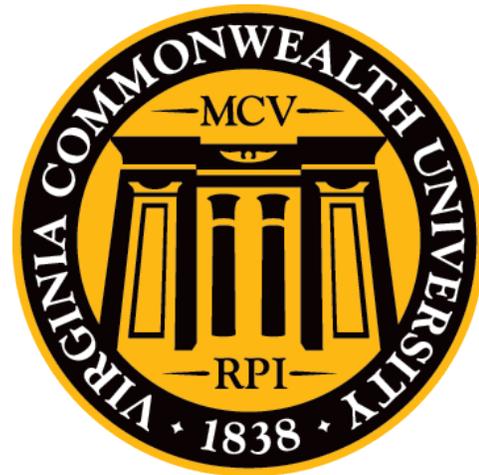


# The MPA Program's Strategic Plan for Diversity & Inclusion



*Approved by the MPA Faculty, Spring 2015*

With appreciation to Caitlin Emry, Victor Horton, Tomeika Jones, &  
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# Master of Public Administration Program Mission

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## Introduction

*This plan is based on the proposition that if Virginia Commonwealth University's Master of Public Administration program wants to prepare innovative leaders to be successful in a diverse workforce, then it must take actions to ensure that the program's community more closely reflects the diversity found in the nation, and must improve integration of diversity into its students, curriculum, and climate. Through a democratic process that engaged 9 faculty members, and 43 current students, we have developed a Diversity Strategic and Action Plan that contains the following components:*

- *Objectives (ambition concerning diversity within the program)*
- *Recommendations (procedures to achieve the objectives)*
- *Performance measures (an avenue to moderate the program's progress toward achieving the objectives)*

*In addition to the aforementioned components, we also provided assessments and recommendations regarding the following aspects of the MPA program:*

- *Student Community, Retention, and Recruitment*
- *Faculty Community, Retention, and Recruitment*
- *Teaching and Curriculum*
- *Research Opportunity*
- *Program; and*
- *Climate*

*It is important to note that all the strategies elected for inclusion in the plan went through a meticulous selection process and merit the attention of Virginia Commonwealth University's Master of Public Administration program.*

# Student Recommendations

Based on the student survey results, the MPA program has several needed areas of diversity improvement. From the Spring 2014 MPA student survey respondents feedback, student diversity needs improvement in four key areas. Four recommendations can be made to enhance these areas of diversity within the MPA program. The recommendations are as follows:

## **I. Offer need-based financial support to students of diverse backgrounds and those from underrepresented populations**

- Each year, monitor and access GTA and SCHEV grant allocations in terms of diversity
- Each year monitor and access endowed scholarship allocations in terms of diversity

## **II. Develop and Implement better disability support services for students.**

- Include a presentation from the VCU Office of Disability Support Services in the new student orientation (require all faculty to attend)
- Consult the VCU Office of Disability Support Services for recommendations on how to make course instruction and MPA social events more accessible for disabled students

## **III. Ensure that administrative practices/campus administrators are promoting the value of diversity in the MPA program.**

- Develop a diversity vision, mission, and goal statement
- Recruit diverse students from undergraduate institutions that have a clear diversity emphasis within their mission
- Examine admissions criteria for diversity bias and replace biasing elements with equitable ones
- Have Dean-initiated diversity events and lectures that are promoted throughout the Wilder School
- Have PASA-initiated diversity events and lectures that are promoted throughout the Wilder School

## **IV. Promote more social events which help to foster a sense of community of the student body.**

- Plan forums and activities based on student interests to promote more student interaction
- Ensure that students have the opportunity to network with diverse alumni
- Provide incentives for students and faculty who attend these events
- Promote cultural dinners and forums that help students break cultural barriers and stereotypes

## One & Three Year Student Goals

One and three year goals are needed in order to help improve diversity within the MPA program. These goals will help the program to enhance its diversity of the student body as well as achieve NASPAA's re-accreditation standards for the upcoming 2016-2017 academic school year. The goals are as follows:

### Year 1 Goals 2016-17

- Develop an updated diversity vision, mission, and goal statement, and post it on the school's webpage
- Ensure that scholarship funds, GTA, and SCHEV grant allocations take into account underrepresented populations
- Assess admissions practices for unbiased and fair program admission for all students
- Recruit more students of diverse backgrounds to ensure diversity in the classroom
- Examine program activities and course instruction, so that no student experiences being singled out in the program due to his or her background or disability
- Foster a climate that encourages all students to feel comfortable sharing their perspectives and experiences in class
- Designate a program campus administrator to talk more about the value of diversity via classroom discussions, student social events, and during new student orientation

