

Portraits

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DEDICATED TO DIVERSITY
STAYING IN THE GAME
A SEASON OF GIVING



DEDICATED TO DIVERSITY

**Embracing differences
is paramount to creating,
maintaining, and building
upon the unified community
of Saint Anselm College.**

By Chip Underhill
Photo by Jeff Dachowski

Student leaders preparing for the Class of 2021 were clear about a high priority in meeting with President Steven R. DiSalvo at the start of this academic year: their first questions were all about diversity and inclusiveness.

“Students wanted to know ‘How will we create a more diverse population?’” recalls DiSalvo. “How will we embrace those who ‘aren’t like us’? What support services will there be for religious affiliations, cultural issues, meals and holidays? How will we go about hiring faculty and staff for a diverse student body?”

“I was fascinated with the students’ extraordinary understanding and interest,” continued DiSalvo, “but also in our specific steps for a more diverse and inclusive community. One student remarked ‘We’ve been talking about this for several years. It’s nice to see the college taking action.’”

The fall marked the arrival of Ande Diaz, the first Chief Diversity Officer (CDO) of Saint Anselm College (see “Engaging with Ande Diaz”, page 20). However, the structural roots of diversity and inclusiveness formally began in November of 1990 with the Task Force on Minorities, appointed by **Father Jonathan DeFelice, O.S.B. ’69**, then college president. Chaired by Dr. Denise Askin, then Executive Vice President, also the first Assistant to the President for Inclusiveness, and now professor emerita of English and a member of the Board of Trustees, the Task Force set about creating “a realistic plan for increasing minority participation.”

In December 1993, “The Saint Anselm College Plan for Racial and Ethnic Diversity” was released, a 28-page outline of the goals, responsibilities and major areas for



progress, focusing on Recruitment, Retention, Academics and Student Life. The Plan presented goals and action “for virtually every dimension of the Saint Anselm College community” and called for a specific Enrollment strategy of personal contact with minority applicants, early outreach and student-alumni endorsement.

In the years since release of the Plan, many sequential and foundational steps have occurred, all of which eventually led to more recent milestones.


WHAT AND WHY

In higher education today, diversity and inclusiveness are recognized for enhancing pedagogy and building a more aware workforce and citizenry. Twenty-seven years ago, Saint Anselm was active in an early movement that is still spreading, but casual observers may not be aware of the significant steps the college has taken.

“It’s pretty progressive for a small Catholic college in New Hampshire to have a CDO,” says President DiSalvo. “The college has listened. We’re supporting the concept of creating a more diverse community.”

Diversity in education is recognizing and appreciating our differences based on race, ethnicity, socio-economics, politics, physical abilities, sexual orientation, gender, physical abilities, religion, age, etc. Inclusiveness is literally including those groups in a community; it’s action and understanding beyond awareness and tolerance. These values declare that we’re a richer world for understanding people different than “us.”

The Ten Hallmarks of a Benedictine Education include “Community – the call to serve the common good,” and President DiSalvo notes the expansion of diversity and inclusiveness is entirely consistent with the college’s mission. “We always lead with mission, and we are not changing our mission; we’re enhancing it. Don’t forget that Saint Anselm was founded to serve immigrant families in the Manchester mills.”



Ahida Pilarski, professor of Theology, served as Special Assistant for Diversity and Inclusiveness to Dr. DiSalvo in 2015-2016, leading the formulation and search for a permanent staff member in charge of those efforts at the college. Professor Pilarski also chaired the Presidential Steering Committee for Diversity and Inclusiveness (PSCDI), tasked with fostering and directing progress toward institution-wide inclusiveness. Significant for Pilarski was her own ethnicity. “As minority faculty, I realized the [challenges] of teaching in a predominantly white institution, but I was happy to help people understand; it’s part of my vocation as an educator.”

“Building institutional capacity for change takes time,” says Pilarski, “but we had enough data to take us to the next stage. Three climate surveys were conducted, with a 2016 survey receiving our highest response yet. The community was ready to engage.”

