

Inclusive Excellence Action Plan

DRAFT for open comment

April 2019

Recommendation 1: Require inclusive excellence training, including a strong antiracist training component, for faculty, staff and TAs

Why is this important (what is the rationale)?

Background. *Requiring antiracism training for all Gillings faculty and staff* was the top ranked recommendation of all 14 received at the Inclusive Excellence Action Session in January 2019 and is consistent with

recommendations from Gillings School constituencies over more than 5 years. Requiring inclusive excellence training was a strong recommendation from our Diversity and Inclusion Working Group (2015) and a top recommendation from the NC Commission on Inclusion 2018 report. This recommendation addresses needs revealed in end-of-course surveys and focus groups and meetings with faculty, staff and students. It is also a key mechanism for upholding CEPH accreditation requirements that we “provide a learning environment that prepares students with broad competencies regarding diversity and cultural competence, recognizing that graduates may be employed anywhere in the world and will work with diverse populations” (CEPH 2016, p. 44).

Overarching goals

- *Everyone in a position of power – e.g., those who make decisions about resource allocation (including resources for RA and TA positions), course structure and content – shares a common understanding of what an inclusive environment looks like (and does not look like) and acts on that understanding.*
 - *All instructors are able to facilitate inclusive, respectful discussions about sensitive topics such as racism and other forms of oppression.*
 - *All members of the Gillings community uphold values of inclusion and respect in interactions with each other.*
-

In discussion with various groups, and because we recognize that there are many forms of oppression we need to address, we expanded the recommendation in two ways. First, in addition to antiracism (at the core of the program), we recommend that the Gillings School also offer other types of inclusive excellence offerings as part of an education program that features a robust menu of offerings, including those that address biases based on gender, culture, religion, sexual preference, ethnicity and more. Second, we also recommend that, in addition to expecting all faculty and staff at Gillings to participate in training, we also include the expectation in all TA contracts, and then provide training before a semester commences, given that TAs have significant instructional contact with other students.

The working group identified two foundational concerns underpinning its recommendations:

1. Many of **today’s most urgent public health challenges are results of systemic and institutional racism and other forms of oppression.** To train a generation of public health leaders to grapple with these challenges, faculty must be equipped to teach students about origins and effects of systemic racism and other forms of oppression and guide productive, respectful discussions about them. Students should graduate with the ability to work and lead as effective, ethical public health practitioners and researchers in diverse settings, and they cannot do so without such a foundation. The ASPPH has identified such skills

as essential for today's public health workers. Being able to facilitate such discussions is also central to a competent and ethical approach to teaching and is consistent with the School's mission to *eliminate health inequities across North Carolina and around the world*.

2. Over the past few years, across multiple venues, **students, staff, and faculty have highlighted concerns about climate at Gillings**, including incidents involving structural, institutional, and interpersonal racism as well as other forms of oppression. Faculty and staff are immersed in, and may have difficulty recognizing how they reproduce and uphold, a culture that perpetuates these forms of exclusion. Raising awareness of these dynamics among all faculty and staff, and learning strategies to address and dismantle them, are critical if we are going to fulfill the ethic we articulate in our School's [diversity statement](#) and, indeed, if we are going to fulfill our [mission and values](#).

Creating a culture of inclusive excellence at Gillings requires that students, faculty and staff be able to learn from each other, listening with humility and speaking without fear. This growth requires an environment of trust and evidence that inclusiveness is prioritized by all members of the Gillings community, at all levels. Our goals are that (a) everyone in a position of power – e.g., those who make decisions about resource allocation (including resources for RA and TA positions), course structure and content – shares a common understanding of what an inclusive environment looks like (and does not look like); (b) that all instructors be able to facilitate inclusive, respectful discussions about sensitive topics such as racism and other forms of oppression; and that (c) all members of the Gillings community have the knowledge, tools and approaches they need to uphold values of inclusion and respect in their interactions with each other. With this shared understanding, we can hold each other's words and actions accountable to promote inclusive excellence.