### Year 3 Goals 2018-19

- Ensure that administrative practices are in line with the program's diversity vision, mission, and goal statement
- Continue to award financial assistance to students from diverse backgrounds
- Assess program activities and course instruction to determine whether or not they are accommodating to the disabled student population
- Have at least one Dean-initiated cultural event or lecture each academic year to foster a sense of diversity and inclusion
- Continue to encourage students to share their perspectives in classroom discussions, so that the program reflects a climate of respectful differences, shared experiences, and varied perspectives
- Promote more student interaction and a climate of community by creating a functional, centralized MPA graduate study location
- Examine the effectiveness of PASA social events to promote more student interaction

# Faculty Recommendations

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## I. Foster a courteous and community-focused workplace for all faculty that is diversity centered

- Make the invisible, visible, by encouraging faculty to disclose invisible diversity markers
- Create an award to recognize faculty leadership on diversity issues
- Offer incentives to attend diversity trainings

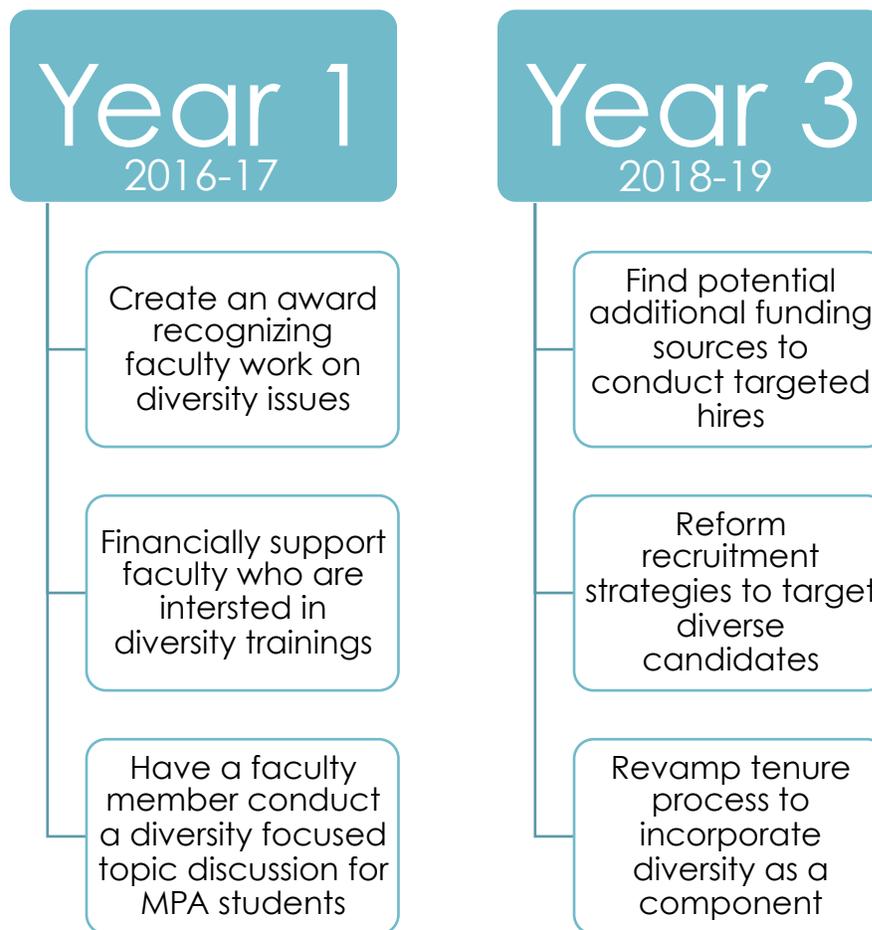
## II. Reform internal recruitment norms, practices, and approaches by placing an increased emphasis on social justice and diversity in the hiring process.

