Infusing Diversity-Inclusion & Social Justice Actions Into Personal Practice in 2021: A CILMAR Cycle of Assessment Report

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Introduction

For calendar year 2021, CILMAR set a goal of infusing the intersections of intercultural, equity-diversity- inclusion (EDI) and social justice (SJ) into all its programs. Specific responsibilities for each CILMAR professional included: (a) embedding EDI or SJ assessments into their programs and projects (b) building formal and/or informal relationships with EDI-SJ partners, and (c) reporting weekly on these efforts to other CILMAR members on said efforts.

The purpose of this inquiry has been to understand the experiences of CILMAR staff in working to achieve the above goals, particularly goal (b), and to create a set of suggestions that might help fuel improvements in this aspect of CILMAR's efforts for 2022.

Methodology

The method employed for this inquiry was semi-structured interviewing. A question protocol (see appendix A) was developed (by the IDA+A specialist), and approved by the CILMAR Director. Since the focus of the CILMAR Cycle of Assessment is continuous improvement, the question protocol also invited each informant to brainstorm, with the interviewer, actionable improvements in process or structures for the coming year. Interviews with all CILMAR professional staff (N = 5) took place during the week of December 13-17, via virtual meeting software, using real-time auto-transcription of oral data.

Executive Summary

Rewards

- All informants report that they are "thinking more often" about the intersections between intercultural work and EDI-SJ work and reported at least one personal success story.
- Multiple informants felt more valued now that their job allows them to infuse a personal passion for diversity-inclusion and/or social justice into their everyday work.
- Informal, task-driven and pre-existing EDI-SJ relationships have been rewarding during this past year.

Challenges

- There was an articulated need- particularly from less experienced informants- for additional support to be effective at developing EDI partnerships.
- Staff have found it harder to build relationships when interactions are mostly virtual.
- Some staff struggle to feel authentic when operating in EDI-SJ contexts; others worry about the ethics and responsibilities of privilege when trying build collaboration.
- Newly assigned pairings with Purdue EDI-SJ professionals have often been low-reward.

Findings

In the remainder of this report, we will look more closely at the challenges and rewards, as reported by informants, before moving on to summarize suggestions (from these same informants) of how CILMAR might, in the next year, continue to improve at infusing equity, diversity, inclusion and social justice into all of its intercultural activities and programs.

What has been challenging?

Challenges that CILMAR professionals have faced while trying to meet EDI-SJ goals this year are:

- relationship building,
- juggling priorities, and
- concerns about inauthenticity and/or ethical uses of privilege in EDI-SJ contexts.

Relationship building

Not surprisingly, CILMAR professionals have found that the continued paradigm of mostly-remote work has impaired their ability to build relationships with Purdue colleagues in the DEI-SJ space, resulting in relational uncertainty and considerable frustration. The more extroverted of the CILMAR professionals, in particular, mourned the lost opportunities to connect informally in the hallways and event rooms of Purdue.

> *"You don't run into people on campus, you don't see people in the office or in passing. You don't have the ease of going out of your way to stop by to see somebody else …."*

The more introverted of CILMAR professionals also noted the difficulty of building relationships via virtual means, but with a slightly different focus. One spoke of the *"…non-verbal communication cues"* which are absent from or more easily missed when communicating primarily through video conferencing and written communication. Another noted that video-based interactions are *"…always more task-focused"* and that EDI-SJ partners seemed to have little capacity to collaborate while also struggling to fulfill core functions during a pandemic.

A majority reported having at least one assigned EDI-SJ partner from whom little to no response was received after overtures of collaboration from CILMAR staff. For example,

> *"I would say probably for every 10 emails I send out to them, I'm lucky if I get one response."*

Although nearly all informants reported developing stronger relationships with at least one EDI-SJ partner, roughly half of the informants expressed a worry that corresponded to this sentiment:

> *"I feel like I'm gonna get dinged because I didn't have enough to do formally with my [assigned] liaison."*

One informant mentioned, in this second year of the pandemic, a growing mismatch between the EDI-SJ offerings of the Center to which they had been assigned and the CILMAR goal of exploring the intersections of intercultural competence work and EDI-SJ work. To this informant, it seemed that this Center along with other Purdue EDI-SJ offices most often see CILMAR as a transactional provider of support in the form of funding, publicity and/or event attendees. Other informants also raised concerns about EDI-SJ offices not fully understanding CILMAR's mission or its desire for more purposeful and outcomes-focused collaboration.