What action steps do we need to take to fulfill this recommendation?

1. **Build a stepwise inclusive excellence and antiracism education program** that allows participants to start at the level most appropriate based on previous exposure and training they have had. Given the history of slavery and Jim Crow in the U.S. and its pernicious continuing impacts in our law and institutions, antiracist education should be a strong component of the program, but professional development addressing other types of oppression would be eligible for inclusion in the program as well. The system should include a menu of possible training opportunities in different types of venues (small group, large group, in-person, online) and with different lengths, approaches and foci. All faculty and staff members should participate in at least one training within three years, and at least one of those trainings should address racism. Thereafter, all faculty and staff members should participate in at least one training every two years. For those in leadership roles (i.e., Dean's Council members, program leads, admissions directors, and those who supervise the work of others), the expectation should be a significant level of engagement in inclusive excellence education over a two-year period (to be specified by an implementation team), in recognition that advanced skills and self-awareness in these domains are *critical competencies* for those who allocate resources and assess the competency of others. We recommend this commitment to continuing education in antiracism and inclusive excellence in recognition of the depth, complexity and evolving nature of the content and skills required.
2. **Identify trainings** available within the University and UNC System and **assess the education level** (i.e., introductory, intermediate or advanced) they would help fulfill.
3. **Explore feasibility of developing additional Gillings-designed trainings**, including conducting a landscape scan, estimating costs of development, conducting a cost-benefit analysis, and assessing whether faculty and staff experts within Gillings and UNC have bandwidth to create such trainings. As needed, explore the possibility of working with local antiracist partner organizations (the [Racial Equity Institute](#) or [We Are](#), for example), to develop content, including specific trainings on (a) how to apply anti-oppression and antiracist principles in one's everyday work, (b) facilitating constructive dialogue around oppression, including racism, xenophobia, homophobia and antisemitism, for example, and strategies for dismantling laws, systems and norms that hold them in place.

4. **Indicate that all new employees will be expected to participate** in the Inclusive Excellence Program within 12 months of joining the School; include training expectations in all contracts and offer letters going forward.
5. Work with HR and unit heads to determine how to **phase in this new education system with current employees**. Going forward, the goal should be that every faculty and staff member completes at least one approved antiracist training/activity in a two-year period. Approved activities could include workshops, retreats, lectures, reading groups, courses or other types of engagement, as approved by the Inclusive Excellence Council. Activities should include time/space for reflection. As noted above, School leaders (i.e., Dean's Council members), program leads, admissions directors, and those who supervise the work of others would be expected to pursue and attain a higher level of education than other faculty and staff. These leaders are stewards of critical resources at the Gillings School and have the capacity to shape the lives of students, staff and faculty through their decisions large and small. A criterion of their leadership should be commitment to continuous (self) inquiry in these domains as a way of fostering highest standards of inclusion, equity and fairness.
6. Work with HR, Strategic Analysis and Business Intelligence, and other key stakeholders to **design a system to track employee trainings**, aligning with UNC HR systems to the full extent possible.
7. **Develop and implement an appropriate evaluation plan** (see below), including an initial benchmark survey prior to program roll-out.
8. **Link training expectations to promotion and tenure (for TT faculty) and/or annual review** for all other employees. A determined level of education should also be achieved by all students who will serve as TAs, prior to starting the position.

What action steps should we take first and why?

We recommend a phased approach to implementing training that allows for the incorporation of Plan-Do-Study-Act cycles and other continuous quality improvement processes. This approach would also allow for smaller training sessions, which are more effective for establishing trust, stimulating deep conversations, and encouraging true reflection -- all needed to allow participants to process and begin to internalize antiracist and anti-oppression principles. Consider offering training both within and across departments and units.

