



# BROWN

August 19, 2024

Dear President Paxson and Provost Doyle,

Among all of the administrative bodies, boards, collectives and committees at Brown, the Diversity and Inclusion Oversight Board—as you both are well aware—plays a unique role in helping “to strengthen and streamline oversight of diversity and inclusion initiatives.” Our work—similar to work in other areas of our rapidly evolving university—must give apt attention to the past and present in order to craft a compelling vision for the future of excellence at Brown.

The DIOB has existed for eight years. During this time, the university has made remarkable progress and put tremendous resources behind implementing the goals of the DIAP’s. We celebrate this substantive headway and applaud the gains tracked on the DIAP [website](#). These accomplishments are a consequence of extraordinary leadership from the Office of the President, the Office of the Provost, and the Office of Institutional Equity and Diversity combined with staff, faculty, and students who share the everyday tasks of working together to create a broadly diverse and effectively inclusive community.

This public memo reflects the cycle of our work since May 2022. It has three sections organized around key areas distilled from meetings with administrative leaders, internal discussions, conversations with staff, faculty, and student colleagues; and reflections on formal university reports, recommendations, and documents. The memo shares our observations that:

1. The university would do well to safeguard and formalize the collaborative principles articulated in the DIAP II. To support this point, we describe three achievements that would not have been made without the principles articulated in DIAP II.
2. The university community would benefit from public dialogue and “ongoing conversations” as a way to care for and reduce the collective fears of our community. We note three recent noticeable silences to make this point salient.
3. That the broader US climate on diversity and inclusion could eviscerate Brown’s commitment to the principles of DIAP II. We discuss this below.

Most significant in going forward is our observation that, to ensure that the principles of diversity and inclusion do not become vulnerable to cultural changes and shifting leadership, the University should formalize and embed these values into its mission. Certain specific goals of DIAP II will need to be reconsidered, but that work should be done on top of clear, formalized, and principled commitment to the flexible inclusion it expressed.

## I. *DIAP-II - Principles and Examples*

DIAP II is a vital statement of the principles of collaborative diversity and broad inclusion. Embedded within it are mission-related values of “inclusivity and belonging” that enable a flexible approach to heterogeneity beyond mere demographics.

There is much work going on at Brown that enlivens the principles of DIAP II. We highlight three current examples:

1. In 2022-3, the Harriet W. Sheridan Center for Teaching and Learning developed and raised outside funds to support their unique program—Equitable Learning Inquiry (ELI)—that benefits both faculty and students from historically underrepresented groups. This program works directly with interested faculty members (who receive a stipend) to examine the meaning of equitable learning for their specific course. It then disaggregates course data to give a sense of how students fare across key demographic groups. With these data in mind, the faculty member develops, pilots, and measures—in collaboration with ELI program leaders—the necessary evidence-based changes to their course to stimulate equity in learning. Additionally, since 2021, the Sheridan Center has organized and run a Seminar for Transformation around Anti-Racist Teaching (START), funded by HHMI from 2021-2023. This ground-breaking seminar takes some of the fundamental principles and ideas of DIAP II and revises them into pedagogical questions. This seminar asks three-person departmental “teams” (faculty, grad student, and undergrad) to reflect together on topics like: “How can we become more equitable, inclusive instructors ourselves? How can we build equitable, anti-racist teaching and learning spaces? What are ways to support peers and colleagues in advancing departmental change? How do we know we have been effective at this work?” *Thus far, 23 departments have revised a foundational course through participation in this program.*
2. The Division of Pre-College and Undergraduate Programs recognized that young students' participation in pre-college programming could be a vital tool for ensuring that students from Providence Public Schools are successful in post-secondary education. As reported in DIAP II, this unit had already increased the percentage of HUG student participation in Brown Pre-College from 13.8% in 2016 to 15.9% in 2019. That percentage has since increased to 17.3% in 2023. Since 2020, PCUG has focused on encouraging Providence Public School District students to apply and enroll in Brown Pre-College, even guaranteeing full scholarships in FY 24. This increased participation from 9 PPSD students in 2020 to 140 in 2023. Additionally, PCUG partners with local and national organizations that support students from low-income backgrounds, first-generation to attend college, and/or identify within the University's HUGs, providing an average of 275 students each summer participating in pre-college. For these students, the pre-college programs have also increased in-program resources by offering intentional dedicated space and programming to bolster academic and social support. In 2020, the unit expanded its scholarship model for Brown employee dependents from 10% discount to up to 50% discount (20% non-taxable). *In summer 2024, the first cohort of 30 PPSD Brown Collegiate Scholars started four-year, year-round no-cost college access.*
3. Finally, The College creatively identified and corrected disparities in the racial background of peer-to-peer advisors in the Meiklejohn Program. Our 2021 public memo lauded the College for its creative efforts to eliminate disparities in student participation in the SPRINT and UTRA programs, its “antiracist training for staff,” and its “reflexive hiring process,” among

