Report of the Commission on Inclusion:  
"Reaching New Heights"

Inclusive excellence is one distinctive quality that characterizes great institutions. By definition, a University exists to further the pursuit of knowledge. Inclusive excellence is a reminder that a university’s “customers” and “custodians” enrich the process of learning as each is allowed to contribute to the process of learning as respected and valued partners.

Kent State University long has been a leader in the creation of opportunities for all to find a place within its hallowed halls for teaching and learning, for work and research. In 1947, Dr. Oscar Ritchie, professor of sociology, was the first African-American to be appointed to a faculty position at any state university in Ohio. President Emeritus Carol A. Cartwright became the first woman to serve as president of a state university in Ohio in 1991.

It is not accidental that the University now has returned to one of its signature goals: to provide a welcoming environment for all to develop their minds and enrich their lives through understanding of, respect for, and participation in diverse traditions.

The Commission on Inclusion has sought to explore ways Kent State University might continue to soar to new heights in relational excellence. That is what lies at the heart of “inclusive excellence” — a commitment to establish a culture and climate whereby each member of the university family is valued and respected.

The pursuit of knowledge is not limited to academic matters. An inclusive environment allows a campus community to take advantage of the wealth of knowledge available within diverse traditions and perspectives. Tapping into such a rich reservoir for learning is the intent of the recommendations contained in this report.

It needs to be underscored that inclusive excellence is a call to personal action as well as institutional accountability. The creation of a welcoming environment cannot be left to chance or placed outside of the core convictions of the University. The Commission on Inclusion has sought to recommend measures which ensure the integration of inclusive excellence into those core convictions.

New ways of measuring progress in the attainment of such an environment will need to be considered. But the dynamism for achieving inclusive excellence will be unleashed through opportunities for every member of the campus community to become better informed and involved in the rich variety of histories available at a university.

It is to this end that this report is now released. May this report provide the initial impetus for Kent State University to “soar to new heights” in creating and maintaining a welcoming environment for everyone connected with this institution.

December 2008
Executive Summary

The vision, purpose and mission of the President’s Commission on Inclusion were provided by President Lester LeFon. 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 LeFon 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 that emerged: 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

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Final Report, Commission on Inclusion
President’s Commission on Inclusion

Vision, Mission and Charge

Since his arrival as the 11th president of Kent State University in July 2006, Dr. Lester A. Lefton has placed high priority upon building the diversity of the university’s student body, faculty and staff, and ensuring that Kent State campuses are places where all people feel welcome and all points of view are respected. Toward this end, in November 2007 he announced the creation of a presidential Commission on Inclusion, chaired by the Reverend Ronald J. Fowler, a 1959 graduate and highly respected community leader in Northeast Ohio.

In order to establish a widely representative Commission, President Lefton invited nominations and expressions of interest from the university and broader communities. A total of twenty-two (22) commission members were selected from a pool of more than 80 interested individuals. At the group’s initial meeting in January 2008, President Lefton shared his vision for inclusive excellence at Kent State, set forth the mission and purpose of the Commission, and issued the charge. President Lefton asked the Commission to complete its work and submit a report within 12 months.

President Lefton’s enduring vision for inclusive excellence at Kent State is to create an environment, a community that welcomes, affirms and empowers all people. Such a community reflects the demography of its society, embraces the history and contributions of all people, cultivates sensitivities to thoughts, feelings and deeds different from one’s own, and furthermore, requires and promotes the supporting curricula to achieve these priorities. Inclusive excellence as a characteristic is manifested in individual and collective actions that transform, create and sustain an environment that is conducive to the success of all. Essentially, the President envisions an institution where inclusive excellence is an imbedded core value.