After getting approvals for the initiative, developing standard text for staff and faculty contracts, and developing a communication to current staff and faculty, we recommend a phased approach; i.e., we should start immediately with requiring new employees, as an expectation of employment, and all faculty and staff who wish to serve on search committees, to participate in programming or to submit evidence that they have done so in the past 2 years. We then recommend prioritizing (1) School leaders (i.e., members of Dean's Council) and program and admissions directors; (2) faculty, staff, and students who have roles that necessitate significant time engaging with students from a position of authority (e.g., instructors, student services managers, TAs) (3) supervisors (of other faculty, staff and students), and then (5) all other staff and faculty. We recommend that the MPH Core TA program expect and offer inclusive excellence training (with at least one pillar of that training focusing on antiracism) initially and then phase in the training expectation for all Gillings School TAs. We also recommend incentives to chairs and unit heads for holding substantive retreats with faculty and staff in their units.

Who should lead this effort? Who else should be involved? Who should be consulted and why?

- **Lead:** Inclusive Excellence Council, Human Resources, Academic Affairs
- **Involved:** Faculty, staff, and students interested in this topic. Also consult with and include other faculty, staff and students to ensure we are designing for the needs of many.
- **Consultants / outside experts:** Provide their experience working with different institutions and evidence-based practices, offer an unbiased perspective, protect the time of faculty at Gillings

Potential challenges

Potential challenges include: (1) attaining approval from University system regarding inclusive excellence training expectations; (2) determining and approving agreed-on standards for education system; (3)

developing and maintaining reminder and tracking systems; (4) ensuring that employees are granted time needed to participate in the programming; (5) overcoming potential opposition from those who do not understand or agree with these new expectations; (6) and specifying what happens when/if faculty, staff or TAs do not participate. To overcome these challenges, we suggest developing multiple different formats for antiracism and inclusive excellence training (e.g., online, in-person, etc.) and using a stepwise education model that allows users to work up to the desired competency level over time. We also suggest implementing meaningful public recognition to reward members of the Gillings School who are leading for equity, and then recognize such work through merit raises as well as tenure and promotion considerations. Beginning in Year 2 of the program, we should publish dashboards on the Inclusive Excellence webpage illustrating our progress in reaching all faculty, staff and TAs. At the end of three years, all Gillings School leaders, program leads and supervisors should have completed an intermediate level of training [still to be defined], and 70% of all Gillings School faculty, staff and TAs should have completed a minimum level of training [to be defined], with 90% participation at minimum level by Year 5.

Tracking and evaluation

Attendance at trainings should be tracked, with follow up to faculty, staff, and TAs who have not completed training in a timely manner. Timely completion of trainings and achievement of required competency levels should be incorporated into relevant annual reviews and goals as well as into tenure and reappointment reviews. Participants should complete retrospective pre/post training evaluations on how prepared they feel to discuss equity and inclusion in the classroom, in an advising role, as supervisors, and as employees. The effect of this intervention should also be measured in terms of the overall School climate -- effectively measuring change over time requires that a baseline survey be conducted prior to roll out of education offerings. We should report outcomes publicly on the Gillings School's Inclusive Excellence webpage with an easy-to-understand graphic that shows percentage towards completion.

We recommend a structured quality improvement process with rapid Plan-Do-Study-Action cycles for each pilot stage and phase of implementation; findings should be shared with the Gillings community at least once annually. Evaluation plans must be compatible and consistent with CEPH guidelines.

Resource for possible metrics: <https://www.aamc.org/members/gdi/490806/nih-scientific-workforce-diversity-interactive-toolkit.html>

Recommendation 2: Require social justice and racial equity training at orientation, as part of the curriculum and in the classroom.

Why is this important (what is the rationale)?