Two student representatives sit on the PSCDI, each reporting they gave and received value in representing student points of view. **Sybille Legitime**, a senior from Haiti, says

she pointed out the merits of interaction between student groups and clubs as she observed the Committee’s interaction with college departments and people. Junior **James Bloor** of Atlanta, Ga., successfully proposed training by the Sustained Dialogue Institute for faculty, staff and students, to change and increase conversation about inclusiveness. “The Committee wants to hear our voices,” he said.

ALL AROUND US

Today, diversity and inclusiveness efforts are ongoing throughout campus, with collaborative programs sponsored and run by (among others) the Multicultural Center, Athletics, Campus Ministry, the Meelia Center for Community Engagement, the New Hampshire Institute of Politics, the Office of Admission, the Office of Residential Life and Education, Student Activities and Leadership Programs and many academic departments.

Dr. Alicia Finn, Dean of Students, remembers coming to Saint Anselm in 2005 and recognizing the “gold mine” of the college’s earlier work. “There was a social justice consciousness. There was a Student Activities and Multicultural Programming office. Campus Ministry supported students with [identity differences]. The bedrock work was done; we could leverage all that work.”

A result was creation of the Multicultural Center (named for Father Jonathan in 2013) by Finn, Father Mathias Durette, O.S.B. (then Assistant Dean of Students) and Dr. Askin. The Center’s first director was Yemi Mahoney, who lists among her

greatest satisfactions the annual Martin Luther King, Jr. programming including the college’s first observation of the federal holiday; a student discussion series about such under-represented identities as Muslim, Catholic and gay, and homeless; the *Shape of Diversity* mural in the Dana Center, and the Transitions program for first-year students.

Athletics also collaborates with and supports the goals of the Center; after his arrival at the college in 2016, football coach Joe Adam changed practice times to allow freshmen to join Transitions. “Our 108 players include 50 freshmen; Transitions gives them a head start, and some players are mentors,” says Adam.

Wayne Currie, current Director of the Multicultural Center, says “We’re fortunate to have a lot of allies and champions on campus to help nurture a generation of informed world citizens who find unity within our differences.”

The Center is so familiar in Hilltop life that it has a nickname: “the Multi.” Two who frequent the “Multi” today are seniors **Laura Monegro**, an Elementary Education major, and **Joaly Rosario**, majoring in Criminal Justice and Russian. Both from Lawrence, Mass., they were surprised to meet each other at the Center as freshmen.

“It was encouraging to meet people you can relate to, people who look like you, but that’s just the initial connection,” says Monegro. “Breaking barriers is what it’s all about. It’s about what we have in common.”



Joaly Rosario and Laura Monegro
Photo by Gil Talbot

Adds Rosario, “The Multicultural Center has a really welcoming vibe for everyone, not just minority members. Caucasians are certainly one of the multiple cultures in our community. The diversity consciousness here has grown exponentially since I arrived. As we say, ‘We are many voices but we’re one community.’”

For decades, Campus Ministry has also provided space for those many voices. A multi-faith prayer room, a Women of Faith panel and social media discussion, the Celebration of Light Dinner, and LGBTQ support programs are just some of the ways it fosters inclusiveness. Most prominently, Service and Solidarity missions support disadvantaged areas at home and abroad. These missions include nightly Reflections

during which students assess the day’s learnings.

“Self-awareness is a huge part of what we offer,” says **Susan Gabert ’91**, Director of Campus Ministry. “In the journey to self-awareness, diversity becomes a big piece of the conversation. “We want people to know God loves them. We share similarities and respect each others’ differences.”

As a 30-year advocate and witness of diversity and inclusiveness at Saint Anselm, Gabert notes “Things happened in small pockets. Now, they’re coordinated and widespread.”

The Meelia Center exemplifies the premise that exposure to other walks of life develops diversity and

inclusiveness. The Center deploys more than 400 students weekly in over 60 partnerships, mostly off-campus. Students also staff “Access Academy,” providing education and college exposure to refugee and immigrant students from Manchester, N.H. schools.

Communities served by the Meelia Center include people recovering from addiction; homeless, runaways, drop outs and delinquents; terminally ill veterans; incarcerated women; foster care and low-income children, non-native English speakers; Alzheimer’s, dementia and brain injury patients; the developmentally and physically challenged, and victims of abuse, neglect, sexual and domestic violence.

