



Sent via Electronic Mail

September 23, 2024

Dear Members of the Diversity and Inclusion Oversight Board (DIOB),

Thank you for sharing your observations and recommendations regarding Brown's progress in meeting its diversity and inclusion goals via your public memo, dated August 19, 2024. The DIOB's ongoing oversight, leadership and partnerships across campus enable Brown to confront the issues of racism, discrimination and inequity that stand in the way of the excellence we aspire to achieve. This is especially important given, as you reference in your memo, the current national and political landscape concerning "DEI" necessitates that Brown continue to affirm and make clear that our diversity and inclusion efforts are, and have been, aimed at serving the University's mission of "advancing knowledge and understanding." As an academic institution, it is this mission that has compelled and continues to compel ongoing prioritization of diversity and inclusion efforts across the Brown community, historically, currently and into the future.

Regarding DIAP Principles and Climate

We appreciate that your memo highlights several examples of creative, collaborative work taking place across campus to advance Brown's diversity and inclusion efforts, including the "Equitable Learning Inquiry" initiative supported by the Sheridan Center for Teaching and Learning, the work by the Division of Pre-College and Undergraduate Programs to make Pre-College accessible to Providence school children, and the College's efforts to eliminate disparities in undergraduate student participation in the Meiklejohn program. Each of these initiatives demonstrates that the goal of Brown's Diversity and Inclusion Action Plans (the 2016 DIAP and 2021 DIAP Phase II) — to embed diversity and inclusion into the fabric of the University — has met with success.

One reason for this success is that now, almost a decade after the DIAP was conceptualized, Brown has built a strong infrastructure to support its diversity and inclusion efforts. Not only is the Office of Institutional Equity and Diversity (OIED) leading a number of important initiatives, but academic and administrative units across campus have invested in the programs and people needed to advance our work. Many of these efforts have been captured in the regular reports that OIED has shared with the community, tracking both unit-level and university-wide efforts. OIED's latest DIAP progress report will be issued in the coming weeks, reflecting the advancement or fulfillment of many of Brown's original goals.

The DIAP was envisioned as a 10-year plan, and it is time for Brown to consider what the next strategic vision for diversity and inclusion should be. Given the considerable investments that have been made spanning the DIAP and DIAP Phase II, the University is well-positioned to develop a plan that builds on our successes. As you know from a recent announcement, the Office of the President has launched a search for the next leader of OIED, who will play a central role in this work. We are excited about launching a new planning process that engages faculty, students and staff once this new leader is in

place.

Regarding “Ongoing Conversation”

We agree with your observation that dialogue, grounded in “collaborative diversity and broad inclusion ... [has] extraordinary value for our community.” Earlier this month at Convocation, President Paxson spoke about how Brown has long valued diversity of thought grounded in twin principles that are core to Brown’s DNA — freedom of expression and a long-standing respect for the dignity and humanity of others. We will remain ardent protectors of these principles, and want to thank you for demonstrating in your memo the link between them and the values underpinning the DIAP.

We also want to share our appreciation for the observations in your memo about instances when further dialogue or engagement would have been beneficial over the past year. We comment on each below.

Standardized Testing

Last year the Ad Hoc Committee on Admissions Policies, which was composed of senior administrators, faculty and members of the Corporation of Brown University, considered whether to reinstate required standardized testing for undergraduate applicants. The group was aware of evidence regarding the correlation between test scores and socioeconomic background, and of the fact that applicants from under-resourced schools have less access to the sort of preparation and support that may boost the standardized test scores of more privileged applicants. But the committee concluded that a policy requiring testing and interpreting tests in the context of a student’s background and record could actually serve to redress some of the ensuing disadvantages: Applicants from underserved schools and communities who lack test scores may appear less competitive in Brown’s very large and highly selective admissions pool. However, strong testing, interpreted in the specific context of a student’s performance on standardized tests, relative to their peers from the same school, may actually serve to demonstrate their ability to succeed at Brown — while the lack of scores may make admissions officers hesitant to admit them.