In 2001, APHA Policy 2017 explicitly named "racism as a fundamental cause of ethnic disparities in health," paving the way for more nuanced understanding of the ways structural and institutional racism underlie persistent health inequities. Public health professionals must be able to recognize these determinants and be able to apply principles of social justice and racial equity in developing and implementing interventions that uphold this policy and to help further the Gillings mission of eliminating health inequities. Building sufficient social justice and racial equity training into Gillings School curricula is also responsive to the requirement of our accreditor, the Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH) that public health

Overarching goals

- *All students graduate with the ability to apply principles of social justice and racial equity in their public health work, including in developing and implementing interventions aimed at addressing health inequities.*
 - *Racism, social justice and health inequity are more seamlessly integrated throughout and across curricula.*
 - *Discussions are led by faculty and TAs capable of effectively facilitating dialogue on challenging topics of racism and oppression.*
-

curricula incorporate “diversity and cultural competency considerations into the curriculum,” as well as ensure the “development and/or implementation of policies that support a climate of equity and inclusion, free of harassment and discrimination.” Though the Gillings School of Global Public Health has long sought to adhere to these principles, as reflected in past action plans and efforts, in a school-wide meeting held on January 8 to discuss the confederate statue and campus climate, some participants indicated that the current curriculum fell short of achieving these goals. At other meetings (Chat with the Deans, end-of-course evaluations, and other contexts), students have voiced concerns that the curriculum at all levels would benefit from a greater focus on dismantling racism so that they are better-equipped to respond to the public health challenges facing the nation. There also should be significantly more content across departments and concentrations about how health inequities occur and how they may be eliminated.

What action steps do we need to take to fulfill this recommendation?

We recommend a multi-faceted approach to meet these challenges, an approach that can foster and sustain a culture of social justice and racial equity, such that these values are woven into the fabric of the Gillings School and define who we are. We propose the following action steps:

1. **COMPASS module:** Refine and strengthen the COMPASS module on social justice and equity to make it appropriate for all students (e.g., BSPH, masters, and doctoral) and require it for all incoming students prior to orientation. Currently enrolled students should also have access to the module.
2. **Incorporate racial equity training into orientation** to build on the COMPASS module. Allow adequate time for presentation of material, dialogue and reflection. Consider scheduling it prior to the Diversity Welcome so that incoming students can use the Diversity Welcome as a space to debrief, if needed and desired.
3. **Implement “brave conversations”** twice a semester to allow students, staff, and faculty to build skills around having respectful, thoughtful conversations about public health issues stemming from racism and other forms of oppression. Facilitators should rotate from different departments each time, allowing different public health disciplines to bring their own perspectives to the conversation. Explore feasibility of requiring students to attend at least one conversation annually and write reflection pieces on them.
NOTE: These conversations should only be led by skilled facilitators (faculty, staff, students and/or community partners) who have received adequate training to manage these events (see Recommendation 1).
4. **Develop a stand-alone course on public health history** with an equity lens. Consider collaborating with History department expert(s) on course development and teaching, if needed.
5. **Incorporate a social justice and racial equity lens into core courses and encourage adoption of such a perspective throughout curriculum.** Charge a workgroup to develop guidance for applying a social justice and racial equity lens in core course curricula. This guidance should then inform a School-wide course syllabus audit to determine which (and to what extent) courses currently incorporate a racial equity lens. External consultants (at the Center for Faculty Excellence, for example) may be needed to help meet the needs of faculty through this change period.

What actions steps should we take first and why?

Action steps above are listed in order of implementation. One possibility for implementation of action step 5 would be to start with the MPH core curriculum, followed by other courses that are required for large numbers of students (e.g., foundational or core courses within departments). An alternative approach would be to start with a few pilot courses, then ask those faculty members to serve as mentors/consultants to others who begin working to redesign their courses, such that there is an active culture of peer learning. This approach would be more gradual and allow for use of Plan-Do-Study-Act cycles or other iterative processes.

Who should lead this effort? Who else should be involved? Who should be consulted and why?

- Lead: Inclusive Excellence Council curriculum workgroup, Academic Affairs
- Involved: Departments; interested faculty, staff and students; potentially, external consultants and GRAs

What constraints or challenges do you foresee? What are your thoughts about overcoming these constraints or challenges?

