UNIVERSITY OF LOUISIANA SYSTEM

FOR YOUR FUTURE. FOR OUR FUTURE.

REGINALD F. LEWIS EDUCATIONAL EQUITY INITIATIVE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Higher education, a key driver in growth, performance, prosperity, and competitiveness, has never mattered more than it does today. Simply put, an individual's ability to prosper in an increasingly knowledge-based global society and economy is more dependent on educational attainment than ever. Given the transformative power of higher education, it is not surprising that over 40 states during the past decade have set goals to increase their state's share of individuals with college credentials and degrees. These efforts have shown promise. Nationally, college-going and completion rates are rising for students at all income levels and across all racial and ethnic groups. Despite this progress, significant gaps remain in preparation, enrollment, and degree attainment across race and socioeconomic status. Studies that examine nationwide completion trends find that 30.8 percent of black adults have earned an associate degree or more, compared to 47.1 percent of white adults between the ages 25 and 64. For context, current degree attainment levels of black Americans are lower than the attainment levels of white adults in 1990—over a quarter of a century ago. These achievement gaps are also noted among low-income individuals and working adults, which not only exacerbates the disturbing increase in income inequality, but it also severely reduces economic and social mobility in the United States.

Similar to national trends, Louisiana has seen an increase in the number of historically disadvantaged students enrolling in college. However, there has been less progress in closing the degree attainment gap across race. Louisiana has the lowest degree attainment rates for black adults (20.7), when compared to other states. It is noteworthy that over 30 percent of adults in Louisiana are black. Educational disparities are also noted across age. Because 71 percent of adults (25 years and older) in the state do not have a postsecondary degree, Louisiana has a significant latent adult learner market (American Community Survey, 2016). While Louisiana has observed increasing educational attainment among its adult population, it still trails its peer states such as Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee, South Carolina and Georgia. Given the strong correlation between postsecondary credentials and economic and social outcomes, it is not surprising that Louisiana continues to have high rates of poverty, poorer health outcomes, and increased rates of unemployment and incarceration.

The University of Louisiana System (UL System), one of the nation's largest higher education systems, has the capacity to produce a large footprint in closing the achievement gap and increasing educational attainment in the state. With its nine diverse postsecondary education institutions, the UL System and its member institutions produced a strategic framework that is committed to producing Louisiana's most educated generation by the year 2025. With three focus areas — economic development, research, and innovation; financial stewardship and accountability; and academic success, student success, and educational attainment — the framework prescribes not only producing 150,000 new graduates by 2025 but also increasing participation and success among all populations.

This first annual Reginald F. Lewis Educational Equity Initiative report has three aims:

- Outline and reaffirm our commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion at the UL System and explain the connection to the broader UL System framework.
- Review the results of our work to date, as well as the model of change used thus far. This report captures a snapshot of our work, and serves as a benchmark for continued work into the future.
- Provide a roadmap of key priorities for the upcoming year.

Going forward, we will report on the prior year's progress in each annual edition of this report. We look forward to building on this strong base, learning from what has been done, and reporting on the continued good work in the future.

OUR COMMITMENT TO DIVERSITY

> "To effectively prepare students from all demographic and socioeconomic backgrounds, we must recruit, develop, and retain faculty, staff, and leaders reflective of the markets we intend to serve."
>
> - Dr. James B. Henderson
> University of Louisiana System President and CEO

Postsecondary education has never mattered more to both American individuals and the nation as a whole. Economists and labor market experts make the compelling argument that 21st century jobs require specialized knowledge and skills — the type of learning that can only be acquired in high-quality postsecondary programs. The impact of the college credential on economic and social mobility is well-documented with studies consistently showing a strong positive correlation between educational attainment and upward mobility. The documented social and economic benefits associated with increased levels of educational attainment led the University of Louisiana System (UL System) to comprehensive, integrative planning centered around our commitment to (1) produce the most educated and prepared generation in our state's history, (2) expand research efforts and public/private partnerships that drive our economy, and (3) invest in the faculty that drive our work. The success of this work requires the closing of opportunity and achievement gaps across all populations. System President and CEO Dr. James B. Henderson maintains that "to effectively prepare students from all demographic and socioeconomic backgrounds, we must recruit, develop, and retain faculty, staff, and leaders reflective of the markets we intend to serve."