"There is something about the Saint Anselm student body," says Dan Forbes, Meelia Center Director. "Students have deep respect for the range of identities."

Diversity of perspective is also fostered in other ways at the college. Made up of students, faculty and staff, the Core Council for LGBTQ Students and Ally Support is charged with acting as a resource to the Vice President for Student Affairs in identifying the ongoing needs of LGBTQ students and addressing them inclusively, according to the Benedictine value of hospitality. The Council provides diverse programming ranging from monthly "Coffee and Conversation" nights, to TED Talks and guest lectures."

GLOBAL AND LOCAL

Saint Anselm College has come a long way, and as proof of progress, consider this: The Class of 2021 is the most diverse, gender-balanced, academically talented, and largest in recent memory, if not in college history. Of course, many challenges remain, including increasing first-generation and international student recruitment, a stated goal of the International Recruitment Office. In an effort to make the application process easier for first generation applicants, this fall for the first time, application fees have been waived for all applicants who would be the first in their family to graduate from college, many of international origin.

"Diversity is absolutely part of the conversation when working with international students," says Kathleen Simenson, Director, International Recruitment. "Potential students and parents from around

the world can be very sensitive to diversity on campus. Most want to know others with similar experience are succeeding here. A current student from Vietnam Skyped with a prospective student from Hanoi. As a result, she came to Saint Anselm College."

The Office of Residential Life and Education helps instill diversity through programs like "Bafa Bafa," an annual event that creates unusual social identities for two groups of Residential Advisors. Sue Weintraub, Director of Residential Life, says their challenge is to get to know each other with only observations and limited interaction. In another exercise, a Muslim student led classmates in wearing a hijab head scarf for 24 hours, followed by group discussion of their experiences.

"I see 'a-ha' moments during inclusiveness training and events," says Weintraub. "Developmentally, people are in different places. Understanding someone's perspective takes intellectual and emotional maturity and a willingness to gather different insights. Some people are averse; that is the challenge.

"Students tend to adopt the nature of expectations regarding policies, procedure and philosophy — as taught and demonstrated.

Saint Anselm's increasing adoption of diversity and Diversity and Inclusiveness exercises and programs abound within the academic context at Saint Anselm, too. The Philosophy Department conducts an annual student exchange with Radboud University in the Netherlands. For campus-

favorite Multicultural Day during Homecoming Weekend, the Modern Languages department partners with the Multicultural Center, Alumni Relations and the Multicultural Student Coalition in promoting global foods and cultural demonstrations. Hispanic Heritage Month is a joint production of six campus departments and organizations. Gender Studies, a minor in its fifth year, has a wide audience, says Professor Jennifer Thorn.

"There are lots of activism and engagement with the world that's led by people who don't think of themselves as doing gender studies," notes Thorn. "Here, many students take classes, do service work and internships, and engage in other ways with issues of gender and sexuality."

"Enough is Enough" Week at Saint Anselm addresses reduction of violence and promotion of peace around the world through the lens of gendered perceptions and perspectives; in the college's "Walk a Mile in Her Shoes" event, men walk one symbolic mile, wearing women's high-heeled shoes.

Sarah Keefe, Director of International Programs, says students return from study abroad with an expanded world view. "They're not just coming back to the Hilltop; they're coming back to 'my country' with a greater perspective on where they fit in a greater world." Keefe says parents increasingly want their children to be more involved and aware in a global setting, and the Office of International Programs provides students with a variety of programs to pursue studies overseas including

short-term faculty-led educational experiences, as well as traditional semester and year-long terms, including the college's program in Orvieto, Italy (now expanding to a year-long experience).

THE FUTURE ON THE HILLTOP

With changes in population, migration, economy and politics, the expansion of diversity and inclusiveness can only grow in importance at Saint Anselm College. "The mission is clear, we're just reinforcing it," says President DiSalvo.