- Faculty need training in facilitating difficult discussions, including those around racism, to sustain a class environment conducive to learning and growth for all students. Faculty participation in anti-racism training (recommendation 1), plus participation in “brave conversations” (action step 3), will help overcome these barriers. As we learned from globalizing our curriculum, incorporating a racial equity lens across core courses is an ambitious goal and would need to be done in phases to ensure that we have sufficient resources to do this in a high-quality way. Faculty will need some support to identify and incorporate appropriate material and to help coordinate content across courses to avoid redundancies and other potential problems. Barriers to incorporating a racial equity lens into courses can be overcome through guidance from instructional experts at Gillings and UNC and, possibly, GRAs, to provide supplemental support. New evaluation and tracking mechanisms will need to be designed and implemented.
- Some faculty, staff and students may value an inclusive environment but do not perceive “an equity lens” necessary for improving curriculum (e.g., a class focused on quantitative methods may not seem to be related to equity; equity training may be perceived as an issue unique to the US context). We will need to make the case for the ways that racism and privilege affect every discipline and country.

Tracking and evaluation

Periodic surveys of school climate and course evaluations (mid-term and end-of-course) can help determine whether new interventions are having the desired effect (see recommendation 1). The syllabus audit will also generate useful data for tracking accountability. The evaluation plan and progress metrics (including climate surveys) should be made available online, accessible to Gillings and the public.

Recommendation 3: Significantly improve our approaches to communicating about our inclusion, equity and anti-racism efforts¹

Why is this important (what is the rationale)?

Since at least 2010, we have invested significant effort and resources into fulfilling a strategic goal to make the Gillings School more diverse and inclusive. Yet, these efforts will be invisible and will not achieve meaningful impact if we do not communicate them effectively. Faculty, staff, students, prospective students, alumni and friends should see that we are moving forward on our strategic diversity and inclusion goals; that we are holding frequent events and lectures focused on inclusion and anti-racism; and that we are holding ourselves accountable for results. Without such a communications effort, our stakeholders will conclude that we are satisfied with the status quo. In short, communicating our inclusive excellence efforts well is a critical part of any plan to improve the climate at Gillings. We also should remember that communicating these goals and activities at previous times will not reach those who join Gillings later, including many students. Thus, communications must be concerted and ongoing.

Overarching goals

- *Effectively communicate plans, actions, statements, events and successes re. inclusive excellence to all our constituents.*
 - *Create a visual environment that communicates our commitment to inclusion.*
-

In this context, we recommend an inclusive excellence communication plan that includes the following:

1. Elevate the visibility of inclusion statements, stories and other efforts – on our website, in print materials, on social media, and via public gatherings.
2. Create an information page for fast-breaking issues related to inclusion, equity, diversity, racism/anti-racism, and social justice (for example, events and issues surrounding the confederate statue on campus).
3. Brand lectures and events that represent inclusive excellence so students, faculty, staff and others can find them easily.
4. Assess and refresh the messages we convey visually across the Gillings School.

5. Create a symbol of inclusivity. (Note, this pillar began as a stand-alone recommendation, but planners concluded that it could be grouped with other communications-related efforts).
6. Hold an open forum twice annually.

What action steps do we need to take to fulfill this recommendation?