other things. In 2024, we learned that this office, in partnership with students, noticed racial disparities in the Meiklejohn program in 2021, collectively created a plan to address them, and implemented this plan with great success. The plan included offering a new course ("UNIV 0123: Practical Introduction to Peer Advising") starting in Spring 2022 to recruit and train Meiklejohns and other peer advisors, as well as introducing a modest stipend to support student engagement. *There is now greater parity in students serving as Meiklejohn peer advisors, including an increase in representation among students self-identifying as from historically underrepresented groups.*

These creative, collaborative efforts were not previously identified as university goals. Instead, they were inspired by the collaborative vision of DIAP II. These successes demonstrate that the broad principles of DIAP II are seeping into our community in generative ways. Even further, units and departments want to work effectively from these principles. It is therefore clear to us that Brown must now more than ever, cleave to the *principles* of DIAP II.

We invite you to think about how Brown might formalize and safeguard the collaborative principles of DIAP II within the University's mission.

## II. "Ongoing Conversation"

Our work this cycle has also revealed the value of open-discourse and "community" dialogue on issues of diversity and inclusion, particularly for faculty and staff. DIAP II calls for "ongoing conversation" on the legacy of slavery and how it currently impacts our university. We read this as both a reminder that public engagement on the values we hold dear habituates our community members into the social norms of our institution, and, as a directive to not lose track of the justice component of our institutional mission.

We met with a number of units. Most notably the Office of Institutional Equity and Diversity, University Human Resources, and Office of Advancement, thoughtfully prioritized—in complicated and nuanced ways—broad understandings of the principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion from DIAP II and knitted them into the fabric of their units. Their work preserved the DIAP II by critically engaging these values and suffusing them into their work. For example, UHR's recent Staff Pay Equity Study and new Compensation Architecture and Career Pathways project, among other things, were explicitly driven by an expansive conception of diversity and inclusion in DIAP II. Advancement's "Pathways to Diversity and Inclusion Fund," an impact fund, aims "to foster a truly inclusive campus" in the wide sense of inclusion, and has become an important part of Brown's Annual Fund because of the DIAP and DIAP II. Finally, the HBCU Initiative based in OIED extends and expands the collaborative principles expressed in DIAP II.

These units are very different in their structure, aims, and duties, but they share three important operational strategies inspired by DIAP II. They:

- consistently disaggregate data by a broad range of self-reported identity categories;
- closely monitor and assess the roles these identity categories play within the content of their work as well as the climate of their units;
- outreach on how this broad account of diversity, equity, and inclusion functions in their decisions.

In short, their work presupposes both quantitative *and* qualitative dimensions of the collaborative norms of diversity, equity, and inclusion and invites critical, ongoing conversation on them.

Commitment to public engagement on the complexities of diversity and inclusion has gone a long way towards building and sustaining social investment in diversity and inclusion at Brown. This is because these norms, like any others, are better understood when more voices (and more *diverse* voices) describe their relation to them. We highlight just three specific instances in which we think public input would have gone a long way in supporting the overall sense of our institutional commitment to diversity and inclusion and reduced avoidable fears and concerns.

The first is the decision to reinstate standardized test scores for applicants applying to the College this fall. All conversations about the SAT, a tool proven to be discriminatory, were handed over to a private committee. We trust the intentions of the committee and believe campus leadership when they say that Brown will use these scores reliably. The point is that some kind of conversation outside of the private committee would have gone a long way for signaling the importance of the issue and modeling the seriousness of our commitment to the collaborative principles in DIAP II. At a minimum, Chair and Director lunches could have hosted this discussion. Provostial and Presidential lecture series could have shifted to a conversational mode featuring dialogue between faculty members. Why there was no public conversation about reinstating the SAT is puzzling, particularly in light of the highly collegial and reflective nature of Brown as an institution.

The second is the decision to refuse to openly discuss the strategy regarding recent data for admissions regarding race/ethnicity of applicants, offers of admission, and matriculants in the class of 2028 disaggregated by race/ethnicity (including early decision). Could our administrative leaders have made this a topic for community engagement and considered some possible scenarios, instead of simply deciding that this information was—in light of federal regulations post SCOTUS—too sensitive to share and discuss? Also, why was this data not shared with the DIOB by now? Without access to this data, this board is unable to provide adequate oversight for our community.

