Executive Summary

The vision, purpose and mission of the President's Commission on Inclusion were provided by President Lester Lefton. He intended for the Commission to build upon the University’s Strategic Diversity Plan while developing advice for his own consideration. The President’s charge to the Commission was to develop broad-based initiatives—including specific ideas and recommendations—that would be actionable within the resources available to Kent State. Importantly, the collective outcome of these recommendations should be to move the university beyond its current state to a new desired state of inclusiveness where all individuals feel welcomed and encouraged to achieve their fullest potential. President Lefton also asked the Commission to be attentive to our context in Northeast Ohio.

In order to complete its charge, the Commission gathered information relevant to inclusive excellence from a variety of individuals from the University and its constituent communities. The Commission analyzed and synthesized the information and identified four interdependent themes/categories emerged that provided a framework for subcommittee work and recommendations. The categories are accountability; access, recruitment and retention; institutional climate and culture; and community relationships. Each subcommittee prepared a report with recommendations. The entire Commission prioritized the recommendations from each of the four categories.

Following are the Commission’s 15 priority recommendations from the four categories that can be implemented in the near term. All of the recommendations from the Commission’s four working subcommittees, including those with longer term implications, are found in the appendix to this report.

1. Clearly identify a Kent State mission and vision statement on inclusive values that is circulated widely and serves as the seminal document for inclusion and inclusive action by all Kent State university stakeholders.

2. Brand Inclusive Excellence, similarly to the branding of Excellence in Action, throughout the Kent State campuses and communities, to secure “buy in” to the mission, vision and value statements developed by the President’s Commission on Inclusion.

3. Launch presidential initiatives that promote leadership on the issue of diversity and inclusion as core institutional values.

4. Restructure the Office of Diversity to increase accountability for diversity-related outcomes and provide it with the necessary functional authority, support services and systems to carry out its mission. The commission recommends that the university’s chief diversity officer position be a cabinet-level officer reporting directly to the University President.

5. Develop and implement a university-wide accountability system (with performance indicators and measures) that requires all academic and administrative units to make
public their annual diversity progress. The president and board should require an annual inclusive excellence action component within each senior leader’s evaluation and goals.

6. Appoint an ongoing presidential advisory committee to monitor progress on commission recommendations. Reports on inclusion-related advances and challenges should be presented to the President and the Board of Trustees at least annually.

7. Support and enhance where necessary university recruitment, retention and scholarship programs in order to position Kent State as a first-choice destination for high-achieving first-generation, targeted and underrepresented students.

8. Remove physical barriers for all facilities, grounds and transportation systems to ensure the safety and well-being of all students, faculty, staff and visitors.

9. Recruit, appoint, promote and retain diverse faculty and staff, with the goal of structured representation at all levels of the university. While structured representation is important in all units, particular attention should be given to senior-level leadership positions within the divisions of Enrollment Management and Student Affairs and Academic Affairs.

10. Develop a vigorous pipeline of highly qualified diverse teachers and administrators for Ohio schools through aggressive recruitment and retention measures and community engagement by the College of Education, Health and Human Services.

11. Promote organizational learning through campus summit meetings, conversations, training and professional development, shared experiences and other venues designed to encourage intentional, systematic and regular interaction across units and advocacy groups.

12. Create welcome centers on all Kent State campuses that not only function as information gateways but also reinforce inclusive excellence values and reflect a warm, inviting campus culture in the first point of contact for visitors and students.

13. Form a student commission to develop a “step outside your boundaries” initiative that will create intentional, effective opportunities for students of all backgrounds to connect, with the goal of developing meaningful, long-term relationships with persons different than themselves that will survive after graduation.

14. Facilitate specific connective activities, such as an annual institutional “encampment” on inclusion bringing together students, faculty, administrators and community leaders.

15. Support and strengthen service learning, community engagement, and immersion opportunities focusing on Kent State’s civic service mission as a public university and linking faculty, students and staff to diverse groups within the community, and give this work value in faculty and staff retention, evaluation and reward systems.
President’s Commission on Inclusion

Rev. Ronald Fowler
Chairperson

Members

Rachel Anderson
Director
Adult Student Center

Tim Berard
Associate Professor
Justice Studies

Surinder Bhardwaj
Emeritus Professor
Geography

Patricia Book
Vice President
Regional Development

Willie Boston
Director, Equal Opportunity/
Affirmative Action

Kenneth Burhanna
Assistant Professor
Libraries & Media Services

Jennifer Chestnut
Executive Director
Hillel

Flo Cunningham
Director
University Communications &
Marketing

Francis Dorsey
Interim Chairperson & Professor
Pan-African Studies

Joanne Kilgour Dowdy
Professor
Teaching, Leadership & Curriculum
Studies

Alvin Evans
Associate Vice President
Human Resources

Rick Feinberg
Professor
Anthropology

Danielle Flickinger
Graduate Assistant
Student Accessibility Services

George Garrison
Professor
Pan-African Studies

Geraldine Hayes-Nelson
Associate Dean
Undergraduate Studies

Justin Hilton
Assistant Professor
Architecture & Environmental Design

Gus Hoyas
Principal Owner
Gus A. Hoyas & Associates Insurance
Agency, Inc.

Nancy Jones
Assistant Professor
Nursing

Barbara Mathews
Retired Educator/Banker
Community Member

Laura Mazur
All Together Now, Inc.
Community Member

Molly Merryman
Associate Professor
Trumbull Campus

Nike Olabisi
Past Vice President
Kent State Gospel Choir
Graduate Student

Administrative Liaisons

Marlene Dorsey
Senior Special Assistant
Regional Development and
Office of Diversity and Academic
Initiatives

Steve Michael
Vice Provost
Office of Diversity and Academic
Initiatives

Charlene Reed
Secretary to the Board of Trustees
Senior Assistant to the President

Yank Heisler
Special Assistant to the President

Final Report, Commission on Inclusion