Finally, some informants noted that 2020 EDI-SJ focused group activities (a virtual book group and the Pursuing Racial Justice Lecture series) felt more rewarding than this year's more individualized activities. On a similar note, one informant cited the negative effect of no longer sharing physical office space (which facilitates discussion), while another commented that:

> *"Without talking with colleagues/partners regularly about DEI work, there is a lack of motivation for me to engage in DEI. I [tend to] lose sight of long-term goals on DEI and don't take time to reflect."*

Juggling Priorities

Most informants spoke in some way about the difficulty of trying to balance family and work during this long period of shifting work paradigms at Purdue and around the world. While work-from-home has made it easier to "attend" an EDI or SJ focused event, it also (as described earlier) has made it harder to build relationships out of such attendance. Further, as the pandemic has evolved into its second year, a more experienced informant noted her growing desire to be protective of evening and weekend time—when many events are typically scheduled-- in order to focus on personal and family wellness. A younger informant stated:

> *"During the pandemic, it is hard to organize multiple tasks and set priorities, because I have to take on more family responsibilities when I am physically at home. Since DEI is just one part of my responsibilities, it is often overlooked when I am too focused on other primary roles."*

Inauthenticity, Privilege & Differing Spheres of Expertise

Despite (or perhaps because of) the previous years' group anti-racism work, the majority-White CILMAR staff continues to work to overcome a certain sense of discomfort on moving into EDI-SJ workspaces on campus and beyond. One informant wondered:

> "*How to, you know, be a better ally to diversity inclusion in general? [Knowing] what other institutions are doing, I think would be helpful.*"

This individual also very frankly mentioned, *"… feeling like an outsider…when I go into the diversity and inclusion world."*

Other CILMAR professionals spoke of wanting *"…NOT to be a burden"* to Purdue EDI professionals, and of wanting *"…NOT to make more work [for them]."* Two informants framed this discomfort as struggling to find a context in which both the CILMAR and the EDI professional could fruitfully combine their separate but overlapping areas of expertise. In the words of one of these latter two informants, the challenge is

> *"...for us [CILMAR] to find ways of continuing to grow our expertise without stepping on other kinds of expertise or using the fact that we have certain types of positional privilege."*

What has been rewarding?

Nearly all CILMAR professionals were able to identify rewards from the last year of attempting to infuse EDI-SJ aspects into their intercultural work. The rewards identified fell into four categories:

- Feeling "seen" –e.g. valued for one's whole and authentic EDI-SJ self,
- Deepening relationships around EDI-SJ matters with new or former partners,
- Structures of accountability, and
- Personal growth.

Feeling "Seen"

Now that CILMAR's annual internal goal-setting process intentionally includes EDI & SJ objectives, multiple CILMAR professionals spoke of feeling pleased that they can bring their whole and authentic self to work. For two informants, the job now draws more fully on their prior disciplinary training; for one of these, it also now aligns more with their self-defined personal inclinations than was the case in this person's initial months on the CILMAR team. To quote two of these informants:

> *"I think that my real job makes more sense now that CILMAR has acknowledged [the importance of] EDI-SJ."*
>
> *"As a minority I'm glad to see that Purdue is making efforts to promote the [EDI-SJ] work – at both a structural and an individual level."*

Relationships

Despite the difficulty of forming and deepening relationships this past year, all informants have found rewards when EDI-SJ partnerships do flourish. Even the individual who expressed inner feelings of inauthenticity in EDI-SJ contexts found that: *"When [interactions] did occur, they were rewarding."* Another informant expressed this feeling thusly:

> *"…to both develop a relationship with the person and then have a shared mission and to touch base with each other on a routine basis. I found to be super helpful because I think we both acknowledged that we had things to learn from each other, so I felt like it was a partnership and all the best senses of what a partnership could be."*

Two other informants spoke of having received strong appreciative feedback from a particular Cultural Center director with whom CILMAR has worked with more intentionally over the past year.