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Each of the UL System's nine member institutions have developed and implemented long-standing, successful initiatives aimed at supporting historically underserved populations. To bring these institutional efforts and resources to scale and ensure sustainable actions of equity, diversity and inclusion, System-level coordination was required. The resulting Reginald F. Lewis Educational Equity Initiative (Initiative) allowed for targeted synergies for equity-focused programs and resources to be housed.

UL SYSTEM DIVERSITY COMMITMENT

The UL System and its member institutions believe universities that aspire to:

- prepare students from all backgrounds for leadership, service, and learning;
- empower regional, state, and global economies; and
- enrich communities through scholarship, research, and artistic expression which must be reflective of those students, economies, and communities.

The Board of Supervisors (Board) for the UL System recognizes diversity as essential to operational effectiveness and mission fulfillment and a strategic business.
The Board declares the recruitment and development of high-quality administrators, faculty, and staff from all demographic, experiential, and cultural backgrounds a Systemic priority.

The Board charges the System president, in collaboration with the presidents of the System's member institutions, with the development of a policy framework, inclusive of measurable outcomes, that ensures diverse, effective leadership is present at all levels of the enterprise.

MODELS OF CHANGE

To achieve the goals set forth in the UL System strategic framework, a number of targeted synergies for equity-focused programs and resources have been established to be housed at the System level. Those programs and resources include Compete LA, the UL System Diversity and Inclusion Taskforce, and the Management and Leadership Institute (M&LI). The subsequent paragraphs of this report will provide updates on each of these initiatives' progress to date.

COMPETE LOUISIANA

Conversations around closing equity gaps have largely focused on 18- to 22-year-old undergraduate students from low-income and historically underserved communities, but new challenges to equitable access and outcomes are emerging. Modern learners do not uniformly follow the traditional path to college. Instead of enrolling right after high school, many students enroll after spending time in the workforce, starting a family, or serving in the military. Part-time students, workers, returning adults, parents, veterans and other non-traditional students now represent the majority of today's students. The largest pool of new students in Louisiana stems from the 653,000 adult learners that have some college credit, but have not earned a bachelor's degree. Adult learners, traditionally overlooked in policy, research, and funding at both the federal and state level, constitute a significant and diverse student population that will enrich the campus but require innovative supports for success.

Louisiana has a significant latent adult learner market because 71 percent of adults (25 years and older) in the state do not have a postsecondary degree (American Community Survey, 2016).

Moreover, nearly one-fourth of adults in Louisiana have some college experience but no degree. Data also indicate equity challenges when reviewing adult learner subgroups. Only one in five African-Americans and Hispanics, ages 25 to 64 hold a degree, compared to 34 percent of whites and 46 percent of Asians.

Compete LA was established to re-engage the 653,000 Louisianans and help them successfully navigate through our universities' processes and systems by identifying and removing barriers that can impede their progression and degree completion. Although Compete LA is still in an early stage of implementation, the System's commitment to equitable outcomes for adult learners is laudable. The Compete LA program already has over 1,600 leads, more than 70 students enrolled and one graduate. Much of the program's success is owed to the innovative practices and policies described below.

- **REDUCTION OF FINANCIAL BURDEN**

The most significant barrier standing between adult students and their return to college is the financial commitment. On Friday, February 28, 2020, the Board of Supervisors for the UL System unanimously approved flat-rate tuition of $275 per credit hour for Compete LA students. This will make our System more competitive with universities with a national online education profile and provide a transparent pricing structure, allowing students to plan for the financial commitment of returning to college.

- **COMPETE LA COACHES**

The UL System hired five dedicated coaches to work directly with adult learners, connecting them with academic, financial, career, and social support resources. The coaches serve as a liaison between the nine member institutions and the student. Coaches collaborate with academic advisors, financial aid officers, and registrars to provide additional capacity in supporting returning adult students. The coach-student relationship is based upon high-touch interactions, intrusive advising, and frequent check-ins.

- **INFUSED MOBILE TECHNOLOGY**

Adult students face barriers to college completion that stem from competing demands on their time. These barriers are often exacerbated by institutional policies and support structures that are geared toward traditional students and other constituents. Compete LA utilizes mobile technology to communicate with students by sending automated messages about deadlines, opportunities, and resources through a mobile application and other electronic communication platforms. The mobile technology provides higher levels of engagement by gathering, understanding, and utilizing data related to student behavior and interests while increasing the impact of every Compete LA coach and institutional staff member.

MANAGEMENT & LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

The Universities of Louisiana Management and Leadership Institute (M&LI) is an annual program for mid-career faculty and staff who aspire to broadened academic, professional or administrative leadership roles. The M&LI is in its third year and many participants from various experiential and demographic backgrounds have received promotions and new opportunities for advancement.