1. **To elevate the visibility of our inclusion statements, stories and other efforts**, we recommend: a comprehensive redesign of the [Gillings School's inclusive excellence webpages](#). The content in these pages is rich and deep, but users need to search to find critical content (e.g., our diversity and inclusion plan *and* where we are in that planning process). We recommend reshaping the landing page, as follows:
 - Once approved, **feature our inclusive excellence plan on the inclusive excellence landing page**. Indicate graphically, where we are with our recommendations (see [Dartmouth's Inclusive Excellence webpage](#) as an example). Determine what data we can post publicly.
 - In addition to the School's overall calendar of events, **tag equity and inclusion events and post them to the Inclusive Excellence page**. Maintain an archive or blog roll of past inclusive excellence/anti-racism/social justice events so that information seekers can see, at a glance, the depth and breadth of our programming over time. Consider featuring major University events on the page as well. Continue to use social media to amplify messages.
 - **Add a comment box** to the inclusive excellence landing page so that people can anonymously raise issues and flag concerns about our environment. Monitor, respond to, and report regularly on submissions in a timely way.
 - Assign the RA for Inclusive Excellence to **monitor the inclusive excellence webpages** at least monthly as part of her/his role; submit updates and changes to the Communications staff.
 - **Explore feasibility and sustainability of adding a blog feature** to the inclusive excellence pages to feature ideas from the assistant dean for inclusive excellence and/or students, staff and faculty from across the Gillings School. If implemented, establish a review process for considering and approving submissions. Use social media to amplify messages.
2. **To ensure that we communicate quickly and effectively during times of relevant fast-breaking events and issues**, we recommend creation of a "breaking issues" corner of the Inclusive Excellence webpage so information seekers can access information about Gillings School events, statements from Gillings leaders (including student leaders), and more. During "acute" stages of an issue or event, post a banner to the School's homepage directing information seekers to the portal. Include a direct link to the site in the homepage "sandwich." Continue using social media to amplify messages about breaking news/issues and feature new posts in the Gillings School's weekly newsletter. As appropriate, send messages to all constituents via email and consider whether to include in our outward-facing newsletter, *Front Lines*.
3. **Brand events that represent inclusive excellence so stakeholders can find them easily**. Consider developing an overarching branding approach, using an easily recognized graphic identifier for relevant events, lectures and workshops. Use the graphic identifier for courses and syllabi that have a strong focus on equity or antiracism. **Further elevate the visibility of lectures and visits by prominent people of color and those working in health equity social justice** by sponsoring an inclusive excellence lecture series. We should sponsor at least two lectures a year; brand and assertively market the lectures to make them visible; make them eligible for credit within the Inclusive Excellence Education Plan; webcast them, if feasible; and archive them prominently. Departments should rotate responsibility for bringing such speakers. Health Policy and Management initiated this effort this spring 2019 (Cara James, PhD, director of the Office of Minority Health, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services presented "Achieving Health Equity through Increased Understanding, Sustainable Solutions and Collective Action, on March 28).
4. **Assess and refresh the messages we convey visually across the Gillings School**. What are we saying with the photographs that line our halls, are displayed on LCD screens and more? We may intend to celebrate our faculty, staff and students, promote equity and inclusion, and illustrate efforts to make an impact on the health of the public. Yet such efforts can easily communicate other, negative messages as well. Given this potentiality, we should develop a guide to help us regularly assess our visual context with

an inclusive and anti-racist/anti-oppression lens. At least one question in the [annual] inclusive excellence survey should address our visual installations across the School. We also recommend empaneling an “inclusive excellence art team.” This team, convened once every couple of year for a couple of hours, could help guide decision-making re. refreshing the photographs, art and displays we have across the Gillings School (no more than 10% in any given year). Photographs used on the web should also be assessed according to our guide. We should aim to retire all photographs of students that are 3+ years old.

5. **Create a symbol of inclusivity.** Symbols can be understood as powerful visible attributes of a culture; they telegraph, and reinforce, our culture’s beliefs, values and rules. They can have “supercharged” meanings, as is evident with our community’s reactions to the presence, and then removal of, the confederate statue from UNC’s campus in AY 2018-19. With regard to the impact of symbols designed to indicate inclusiveness, a recent study suggests that students exposed, even briefly, to Safe Zone icons on office doors and syllabi perceive a more positive campus climate for sexual minority students.³ Gillings students, faculty and staff have affirmed, in various venues, the value of such indicators of inclusion, most recently at the Inclusive Excellence Action Session on January 8. In this context, we recommend design and adoption of a symbol for inclusive excellence as part of a larger communications plan (a) to help **visually demonstrate our efforts to create a more inclusive culture at the Gillings School** and (b) to serve as a **counterpoint to the many symbols across campus that reinforce hegemonic norms**. To create the icon, we recommend having SPH Communications sponsor a schoolwide competition, open to Gillings School students, staff and faculty, to create an icon that symbolizes inclusion. Styled as a hackathon, we could invite teams of people to a workshop led (for example) by an artist-in-residence at UNC to draft inclusion symbols. We could use the event to illuminate what we are trying to achieve through creation and adoption of the icon (what is inclusion and how can we represent it in a symbol?). At a second event, artists could reveal and explain their designs to event participants, and participants could vote on their favorite. Winner(s) would be announced and, if acceptable, have their design adopted by the Gillings School for a visual installation in a prominent place (the atrium, for example).
6. **Hold an open forum twice a year** for students, staff and faculty to offer inclusive excellence updates, share survey results, and to hear from our constituencies about inclusive excellence topics.