Your memo expresses the view that the process of coming to the decision to reinstate standardized testing would have benefitted from additional engagement with and input from the Brown community. Although the committee did receive input from faculty, students and alumni, we will take to heart your advice that one or more open forums, or additional targeted outreach, would have been valuable. The input that the committee received during the course of its work made it clear that there is a range of views about the value of standardized testing. We will continue to evaluate this decision, along with all of our admissions practices, as the full impact of the U.S. Supreme Court decision banning the consideration of race in admissions becomes clearer. This will provide an opportunity for continued community engagement going forward.

Post-SCOTUS Admissions

The DIOB’s memo was sent to us on August 19, 2024, a few weeks before our September 6 [announcement of the demographics of the class of 2028](#). We appreciate that the DIOB and other members of our community would have liked to receive information about demographics of the entering class at an earlier date. Typically, information on the racial and ethnic composition of the entering class is not made public until October, since the required federal reporting of race and ethnicity is based on a census of students as of October 1. We decided to make information available earlier this year due to intense interest in the issue, even while recognizing that the data from the October 1 census may be somewhat different from what was reported on September 6. Moving the date up even earlier would have

been impossible since, due to new protocols that followed from the Supreme Court ruling, information on the race and ethnicity of admitted students (individually or in aggregate) was not made available to anyone in the admissions office or to senior administrators until the entire admission process, including any waitlist activity, was concluded deep into the summer.

As we move forward with our review of the past year and expanding strategies for future recruitment, we understand the need for additional input and consultation. We have had a dedicated group of administrators and faculty working on these issues for some time, including faculty as recommended previously by the DIOB. We welcome the opportunity to continue collaborating with members of the DIOB further as we continue to assess these critical issues, including reviewing with the DIOB more fine-grained data that cannot be made public.

The DIAP and Title VI

Your memo raises a number of excellent questions about how the events of the past year — including increasing reports of Title VI violations and rising concerns about harassment and discrimination based on religion, nationality and shared heritage — will impact the University’s work on diversity and inclusion, especially in light of Brown’s voluntary resolution with the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights that was announced on July 8, 2024.

We want to acknowledge that, at Brown and many other colleges and universities across the country, there are deep and valid concerns that higher education leaders are under pressure to suppress free speech and open discourse to advance specific political ends. In this turbulent environment, it is vitally important that we continue to stand by our firm commitment to academic freedom and freedom of expression, while at the same time ensuring that no member of our community is subject to hate or dehumanization. This is essential if we are to be an inclusive community.

As the DIAP makes clear, Brown’s conception of “inclusion” is broad. Our goal is to provide a welcoming and supportive environment for all members of our community. The cover letter to the 2016 DIAP states that:

“All Brown students, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, nationality, religious and political views, and other aspects of their identities, are accepted because of their enormous potential as scholars and leaders. It is imperative that all students — and, indeed, all members of our community, including faculty and staff — are valued, respected, and provided with equal opportunities to thrive at Brown. Our challenge and opportunity is to bring faculty, students, and staff together to ensure we are living up to our ideals.”

The events of the past year have challenged us to think creatively and thoughtfully about how we can make this vision a reality, not only to remain compliant with Title VI, but also because it is essential to advancing Brown’s mission of education and scholarship in the service of society. The lessons of this past year will be important as we move into the next phase of envisioning Brown’s work on diversity and inclusion.

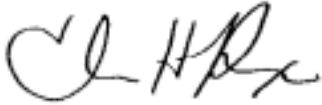
Conclusion

We want to conclude by addressing an observation shared on the first page of your memo — where you state that “the broader US climate on diversity and inclusion could eviscerate Brown’s commitment” to diversity and inclusion. We simply can’t and would not allow this to happen. As the DIAP makes clear, our commitment is grounded in and central to our academic mission:

“A diverse and inclusive community, in which a wide range of experiences and views are represented and all individuals are valued and treated with respect, is the best possible environment for fostering the advancement of knowledge and discovery through free inquiry, and it is also critical to knowledge production in a globalized world.”

We look forward to working with the DIOB and other members of the Brown community as we move this important work forward into the next decade.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'CHPaxson'.

Christina H. Paxson
President

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Francis J. Doyle III'.

Francis J. Doyle
Provost