The President’s institutional vision for inclusive excellence leads directly to the Commission’s purpose/mission and charge. Specifically, the purpose of Kent State’s Commission on Inclusion is to develop a comprehensive, broad-based initiative designed to improve the sensitivity and openness of individuals throughout the eight campus system to different views, backgrounds and approaches, thereby creating a welcoming environment for all. Within this context, the Commission was charged to deliver ideas and recommendations to the President that draw upon best practices from universities, businesses and community organizations. The melding of these recommendations should be appropriate to the Northeast Ohio geography and the rich centennial history of traditions at Kent State. A desired outcome of the Commission’s work would be a demonstrable enhancement of inclusion at Kent State University.
Inclusive Excellence: Forging a Working Definition

In accordance with the President’s vision, mission and charge, the Commission believed early on in the process that it was important to define its terms. As a result of extensive committee work and commission deliberation, a definition of inclusive excellence was adopted. The definition ties inclusion to academic excellence and what defines a superior 21st century education for our students. It sees diversity in all its human dimensions and takes the point of view that diversity must pervade our staffing structure as much as our student body.

As a university, Kent State stands for academic excellence; that is, excellence in educating students, conducting research and serving the broader community. Kent State helps students to develop their innate talents so that they may lead rewarding personal and professional lives and become engaged citizens. The university generates new knowledge and understanding that it disseminates through a variety of means; and it applies those insights to address pressing social, cultural, economic and political issues at a regional, statewide, national and international level.

Academic excellence requires inclusiveness. Kent State aims to serve a full spectrum of students—male and female, from all socio-economic classes as well as ethnic, racial, national and religious backgrounds, without discriminating based on sexual orientation, age, learning style, military status, or physical ability. To fulfill its potential, the university must serve a diverse student body which, in turn, requires a diverse faculty, staff and administration, and engagement with diverse communities. Through exposure to diversity by means of intellectual discourse as well as personal contact in classrooms, around the campus, and in the community, members of the Kent State community will learn how to interact fruitfully with others who are different from themselves. Inclusion, thus, is not only a laudable goal in and of itself; it is critical to a superior twenty-first century education.
Listening to Constituencies: Overview of the Process

In alignment with a stated vision, a clear purpose and a working definition of inclusive excellence, the Commission was prepared to carry out its charge. As indicated earlier, the Commission was charged to deliver ideas and recommendations to the President which utilize best practices from universities, businesses and community organizations. The melding of these recommendations should be appropriate to the Northeast Ohio geography and rich centennial history of traditions at Kent State. The Commission’s goal is to assist in actualizing the President’s vision for a welcoming community that seeks to ensure the success of each of its members, whether it is the department secretary, a member of the grounds crew, a member of the faculty, or a member of the Cabinet.

In order to complete its charge, the Commission recognized the need to include attention to the views and perspectives from a wide variety of individuals from the University and its constituent communities. As such, the Commission used several techniques to gather information and perspectives on inclusive excellence that would lead to the development of a comprehensive report with recommendations. These techniques included: gathering data through surveys; holding open forums at several campuses; and reviewing historical information on diversity/inclusion at Kent State and other institutions and organizations. Following is a brief summary of each technique.

Survey

A survey was developed and distributed widely to faculty, staff, students and community representatives. Questions focused primarily on progress, obstacles and suggestions relative to Kent State’s efforts to enhance inclusion. Survey responses served as a springboard for discussion at open forums and as a basis for development of subcommittee reports. A copy of the questionnaire is included in the appendix.

Open Forums

The Commission on Inclusion hosted four forums held at the Kent, Trumbull and Stark campuses. Forums were held on the Kent Campus on June 17 and September 16. The Trumbull Campus forum, held on July 8, also included members from the Ashtabula and Geauga campuses. The Stark Campus forum, held on July 22, also invited participants from the Tuscarawas, Salem and East Liverpool campuses.

All forums allowed faculty, staff, students and community members to share their views, concerns and recommendations on a variety of questions/issues related to inclusive excellence and diversity. Participant comments could be grouped into several broad interdependent categories where similar themes emerged. These categories were: (1) access, recruitment and retention of faculty, staff and students; (2) institutional climate, message and mission; (3) academic/socio-cultural programs and practices; (4) policy and organizational considerations: and (4) community relationships. Report summaries are included in the appendix.
Historical and Background Information