We want to draw your attention to the fact that avoiding public engagement on admissions and putting the data in a “black box” has raised anxiety and suspicions on our campus. It is not simply that the data should have, at least by now, been released to us. More importantly, it is that our campus community was never given the chance to make this problem—the legal fears regarding releasing the data—a topic for open engagement. We acknowledge that some Administrative leaders organized public programs *pre*-SCOTUS to explain what might happen, but we are not aware of opportunities our community had for discussing the kind of university we want to be, and reflecting on what decisions should guide our actions *post*-SCOTUS. Why?

The third is that over the course of last semester when our campus, like many others, experienced tensions and conflict in the context of the war in Gaza, we seemed to abandon DIAP II’s call for ongoing public discussions. The situation in Israel and Palestine led to widespread protests, including the call for divestment from students on our campus, two takeovers of University Hall, arrests, a hunger strike, and an encampment. During this period, Title VI violations became an increasing concern on our campus. Staff, students, and faculty were left in the dark about the extent to which Title VI would impact the very framework of DIAP II and the ongoing activities, initiatives and processes associated with it. Further, the links between DIAP II and anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, anti-Arab, anti-Middle Eastern as well as anti-Palestinian sentiments have not, to our knowledge, been addressed in public. We wonder, what is the impact of Title VI on DEI activities at Brown, especially given the recent agreement with the Office of Civil Rights?

Our community flourishes when we engage in difficult conversations on issues of diversity and inclusion in a public way with confidence grounded in the principles articulated in DIAP II. Institutional silence, even when it stems from the legitimate urge to be quietly protective, has consequences. It raises fears and engenders confusion particularly among those who are new to Brown and are joining this effort towards diversity and inclusion for the first time. The 2023 Campus Climate survey confirmed that only 34% of our undergraduates were “somewhat familiar” or “very familiar” with DIAP I or DIAP II.

We call for robust community dialogue as a first principle of Brown’s standard for diversity and inclusion.

### ***III. Current Climate and Context***

In some important ways, the current context in our nation—and our university’s response to it—are important background conditions that shape this memo. This is an extremely challenging moment for higher education. It is important to remember that, between 2016 and 2022, Brown’s commitment to work on diversity and inclusion took place in a national climate that was generally conducive to efforts towards wide-spread social changes related to issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Proof of this is that in 2020, many government agencies, corporations, and institutions of higher learning finally recognized what Brown’s first DIAP acknowledged in 2016: that “both diversity and inclusion are central” to institutional success. Public statements and the dedication of resources confirmed that these organizations believed that society could be made more equitable and that their workplace could become more diverse. It is under these generally supportive conditions in 2021, that Brown successfully launched DIAP II.

The national climate is much more hostile today. The attacks on the grammar and substance of the phrase “diversity, equity, and inclusion” have resulted in institutions renegeing on their previous commitments to engage in the discourse of diversity. Further, the threat of legal action looms over efforts to create communities that are broadly diverse and effectively inclusive. This has prompted academic institutions—that supposedly prize debate and intellectual discourse—to turn away from values they previously held dear.

For the last twenty years, Brown has set the industry standard for how institutions of higher learning should respond to the legacies of exclusion. DIAP II, a document that articulates collaborative principles and guides the vision of our university on diversity and inclusion, enables us to invoke a set of concepts and address core ethical themes of fairness, integrity, and decency at the institutional level. Conditions will change. Yet, the foundational moral grammar of the discourse of diversity and inclusion—like the moral grammar of freedom and democracy in the US Constitution—remains consistent.

Our position is neither to defend the DIAP II, nor to romanticize it; it is—more simply—to report what our work revealed. With that in mind, we can unequivocally state that the collaborative diversity and broad inclusion embedded in DIAP II have had extraordinary value for our community. Surely, the SCOTUS decision renders some of the proposed actions of DIAP II impossible. For example, for the medical and graduate school, “the goal of doubling the number of graduate students from historically underrepresented groups” can no longer be pursued via admissions. Yet, our university should neither abandon nor re-imagine our principled approach to diversity.

Brown University casts a long shadow. Its legacy demands that our expert faculty and top administrators take a leadership role in the national debate on these issues.

#### *V. Looking Ahead*

Post-Scotus, some of the goals, initiatives and actions described in DIAP II must be altered. The principles and values of DIAP II, however, should not be changed. Our hope is that a university-wide process will inform the shift in how we pursue the goals and actions we have committed to secure. We encourage this process include: 1) the university formalizing its commitment to the collaborative principles of DIAP II; 2) robust community conversations and ongoing public dialogue on strategies, goals and actions; 3) the crafting of new goals based on the principles of DIAP II that draw on existing academic expertise at Brown (for example, there is much more to do to insure that queer, non-binary, and transgender members of our community feel supported and valued); and, 4) a sustained commitment to leading the national conversation on these important issues.

Sincerely,

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