Structures of Accountability

Some CILMAR professionals found that new structures of accountability to one another were rewarding. For example, as articulated in response to the question about what has been rewarding this year, one informant stated:

> *"Well, I think the addition of the questions in SCRAPS that ask us about [EDI-SJ actions]… has been effective because on a weekly basis now I actually reflect back and think, oh, what did I do and if I didn't do anything, I'm motivated to go ahead and put something on my calendar for the next week. Oh, I need to reach out to so and so. Or you know, it's time for me to check in about X or Y, right? So it's a consistent reminder without being too burdensome."*

Another appreciated the challenge to 'backwards design' EDI-SJ elements into the programs for which they serve as project lead. This informant found it rewarding to have created a rubric that brought EDI-SJ perspectives more intentionally into the decision-making process for CILMAR grants distribution, and of successfully recruiting a grants review committee that had a more varied ethnic composition than had been the case in previous years.

Two CILMAR professionals were grateful for the reflective opportunities afforded by being required to create regular social media posts that were attentive to the intersections between intercultural work and EDI-SJ matters. For example, one spoke of the joy of *"…getting 250 'likes' overnight…"* to a social media post on a DEI topic.

Personal Growth

The 2021 Cycle of Assessment goals for CILMAR focused on improving programs and building relationships, not on personal growth. Nevertheless, two informants mentioned personal growth when asked to define the rewards of focusing more on EDI-SJ matters.

For example, one informant reflected on the intercultural rubric and spoke of being able to identify personal growth in the areas of empathy, emotional resilience and tolerance of ambiguity. Moreover, in the course of collaborating with another CILMAR teammate on a project recently, this same informant came to a realization of having become much more able to pull their own weight when required to *"put on a critical lens."* To quote:

> *"…and then we got to the critical lenses and I said, 'So [teammate], when you look at the tools and you give it the critical lens … what are the questions that you ask yourself?' But I found out I knew what the questions were. I finally knew what the questions were… [in contrast to] two years ago, when [this teammate] would challenge me on those things, I didn't know the questions."*

Another CILMAR informant, despite having earlier related to the interviewer a feeling of EDI-SJ inauthenticity when it came to liaison work, found it rewarding to have been able to recognize that a newly re-designed curriculum activity was *"…ruffling some feathers … in this particular group."* In this more curricular realm, the informant found a rewarding sense of EDI-SJ efficacy in soliciting feedback from the students about the assignment and in persuading the curriculum team that *"…we need to be more sensitive to this particular issue [and change the assignment]."*

What If? What Next?

As the interviews drew to a close, each informant was invited to brainstorm what is "the next step" for infusing EDI-SJ perspectives into CILMAR for calendar year 2022. Some informants were eager to "dream big," suggesting that it was time for "*Some sort of larger collaboration… around faculty development [that]…sits at the intersection of inclusion, equity and intercultural [learning]*," while others merely hoped for reductions in their workload.

The majority of suggestions were around:

- Being more purposeful about EDI-SJ liaison pairings or collaborations, and
- Creating more structures of intentionality.

Liaison Pairings and EDI-SJ Collaborations

Most informants felt that having each CILMAR staff member assigned to liaison duties for/with a specific EDI-SJ center leader or professional was a frustrating enterprise rather than a productive one. The data gathered via the semi-structured interviews indicate that connections to an EDI-SJ professional have felt rewarding when:

- a shared EDI-SJ task connects both the CILMAR staff member and the EDI-SJ professional to recent strategic Purdue initiatives,
- a pre-existing work or friendship connection exists between a CILMAR staff member and an EDI-SJ professional, or
- the CILMAR professional shared an identity characteristic with the group which the EDI-SJ professional's Center was created to serve.

Younger staff members were particularly eager for more direction in how to connect *effectively* with EDI-SJ partners and how to juggle priorities so that EDI-SJ work does not repeatedly get set aside in favor of more tasks that seem either more central to the intercultural mission or more urgent or both. More experienced informants are also wondering whether supporting events put on by Cultural Centers is a productive use of limited time.

> *"Do we need to be supporting, for example, our cultural centers and some of our colleagues who traditionally have asked for our support with events? Is there something else we could be doing instead?"*

Two informants suggested that perhaps CILMAR needed to do more investigation into which members of specific EDI-SJ offices had the bandwidth, power and/or will to collaborate. Suggestions for improvements to the liaison assignment idea included the following:

- Reducing assigned duties to allow time for the persistent pursuit of collaboration,
- Researching what might be the "natural connections" between a Center focused in EDI-SJ work and a center focusing on ICL work, either at Purdue or elsewhere,
- Thinking more about what the outcome of liaison work is intended to be,
- Instituting some sort of needs analysis process with EDI-SJ partners,
- Engaging in:
    - "…collaborative dialogue where we dream together" &/or
    - joint professional development with EDI-SJ partners and potential partners.