MANAGEMENT &
LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

The program is held over the course of two semesters, with each of the Universities of Louisiana hosting a two-day session. Participants develop leadership skills and competencies by exploring case studies, presentations, and readings; engaging in group projects identifying, assessing and addressing three major System-wide issue; and fulfilling an extended mentoring/job-shadowing component.

Goals for Institute Participants:

- Gain familiarity with contemporary challenges facing academic and administrative leaders.
- Deepen understanding of fundamental perspectives and concepts of leadership as they apply in higher education.
- Enhance personal and professional leadership competencies.
- Advance the UL System by leading three System-based group projects from conception through completion.
- Increase understanding of important dimensions of higher education administration, including organizational structure and mission, governance, finance and budgeting, legal and regulatory issues, diversity, and ethics.
- Mentor future faculty and staff leaders, by sharing knowledge and experiences.

The 2019-2020 cohort includes the following members:

Lynette D. Bates
UNO

Dr. Christine Berry
ULM

Dr. Christopher Broadhurst
UNO

Dr. Lisa Broussard
ULL

Scott Burrell
NSU

Jazmine Cherry
GSU

Emily Essex
ULM

Dr. Todd M. Keller
Nicholls

Dr. Jessica Leger
ULL

Katherine Mable
Nicholls

Dr. Angel Ogea
MSU

Julie Powell
NSU

Jennifer A. Riley
LTU

Dr. Kevin J. Roberson
GSU

Michael T. Snowden
MSU

Dr. Chris Thomas
MSU

Donna Thomas
LTU

Dr. Gabe Willis
SLU

Dr. Jeffrey Wright
SLU

Dr. Bryan J. Zygmont
LTU

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION TASKFORCE

President Henderson called for the formation of a Taskforce on Inclusion in the Workplace to evaluate how the System and its respective campuses implement policies designed to encourage inclusion and respect for diversity among our students, employees, and constituents. Over the course of nine months the Taskforce evaluated and integrated all of the information; deliberated on its implications to our System; and engaged in a courageous conversation about how to best deliver on the UL System's commitment to providing inclusive academic communities. The Taskforce spent nine months evaluating existing policies and practices, deliberated on its implications to our System; and engaged in courageous conversations about how to best deliver on the UL System's commitment to diversity and inclusion. The resulting policies and practices were recommended by the Taskforce.

UNIVERSITIES OF LOUISIANA'S CHIEF DIVERSITY OFFICERS

Chief diversity officers have become increasingly common across leading institutions of higher education, driven by the push to create more diverse, inclusive and equitable environments for the benefit of all members of the community. Simply put, chief diversity officers attempt to institutionalize diversity and inclusion in higher education. To date, each campus has appointed someone to serve in this capacity. Dr. Claire Norris' role has been expanded to serve as the Chief Inclusion, Diversity, and Effectiveness Officer for the UL System. Dr. Norris will guide efforts to conceptualize, define, assess, nurture, and cultivate diversity and inclusion as a System resource.

PURSUING INCLUSIVE EXCELLENCE: EQUITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION WORKSHOP

In October 2019, the UL System hosted a half-day workshop at the University of New Orleans. The workshop was designed by diversity consultant, Deb Elam, CEO Corporate Playbook. Workshop participants included faculty, staff, and selected student leaders. Workshop participants engaged in breakout groups with colleagues who are in similar roles from the nine UL System member institutions. Groups included: Presidents/Board Members; Provosts /Academic Affairs; Human Resources; Athletics, CFOs/Facilities; Chief Diversity Officers; Communications and Student Affairs. Each breakout group identified specific opportunities to advance equity, diversity and inclusion in their respective areas of responsibility. Our keynote speaker was Dr. Maurice Stinnette, VP of Diversity and Inclusion at BSE Global. Dr. Stinnett brings over 15 years of experience in diversity, inclusion, equity, social justice and multicultural education. Dr. Stinnett uses his extensive business, management, and planning skills to ensure high-quality diversity, equity and inclusion programs and efficient business practices for all stakeholders and institutions. While the convening itself was progress, the deliverables from the work group will continue to inform practice and drive increased diversity and inclusion.

