

# Advancing Southern Towards a Social Justice and Antiracist University

*Priorities and Recommendations (2020-2023)*

## INTRODUCTION



At Southern, we are committed to identifying and addressing systemic barriers to equity, access, and success for all members of our community. We are also committed to constructive dialogues where we treat one another with dignity, respect, kindness, compassion, and civility as we share varying perspectives, with the goal of creating a culture of inclusion and belonging. By joining social justice and free speech with critical thinking in and out of the classroom, we prepare students to engage with societal issues on campus, as well as in our local communities, our nation, and world.

~ <https://socialjustice.SouthernCT.edu> ~

This commitment to diversity, equity, access, inclusion, and belonging informs our curriculum, teaching, learning, scholarship, creative activities, co-curricular activities, residential life, community involvement, and support of these endeavors by Southern community. This endeavor is essential in meeting the goal of preparing our students and ourselves for meaningful lives in a diverse, equitable, and inclusive global society.

The current unaddressed systemic racism as well as the current coronavirus pandemic and the ways in which communities of color in particular have been devastated and impacted, in my mind, urges all

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of us at Southern more than ever to be the best fighters in our work against systemic racism and other forms of inequities and oppression towards all communities.

The priorities and recommendations described in this document represent a brief analysis informed by my meetings with individual faculty, staff, and students beginning in June 2020; the findings from the 2017 Campus Climate Survey; and President Bertolino's 2017 *A Vision for Southern*.

In the coming months, and with support and collaboration from the President's Leadership Team (PLT), I will be working with members of the Southern community to develop a more robust strategic plan to take actions that advance SCSU to be the preeminent leader in Connecticut and nationally towards social justice, antiracism, and oppression of any kind, and inclusive excellence through institutional transformation.

Critical to its success is each understanding that a one-way approach will not help us advance this work. We must also allow space for open and honest conversations to the critique and approach to our work with a deep commitment to a spirit of collective liberation.

adrienne maree brown, author of *Emergent Strategies. Shaping Change, Changing Worlds* (2017) states that this collective liberation depends on being reflective of the following:

"We are socialized to see what is wrong, missing, off, to tear down the ideas of others and uplift our own. To a certain degree, our entire future may depend on learning to listen without assumptions or defenses." This revolutionary journey that we are about to embark upon relies on hope: a hope that adrienne maree brown argues is reliant on "aligning our behavior, our structure and our movements with our visions of justice and liberation, and give those of us co-creating the future more options for working with each other and embodying the thing we fight for — dignity, collective power, love generative conflict, and community" (p. 6).

We will not solve systemic racism and inequality overnight, and we have so much work ahead. But in a world where we often spend more time debating the nature of our problems than we do taking meaningful action, we must find ways to contribute however we can and to move forward as a community.

And last, clear and robust measures will be used to track diversity and inclusion efforts and outcomes, to avoid a tendency to revert to habitual and ingrained thinking and behavioral patterns limits the returns from an organization's investment.

**Diane Ariza**

*Vice President for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion*

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*"I believe this is the only nobility to which we should aspire – that is, to be the best fighters against each other's oppression, and in doing so, build links of solidarity and trust that will forge an invincible movement against all forms of injustice and inequality"* – Leslie Feinberg

## Three Year Plan | 2020-2023

Phase I: Listen, Learn and Engage *July 2020-December 2020*

Phase II: Engage and Strategize *January 2021-December 2021*

Phase III: Systematize, Measure, Assess *January 2022-December 2023*

For this academic year, the VPDEI in collaboration with the Southern community will focus on the priorities and recommendations outlined below.

**DECLARATION 1: Southern will work to increase the capacity to advance racial and social justice.**

### ACTION STEPS:

1. The VPDEI invites stakeholders to a one-on-one listening circle to take inventory and learn about challenges and strengths on how to advance the work.
2. The VPDEI, with support and collaboration from the Presidential Leadership Team (PLT), proposes to expand and support the division/department by:
  - i. allocating new resources (i.e., hiring of new positions)
  - ii. intentionally collaborating with existing programs (i.e., CARE, Barack Obama University School (New Haven/SCSU), Center for Autism)
  - iii. reallocating current resources from different divisions and offices

The additional resources will assist the VPDEI to create a more systematic, intentional, and coordinated effort to advance Southern to be the antiracist and social justice university it aspires to be. This effort does not preclude the VPDEI continuing to work with the PLT and Southern community to thread the diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts throughout campus.