"In 30 years, I hope and expect this college will be more reflective of the world in which we live," he continued. "Demographic trends, evolution of the Church in its congregation and policies, students going to college over greater distances, more international students interested in U.S. schools... We have an eye on where we're going, but to get there, we have to actively engage."

With continued appreciation of diversity and inclusiveness, closes DiSalvo, "our students—who know how to discuss, debate and challenge respectfully—will become even more engaged and more contributing to society."

Photo by Jeff Dachowski

As the first Chief Diversity Officer of Saint Anselm College, Dr. Ande Diaz reports to President DiSalvo and is a member of his cabinet. Arriving in July after a nationwide search, Dr. Diaz brings a deep experience in civic engagement, diversity, and inclusion, including over 10 years as the most senior diversity professional on several campuses. She holds a B.A. from Yale University, an Ed.M. from the Harvard Graduate School of Education, and a Ph.D. in Human and Organizational Development from Fielding Graduate University.

What is your role as Chief Diversity Officer?

The most important responsibilities of a Chief Diversity Officer are to coordinate, communicate and monitor progress on diversity and towards inclusion. Schools are determining that it advances their mission to have a designated person keep an eye on the big picture while connecting smaller pieces. I see the role as facilitator, synthesizer and confidential coach. I didn't come with pre-set initiatives. What we do will come from the community.

Why diversity and inclusiveness?

Four concepts underline why diversity matters: pedagogical concerns, educational access and equity, career preparation and economic imperatives. Research has proven that diverse environments help students learn. College students are an increasingly diverse population. We want to matriculate a diverse student body and make sure they thrive. We want to help faculty strengthen their skills for teaching a more diverse student body.

In my interview, I was asked "Can an institution be both Catholic and diverse?" Absolutely. Serving different social identities doesn't dilute Catholic identity. We're stronger as a Catholic institution because we welcome new neighbors.

What promotes diversity and inclusiveness?

First, continue the great work of the Admission Office to increase student body diversity. Second, we need to expand learning opportunities for engagement across differences; that's how diversity and democracy are tied. It's a responsibility of higher education to create a citizenry with greater understanding, civic literacy and human empathy. Third, we need to support faculty and staff with resources to help them advance our mission.

Do you sense an appetite for even greater diversity here?

Oh yeah (laughs softly). I've been holding a lot of listening sessions. People are offering all sorts of insights and suggestions.

What does it say that Saint Anselm has a CDO?

The private sector and some larger universities have had CDOs for over a decade; it's a new function at smaller liberal arts schools. Recognizing that a CDO can advance the Catholic mission and Benedictine values is a testimony to the leadership of Saint Anselm College.

How did you get here, to Saint Anselm?

I grew up tri-racial and bi-cultural in the strong Puerto Rican community of New York City.

I never set out to do diversity work; I got there out of civic engagement, working in Career Development at Harvard, Residential Life with Princeton, Research at Tufts, and Intercultural Learning with Roger Williams, then at Allegheny College as Assistant Provost for Diversity.

For me, it's all about developing engaged world citizens, something that happens in small ways every day. What excites me is observing students grasp and grow; becoming strong student leaders who contribute to a better world.

What strikes you as you consult with campus constituencies?

A lot of compassion. Kindness. Consideration. Love for coworkers and classmates — that is palpable. It's a genuine regard and warmth for the individual.

You've been here a few months. Where are we?

Right on task; the school is very well positioned. We have two decades of progress including three climate assessment surveys. We've been building on the foundation of the 1993 Plan for Racial and Ethnic Diversity.

In the fall, we listened formally and informally, from the Coffee Shop to the Multicultural Center. Through that listening, I expect to identify themes and opportunities to help us advance our strategic priorities of diversity and inclusion.

Many colleges are exploring models of intergroup dialog for curricular and co-curricular learning. I'm curious about the community's interest in that. Meanwhile, I'm pleased to announce a pilot program of the Diversity and Inclusion Fund, designed to encourage community creativity. Its next application deadline is in early February.

In the short run, we're recognizing a lot of engagement, creativity and ideas in all corners of campus. In the long run, stay tuned.

Engaging with Ande Diaz

CHIEF DIVERSITY OFFICER