Commission members reviewed extensive historical and background information on diversity/inclusion which helped provide context for the group's work. For example, there were several reports on institutional diversity initiatives that occurred during the past decade. These documents focused on areas such as diversity strategy and planning; organizational structure; cultural/multicultural programming; recruitment and retention initiatives; and race relations, among others. Most recently, in 2006 Kent State completed a comprehensive five-year strategic diversity plan. This plan serves as a companion to the work of the commission. Commission members also reviewed a variety of relevant documents from other organizations that provided insight into diversity/inclusion strategies. For example, Commission members reviewed a document entitled Now is the Time: Meeting the Challenges for a Diverse Academy, produced by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities and the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges.
Framing the Commission’s Recommendations

After a thorough review of information gathered through forums, surveys and scanning of best practices, Commission members identified four primary themes that framed the foundation for its subcommittee work and recommendations. The four themes were accountability, access, recruitment and retention, institutional climate and culture, and community relationships. Each of the four subcommittees prepared a report with recommendations. Using a deliberative process, the entire Commission reviewed and prioritized the recommendations in each category. Fifteen (15) priority recommendations have been identified by the Commission.

Following are the three or four priority recommendations in each area 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.

Accountability

1. 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.

2. 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. For units and for individuals, performance should be linked to rewards and outstanding progress should be acknowledged and celebrated campus-wide.

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

Access, Recruitment and Retention

1. Support and enhance where necessary university recruitment, retention and scholarship programs serving first-generation, targeted and underrepresented student populations to include, but not limited to African-American, Hispanic/Latino and Native American communities. This includes engagement with diverse communities and schools, especially in Northeast Ohio. We believe the plan should position Kent State to be a first-choice destination for high-achieving students across the spectrum.

2. Assess and develop a plan of action (including timetables) for removing physical barriers for all facilities, grounds and transportation systems to ensure the safety and well-being of all students, faculty, staff and visitors.
3. Recruit, appoint, promote and retain diverse faculty and staff, with the goal of achieving structured representation at all levels of the university. Particular attention should be given to senior-level leadership positions within the divisions of Enrollment Management and Student Affairs and Academic Affairs.

4. 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. While this recommendation focuses specifically on that college’s unique and influential role, it is expected that all Kent State campuses and colleges will contribute to P-16 initiatives.

**Institutional Climate and Culture**

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

3. 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.

4. 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.

**Community Relationships**

1. 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.

2. 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. This effort should consider how best to create “common ground” spaces where all students congregate and connect as well as how various campus facilities (such as Oscar Ritchie Hall, Hillel Jewish Student Center, Women’s Resource Center, and others) might be used in launching or forwarding the work of the commission and community engagement.
3. Facilitate specific connective activities, such as an annual institutional “encampment” on inclusion. Encampment is an invitational, one-day fall retreat that brings students, faculty, administrators and community leaders into contact with each other in an informal, comfortable situation that fosters enlightening conversations. It has a “no-titles” policy, meaning everyone at the event is treated equally, and the agenda will include an inspiring speaker on the topic of the day, community-building sessions featuring cooperative activities and games, eating together and discussing shared concerns and campus and community issues on an equal level. Its purpose is to create an open dialogue, rather than trying to change or form policies.

4. Support and strengthen service learning, community engagement and immersion opportunities that further Kent State’s civic service mission as a public university and link faculty, students and staff to diverse groups within the community, and give this work value in faculty and staff retention, evaluation and reward systems.
In Memoriam

Willie Clemmon Boston, Kent State’s director of equal opportunity/affirmative action, was a member of the Commission on Inclusion. The impact of his sudden death on June 11, 2008, was deeply felt by members of the Commission. His calm demeanor and insightful observations proved invaluable assets to the Commission on Inclusion.

Mr. Boston spent a lifetime helping organizations comply with federal statutes related to diversity and equity. His concern went beyond legal compliance. Mr. Boston’s deepest concern was the humanization of relationships. His professional career was committed to the pursuit of respect and fairness within institutional life. He proved an invaluable partner and contributor to the formative work of this Commission.

It is with profound gratitude that the Commission on Inclusion recognizes and salutes this good servant-leader, and expresses a genuine regard for his membership on the Commission of Inclusion.