- Request additional funding from VCU to hire diverse faculty (targeted opportunity hires)
- Identify and initiate alternative recruitment strategies to target diverse candidates, including socio-economic status (e.g., new venues for advertising job openings)
- Be more tactful encouraging applicants to identify invisible diversity cues when recruiting
- Place diverse faculty on hiring committees

## III. Increase support for advancement of diverse faculty

- Offer opportunities for professional development and clear paths to advancement or promotion
- Create value in diversity research by making it a major component in tenure

## One & Three Year Faculty Goals



## Curriculum & Teaching Recommendations

Based on the findings from the survey conducted in the Spring of 2014, the following recommendations should be taken into consideration for the betterment of Virginia Commonwealth University's MPA program regarding diversity. Considering our research of literature and analysis of findings we have noted key points in which we believe will expand the MPA program's capacity for diversity. The recommendations are a preventative measure aimed at correcting or preventing the exclusion of diversity within the curriculum. Diversity is an important aspect of a well-rounded educational experience and through these recommendations we hope the MPA program will develop an importance for diversifying the curriculum.

## I. Integrate diversity related topics into the course syllabi and class discussions and topics

- Continue to explore and adopt ways for faculty and staff to learn “best practices” for incorporating diversity into the classroom
- Provide incentives for faculty and staff to incorporate diversity into their curriculum plan
- Provide institutional support for faculty and staff to seek outside training to learn how other organizations are incorporating diversity
- Find existing models of curriculum diversity and hold workshops for faculty and staff to discuss and analyze how they could best develop a similar model
- Incorporate ethical and culturally sensitive research into appropriate courses via lecture, textbook, handouts, and/or outside guest lecturers

## II. Broaden the definition of diversity within the classroom

- Continually encourage and incentivize research relating to diversity
- Expand characteristics of diversity discussed in the classroom
- Incorporate non-hegemonic standards of thought and teaching regarding diversity into the classroom discussion
- Require that a diversity statement be included in the mission the 8 PADM core courses
- Create training manuals and guides for professors that contain research about what diversity is, how to implement it into the classroom, and “best practices” for discussing it
- Offer graduate students more opportunities to assist professors in research about developing and integrating diversity into curriculum

## III. Continue to assess syllabi’s diversity content

- Revise current faculty and student diversity survey to better address diversity
- Develop a survey for recent alumni to determine if their experience in the MPA program prepared them to work effectively in diverse contexts
- Develop a committee of faculty, staff, and student representatives focused on diversity within the curriculum
- Hold forums within diversity curriculum committee that addresses how faculty can broaden their diversity statements and revise their mission based on new research
- Have the curriculum diversity committee work closely with PASA to gain a better perspective about how students view diversity within the program

## IV. Create new learning opportunities that focus exclusively on diversity related topics within public affairs

- Faculty should use the curriculum committee to discuss how to implement more projects that focus on diversity related topics
- Focus curriculum requirements on involving students to advocate diversity within the classroom
- Create lecture series that focus on inclusion and diversity for MPA faculty and students
- Annually offer one elective that focuses solely on diversity within Public Administration<sup>7</sup>

## One & Three Year Curriculum Goals

In order to successfully implement the suggested recommendations, the following goals need to be achieved within the listed time frames:

### Year 1 Goals 2016-17

- Require all core courses to have a diversity statement in their course syllabi
- Revise current student and faculty surveys to ensure the best data is collected
- Send out a diversity survey to faculty and students every 2 years
- Develop an alumni survey to appraise the program's ability to teach about diversity
- Develop a committee focused on curriculum diversity
- Get PASA involved in curriculum diversity related topics
- Develop a lecture series focused on diversity and inclusion