What actions steps should we take first and why?

Focus first on (a) refurbishing the webpages, (b) adding a comment box and (c) elevating the visibility of dean and senior leaderships’ statements. Next, focus on branding events and resources. Somewhat later, develop criteria for assessing inclusiveness in our visual environment (across buildings, print materials and on web) and then implementing changes based on these criteria (as noted above). Open forums should begin in AY 2019-20. Development of a symbol could happen later as well.

Who should lead these efforts? Who should be involved?

- **Lead:** Inclusive Excellence, Communications, Gillings School Dean’s Office
- **Involved:** Department chairs, Office of Student Affairs

Potential challenges

Transitions in SPH Communications mean that we have a very lean staff at this time. This may slow completion of action steps. Otherwise, no challenges are anticipated.

Tracking and evaluation

- Monitor web traffic to Inclusive Excellence pages, adjusting placement and messaging as needed.
- Include questions in the annual Inclusive Excellence survey that address messaging and visuals.
- Monitor whether web pages have been updated regularly.
- Track and report on attendance at events.
- Receive and act on feedback from twice-annual open forums.

Recommendation 4: Advocate on behalf of students for living wages, fairness in hiring practices, and greater transparency regarding employment opportunities

Why is this important (what is the rationale)?

During the Confederate Statue Action Planning meeting in January 2019, students present posed questions about inequities in graduate student compensation and benefits as compared to other UNC-Chapel Hill Schools; the rights of graduate students, particularly if they choose to participate in civil disobedience; and they requested increased transparency (and better communication) on a range of issues, including how we determine financial support for students (i.e., need versus merit), the cost of living in Chapel Hill and surrounding areas, and available TA/RA positions and associated application and vetting processes. Students are also earnestly seeking more information and greater clarity from administrators on a host of issues affecting the Gillings student experience, including stress levels and general health and well-being. Recent research, including a major new study outlining a “mental health crisis” in graduate education (*Nature Biotechnology* 36, 282–284 (2018)), underscores the importance of this problem and shows that what is happening at Gillings is part of a national situation. Namely, graduate students in the U.S. are six times more likely to experience depression and anxiety than the general population. As we have articulated elsewhere, a climate of inclusive excellence is one that supports individual success. In our pursuit of such a climate, we must demonstrate institutional commitment to understanding, monitoring and addressing – where feasible – the sources of stress and anxiety on our student population. Financial issues are a major source of stress and anxiety for many of our students, and there are concrete steps we could take to reduce the prevalence of that stress across the Gillings School.

Overarching goals

- *Enhance monitoring of and response to student concerns re. equity in hiring and pay as well as financial barriers to graduate education.*
 - *Identify and act on causes of student stress and anxiety.*
 - *Advocate for dental health coverage for graduate students.*
-

What action steps do we need to take to fulfill this recommendation?