THE UL SYSTEM FOR OUR FUTURE CONFERENCE

The programming for this year's conference was organized into the following three tracks:

- Innovation: research, technology, communication and marketing, student services, academic excellence, alumni engagement
- Integrity: diversity, adult learners, human resources
- Inclusion: finance, transparency, public-private partnerships, institutional research, governmental affairs, facilities

Louisiana's Commissioner of Higher Education Dr. Kim Hunter Reed served as the pre-conference's keynote speaker. Dr. Reed presented the Louisiana Board of Regents' Master Plan, which set the aggressive goal to have 60 percent of its adult population equipped with a degree or high-value credential by 2030. Dr. Reed acknowledged that it is imperative that the state's systems of higher education work collectively to address historical and contemporary inequities in educational attainment.

CHAMPIONS OF DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

A Champion for Diversity and Inclusion award was created to recognize and honor individuals at the System conference each year who exhibit excellence in living and promoting behaviors that demonstrate diversity, inclusion and cultural competence at an institution within the UL System. The awardee must represent openness in thinking and they embrace differences that promote equal opportunity in race, religion, culture, sexual identification and expression, thought processes, etc. This year's awardee was Dr. Caroline Jurisich.

Dr. Jurisich is currently the Lead Coordinator for the UL LIFE ("Learning Is for Everyone") program. The UL LIFE Program is a highly personalized program for young adults with intellectual disabilities. The LIFE courses combined with college-level courses for the students to audit all center around the practice of learning by doing. The program staff work closely with each student to customize their courses and college experience so they are prepared for a career they love.

ROADMAP OF KEY PRIORITIES

USING DATA AS A TOOL TO ADVANCE EQUITY

Many educational leaders are searching for ways to communicate their institutional commitment to equity. By showing governing boards and the public the ways that staff, faculty, and administrators are using data to improve institutional performance, college and university leaders can articulate equity as a standard of practice that is beneficial to all students and to society as a whole. The UL System will lead innovation in this area through creation of a data dashboard that will track equity measures. This public dashboard will further the ability of educators and policy makers to identify and shine spotlights on equity gaps in order to lead to the refinement of state and institutional policies to address gaps and improve student outcomes. Additionally, this dashboard will equip advocates with high quality and timely data which they can utilize to make a greater impact on their advocacy strategies. Our dashboard will pinpoint equity gaps, examining at whether and how historically disadvantaged students are accessing and succeeding across our nine-member institutions. This data dashboard will achieve the following outcomes:

- Facilitate decision making and planning;
- Integrate data across a wide variety of information systems;
- Create a culture of transparency and accountability;
- Create shared accountability for responding to equity gaps among the campuses, System and stakeholders.

DIGITAL EQUITY AND INCLUSION TASKFORCE

The COVID-19 global pandemic drastically upended the higher education enterprise, particularly in the areas of teaching and learning. Stay at Home/Shelter in Place orders required higher education leaders to respond quickly by moving all courses to remote learning. In just one week following the Governor's announcement, the Universities of Louisiana engaged in a wholesale, sudden shift to remote instruction requiring all instructors to adapt their course delivery methods. Data showed that over 90% of all face-to-face (F2F) and hybrid courses across the UL System were moved to either online or remote learning within week one. While this shift illustrated the tenacity and resiliency of the faculty, staff, and students, it also highlighted digital inequities across teaching and learning. In response, the UL System established a Digital Equity & Inclusion Taskforce (DEIT) comprised of 14 individuals from various backgrounds and experiences to develop a new System-wide model for advancing digital equity and inclusion within the UL System. Members of the DEIT represent the following roles: information technology (IT), online learning, diversity and inclusion, faculty, student life, and student leadership.

Recognizing that digital equity and inclusion means ensuring students have equal access to technology as well as the training necessary to navigate digital tools, the DEIT identified four key areas that must be addressed to ensure equitable, inclusive, and innovative teaching and learning experiences across the UL System.

DEIT focus areas:

- Access to Technology - ensures equitable access to high speed internet, affordable and reliable technology, and mobile technology for faculty, staff, and students.
- Online Learning Infrastructure – develops/enhances online learning infrastructure across the System for faculty, staff, and students.
- Digital and Technological Literacy – ensures that all students are prepared for online learning and faculty and staff are prepared for online instruction and support.
- Intrapersonal barriers – eliminates/lessens personal barriers that exacerbate the digital/technological divide.

GEER funding generously provided by the Governor's office has been used to help enhance efforts related to online learning infrastructure and digital and technological literacy across the UL System. Faculty and staff of all nine universities created professional development content to advance teaching and learning opportunities.