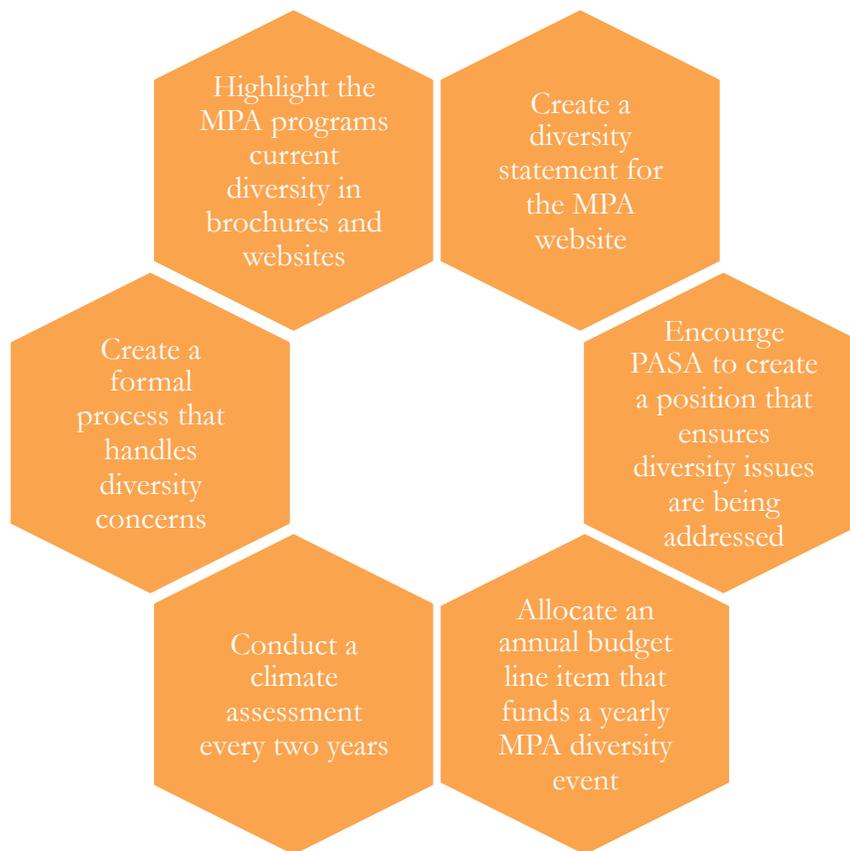
### Year 3 Goals 2018-19

- Continually analyze findings from faculty, students, and alumni survey
- Have the curriculum diversity committee meet twice a semester to discuss how to better integrate and broaden diversity within the classroom
- Have a statement in the curriculum stressing the importance of students to collaborate with students from diversity backgrounds within group projects
- Develop at least one graduate research position for a graduate student to collaborate with a faculty member to research new diversity
- Fund a training once a semester for faculty members to participate in a diversity focused training
- Enhance the lecture series focused on diversity and inclusion
- Annually offer one diversity related/focused elective

# Climate Recommendations

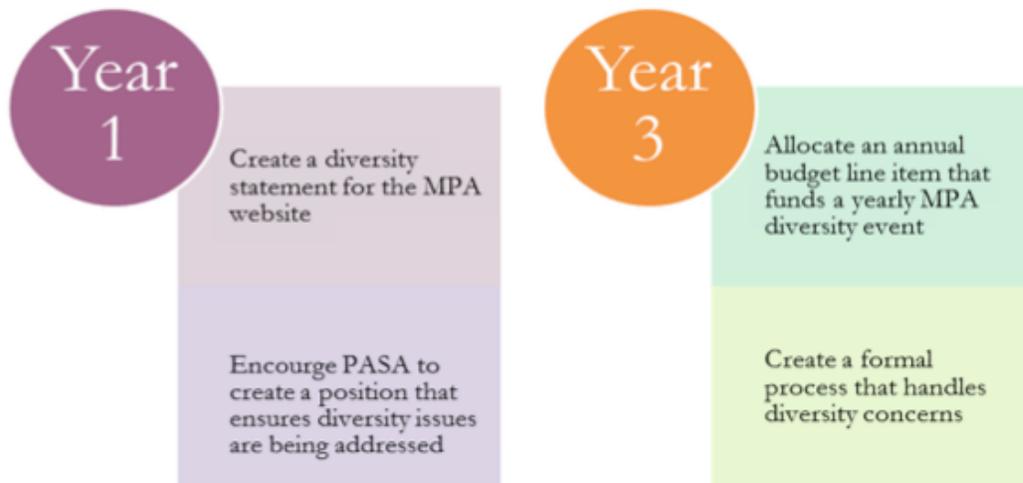
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The following climate recommendations are suggested in order create an improved environment for VCU's MPA program growth, related to diversity and inclusion:



## One & Three Year Climate Goals

Many of the climate recommendations are additional elements that could be implemented within year one.



## Performance Measures

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Performance measures for Virginia Commonwealth University's MPA program are critical to ensuring that goals are being met.