1. **Create a Gillings Commitment guide (a type of “bill of rights and responsibilities”)** to clarify students’ and faculty members’ rights and responsibilities. This guide would indicate what students can expect of faculty. Similarly, it would outline what faculty can expect from students. Part of these rights and responsibilities would be fairness in hiring practices (making job opportunities and pay scales fairer or, when pay scales vary, clarifying why this is so).
2. **Understand, standardize, and improve communication about departmental processes for disbursing financial aid.** Student leaders shared a perception that most financial aid (RAships, TAships, tuition remission, and scholarship) is disbursed based on merit rather than on need. We recommend assessing feasibility of collecting data, and publishing aggregated dashboards on, how we disburse funding. Recognizing that data may not be available regarding financial need of graduate students, we should set a goal (to be agreed on) regarding better understanding student need and then allocating a greater portion of School Based Tuition and scholarships to students with need. We further recommend that we develop a CQI mindset when it comes to these processes to ensure that students with need can enroll and pursue an education at the Gillings School. While there likely will always be a gap between students with need and available funds, we should aim for the gap to be as small as possible.
3. **Improve how we communicate with admitted students re. their financial offers,** ensuring there is “truth in advertising.” Some students report that they receive assurances from faculty and staff that tuition at the Gillings School is low, the cost of living in Chapel Hill is reasonable, and that most of our students can get RAs and TAs once they arrive. Yet they report a reality that does not match this narrative. To ensure that admitted students are able to make fully informed decisions regarding whether

to enroll at Gillings, we recommend developing – and adopting across the Gillings School – a standardized, well-designed form, to be completed for each admitted student, that provides clear, complete and timely information regarding what is included in their financial aid packages, what is *not* included, and an honest estimate of the financial outlay a student will need to commit to. The form should include average costs of rental properties. This is becoming a matter of competitive necessity and the right thing for students. We should prepare these letters earlier so that students who want to attend Gillings are not forced by circumstances to accept the earlier offers they receive from competitor schools.

4. **Develop, and make easily available on our website, an infographic on financial realities of graduate school at UNC-Chapel Hill.** Assess, and improve where necessary, the availability of financial aid information on the website. Consult competitor schools' websites in developing this information.
5. **Require students to attend financial aid informational sessions** at Open House and Admitted Student Day if they attend in person.
6. **Monitor student experiences in periodic Inclusive Excellence survey** that includes questions about financial stressors, mental health, work-life balance. If we do not currently track student debt, or student employment during their time at Gillings, we should include these as questions as well. Act on this data.
7. To create greater transparency about opportunities, **create one internal job opportunity website/application mechanism**, easily accessible to all Gillings students. Require all student employers at Gillings to post opportunities to that site.
8. **Identify the authority at UNC or in the UNC-System that determines graduate student benefits with the aim of advocating for the addition of a dental benefit for graduate students.**
9. **In the medium-term, explore the feasibility of offering part-time residential academic programs and evening and/or weekend classes**, for working adults. The option to pursue a graduate education part-time would ease financial stress for many of our students.

What actions steps should we take first and why?

Developing a “bill of rights and responsibilities” would help establish principles for action and would therefore be an important early step. Developing surveys should also be an important early step so we can establish a baseline understanding of the financial stressors students are facing. Developing and implementing a web portal for job opportunities will be challenging, but should be a priority. Advocating for living wages for students, increasing pay equity and transparency, and advocating for dental health benefits should be adopted as a priority among senior leaders at the Gillings School.

Who should lead this effort? Who else should be involved? Who should be consulted and why?

- **Lead:** Office of Student Affairs
- **Involved:** Academic Affairs, Inclusive Excellence Council, Communications
- **Consultants /outside experts:** How are other SPHs handling these issues?

Potential challenges

Potential challenges include: (1) major data gaps in understanding financial needs of graduate students; (2) administrative hurdles associated with developing, and assuring adoption of, a system that standardizes financial aid disbursement practices across the school; (3) gaining buy-in, and broad use of, a web portal that features all jobs available to Gillings students *and* identifying, and providing financial support for, new FTE associated with maintaining the job site; (4) introducing new surveys can potentially add to survey fatigue, and may not get high response rates.

Tracking and evaluation

A survey that measures the student experience and/or satisfaction can monitor whether students feel the implemented changes have improved their ability to make informed choices about choosing Gillings, and mitigate some stress related to finances during their time as students.