Structures of Intentionality

One measure of success of the CILMAR Cycle of Assessment is the degree to which all participants have come to believe that structures of intentionality can make a meaningful difference in outcome(s). The informants suggested that CILMAR consider the following for calendar year 2022:

- An annual "Intersections Award"- co-managed by CILMAR and EDI-SJ entities,

- A CILMAR EDI-SJ employee of the month award to increase motivation,
- A moratorium on new projects to allow focusing on deeper EDI-SJ relationships,
- Designating a certain percentage of the professional development slots at regular staff meetings to focus on EDI-SJ discussions and group reflection,
- Requiring all staff members to post regular EDI-SJ content to CILMAR social media, and
- Committing to individualized IDI coaching for each team member (or something similar) to improve team efficacy, with the help of CIE or an outside consultant.

Conclusion

The initial quantitative data from the 2021 Cycle of Assessment (see Stahl &Yngve, 2022) indicate that CILMAR professionals have been active in a broad variety of endeavors that support EDI-SJ efforts at and beyond Purdue, just as they were in 2020. By the standards of some organizations, this would count as a resounding success.

The qualitative data discussed here reveal a different perspective -- a prevailing concern among CILMAR staff about not doing enough or being expert enough (when it comes to EDI-SJ work). As related above, multiple informants expressed fear or shame when talking about how their EDI-SJ efforts might be judged, either by their CILMAR peers or by Purdue colleagues of color). While this year's Cycle of Assessment goals did not (unlike last year) require attending a specific number of EDI-SJ events, CILMAR specialists clearly continue to feel pressure to be visibly present as part of Purdue's EDI-SJ community.

These interviews also reveal that there is a disparity among CILMAR professionals as regards the rewards of engaging in this transdisciplinary Intercultural-EDI-SJ efforts. While some informants have found personal fulfillment in having an intercultural job that openly embraces intersections with EDI-SJ work, others have found that attempting to work towards CILMAR's EDI-SJ goals while also overhauling one's primary program content and focus (due to a pandemic) and/or managing family crises (due to a pandemic) is primarily an exercise in frustration. Some found their primary reward in relationship building (e.g. mentoring colleagues of color) or fine-tuning curriculum, others found that focusing on increasing the diversity of program applicants or review committee members was rewarding.

In short, these data suggest that CILMAR's 2022 goal-setting process should focus on continuing to nurture a strong foundation of efficacy and agency. It will be important to pay attention to individual staff differences in bandwidth, extroversion, positionality and experience. Informants would like: structures of group reflection to be strengthened, liaison pairings to be reconfigured and, particularly in the case of younger staff members, more structures that help them build successes in authentically connecting EDI-SJ work to their current portfolio of duties.

Appendix A: Question Protocol for Semi-structured Interviews

1) **How has the evolving pandemic shaped your interactions with colleagues this past year?**
    - Prompts
        - How do you stay engaged & connected with them?
        - Does it differ for folks within CILMAR and outside CILMAR?
2) **Who is/are your formally assigned diversity –inclusion or social justice partner(s) for CILMAR**?
    - Prompts
        - Did you and your inclusion partner(s) set up (or evolve) a structure to stay connected during this pandemic year?
        - How did that go?
        - Have you developed any informal diversity-inclusion or social justice partnerships this year?
3) **Looking back across this past calendar year, what has been rewarding to you about this inclusion liaison work for CILMAR**?
    - Prompts
        - What was the outcome that most surprised you? Why?
        - What has been your own primary take-away or "learning outcome" from this?
        - What keeps you motived to continue with this work?
        - Tell me more.
        - Has your liaison communicated to you that they found this partnership rewarding?
        - Can you be more specific?
        - What if? What next?
4) **Looking back across this past calendar year, what has been <u>challenging</u> to you about this inclusion liaison work for CILMAR**?
    - Prompts
        - Was there a challenge that surprised you? Why?
        - How does that make you feel?
        - What have you learned about yourself or about Purdue from experiencing these challenges?
        - Has your liaison communicated to you that they found challenges in attempting to work with CILMAR?
        - Can you be more specific?
        - What if? What next? Tell me more.
5) **What else would you like to share with me (confidentially or otherwise) about incorporating inclusion into our definition of CILMAR's excellence?**