opportunity to thrive. Their efforts are driven by the fact that they each believe that we, as a college, cannot achieve excellence without diversity. For these reasons, the College of Design Diversity Committee is deserving of the Lillian H. Williams Award. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Becky L. Yust, Ph.D., Interim Dean
Driven to DiscoverSM