3. The VPDEI will establish an Antiracist Student Advisory Group comprised of students from multicultural organizations, student government, and other student organizations to help inform, guide, and strategize how best to move forward and sustain antiracist and social justice work on campus.
4. The VPDEI will work with faculty, staff, and PLT to establish the Center for Justice and Social Change (SJSC) to serve as an interdisciplinary hub for coalition-building and engaged action directed at addressing/dismantling systemic and structural barriers to equity. This mission is advanced through the SJC's 4 pillars of educational programming and development opportunities, research, advocacy/activism, and partnerships with community and institutional stakeholders in Greater New Haven, the State of Connecticut, and beyond.
5. The VPDEI with assistance from the office of Diversity and Equity, the Ombuds, and Center for Justice and Social Change from Community Action, Research, and Education will develop workshops/training on antiracism and bias, using a restorative justice model, beyond the existing "Harassment and Discrimination" and "Managing Bias" online training.

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6. The VPDEI will oversee the Racial Intersectional Justice Group (RIJG) along with Academic and Student Affairs and identify best practices moving forward. This group will replace the President's Commission for Social Justice and oversee the diversity grants and recognition awards.
7. The VPDEI will collaborate with internal and external stakeholders to provide intentional antiracist leadership education to the senior leadership team, including deans and chairs.
8. The VPDEI will work with Integrated Communications and Marketing to develop a communication plan that best informs and threads DEI efforts to internal and external communities.
9. The VPDEI in collaboration and support with the PLT, RIJG, and other stakeholders will inventory policies and protocols already identified by stakeholders, and continue review process.
10. The VPDEI will create benchmarks for how the community will measure success.



**DECLARATION 2: Southern will develop an institutional plan to create a more inclusive and diverse curriculum.**

**ACTION STEPS:**

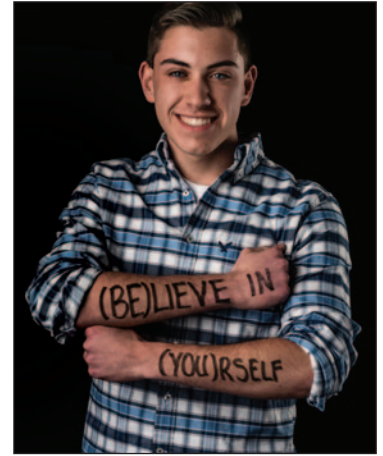
1. The VPDEI will begin conversations with the Provost, UCF, Faculty Senate, and other representatives in academic affairs and student affairs to develop a plan for how to advance and support a more inclusive and diverse curriculum and co-curriculum.
2. The VPDEI will work with current faculty, deans, and department chairs to develop more intentional educational training for inclusive teaching and advising strategies.
3. The VPDEI will create benchmarks for how the Southern community will measure success.

**DECLARATION 3: Support and advance the facilities and clerical staff as part of the Southern community.**

**ACTION STEPS:**

1. Based on the 2017 Campus Climate Survey findings, the VPDEI will work in support and collaboration with the PLT, division heads, and MRMC (SUOAF) to create an intentional strategy moving forward to address climate issues.
2. The VPDEI will meet HR, facilities, and clerical staff to identify priorities.
3. The VPDEI with collaboration and support from the PLT and other stakeholders will create benchmarks for how the Southern community will measure success.

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**DECLARATION 4: Southern will increase student, faculty, and staff of color recruitment and retention efforts and programs.**

**ACTION STEPS:**

1. The VPDEI with support and collaboration from the PLT and other designated offices will create benchmarks and metrics using an Equity Scorecard based on priorities.  
<https://cue.usc.edu/tools/the-equity-scorecard/>
2. The VPDEI in collaboration with Southern community will identify best retention practices, including the creation of affinity groups similar to what already exists with the Alumni Office.
3. The VPDEI will work closely with the MRRC (AAUP) and MRMC (SUOAF) to establish priorities.
4. The VPDEI will work with deans/department chairs and search committees to identify priorities for how best to recruit and retain faculty of color.
5. The VPDEI will work with Enrollment Management, deans, and chairs to identify and prioritize opportunities to increase enrollment of students of color (i.e., nursing, math).
6. The VPDEI will identify with Student Affairs, Enrollment Management, Academic Affairs, and the School of Graduate and Professional Studies priorities for how to retain the most marginalized student populations (i.e., non-traditional, first generation, DACA, transfer).

**DECLARATION 5: Thread Social Justice Antiracism/Oppression brand throughout the university.**

**ACTION STEPS:**

1. The VPDEI will revisit with the PLT the short- and long-term goals identified in President Joe's *A Vision for Southern 2017* document identifying Southern to be classified as a Hispanic- and Minority-Serving Institution.
2. The VPDEI will work with PLT and revisit the definition for social justice and how it is threaded throughout the university in the curriculum, webpages, and mission statement.
3. The VPDEI will work with Integrated Communications and Marketing to develop a communication plan that best informs and threads DEI efforts throughout internal and external communities.