### Survey

For the MPA program, it is suggested that the survey created by the PADM 689 Diversity Capstone Team be administered every other year to assess demographic numbers and perceptions in comparison to prior years. This is imperative to see improvements in the areas of recruitment of diverse groups and perceptions of the MPA climate and environment. Additionally, the survey is one valid way to display the progression of the MPA program in respect to improvements of diversity and inclusion. Below are some additional items that need to be examined in order for the MPA program to show improvements in performance as they take on the charge to improve diversity and inclusion within the Master of Public Administration program.

## Recruitment & Retention

### *Student Recruitment & Retention*

Examine the number of MPA students who are diverse by gender, race, citizenship status, 1st generation college student, religious preference, veteran status, and other potentially underrepresented groups.

Percentage of current students who report they would encourage a perspective student to apply. Then report findings by various population demographics.

Examine student retention and graduations rates given their class after 1, 2, .... 6 years.

## Faculty Recruitment & Retention



Examine percentage of candidates interviewed for faculty/staff positions who are diverse (by gender, racial minority status and/or citizenship status).

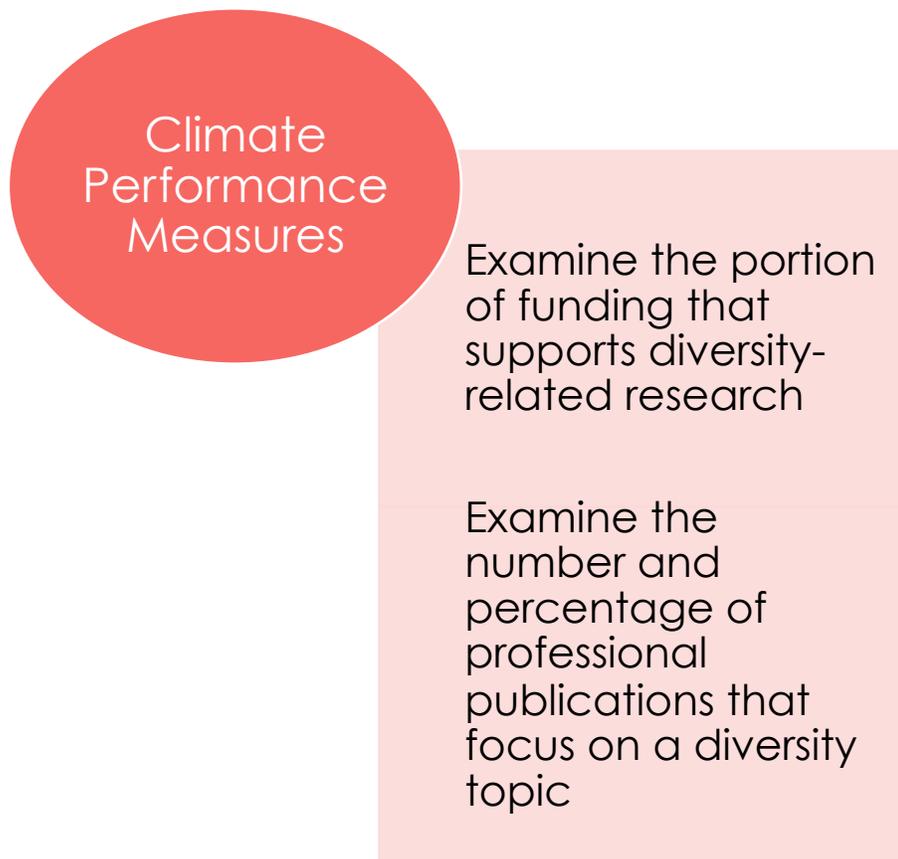


Capture the percentage of MPA tenure or tenure-track faculty and adjunct faculty who are diverse by gender, sexual orientation, disability, veterans status, first generation immigrant, etc.



Assess the percentage of VCU faculty staff reporting that they are satisfied with their jobs.

## Climate Performance Measures



## Conclusion

Diversity is an important aspect of a well-rounded educational experience. In order to demonstrate its outstanding commitment to diversity while maintaining an innovative academic learning environment, the Virginia Commonwealth University Master of Public Administration program ought to adhere to the proposed Diversity Strategic and Action Plan. The integration of the strategies and actions outlined in this plan will assist in improving the environment of diversity and inclusion within the program, while preparing the next generation of leaders for success in a diverse workforce. An adherence to the Strategic Plan, with its aforementioned objectives, recommendations and program measures, will allow the MPA program to ensure success in the years to come.