

Annual Report to the University Senate

Academic Year 2025-2026

Senate DEIJA Committee

Committee Charge: This committee shall review University policies, practices, and conditions relevant to supporting and promoting justice, equity, diversity, accessibility, and inclusion among students, faculty and staff.

2025/2026 Senate DEIJA Committee Members:

- ***Micah Heumann, Co-Chair, EP/Honors**
- ***Marie Coppola, Co-Chair, CLAS**
- *Mary Ann Amalaradjou, CAHNR
- *Martha Cutter, CLAS, English, Africana Studies Institute, Social & Critical Inquiry
- *Beth Ginsberg, CLAS (Stamford Campus)
- *Eleanor Ouimet, CLAS
- *Karen Skudlarek, Campus Tech Services
- *Eduardo Urios-Aparisi, CLAS
- *Timothy Vadas, College of Engineering
- *Cindy Zhang, CLAS
- Kimberly Curry, The Graduate School
- Greg Bouquot, Registrar's Office
- Vanessa Heigel, Graduate Student
- Jose Narcisse, Undergraduate Student
- Jeffrey Hines, Office for Inclusion and Civil Rights (ex-officio)
- Angelo Montes Diaz, Undergraduate Student
- Audrey Silva, Center for Students with Disabilities

*Senate Member 2025/2026

Summary:

The DEIJA Committee (formerly JEDI) met regularly throughout the 2025–2026 academic year. Building on prior years' work, the committee continued to focus on institutional climate, student support, faculty/staff retention, accessibility, and policy equity. The committee also adapted to evolving institutional and national contexts affecting DEI-related work.

Key themes this year included:

- Strengthening student support systems and understanding utilization trends
- Monitoring faculty and staff retention efforts
- Addressing accessibility and equity in institutional policies
- Ensuring religious inclusivity in academic scheduling

- Revisiting unfinished priorities from prior years

Presentations from campus partners, including the Dean of Students Office and Campus Planning/Facilities—provided critical insight into student needs and operational changes.

The Dean of Students Office reported a continued increase in student utilization, with thousands of student engagements annually and many repeat visits, underscoring growing demand for individualized support services. These services include academic support, mental health referrals, financial concerns, and religious accommodations, highlighting the importance of coordinated, student-centered care.

Specific Topics Addressed:

Topic 1 Exit interviews and retention strategy plan (see 24-25 report for details on retention and KPIs); concern about the departure of Lakeesha Brown from UConn Storrs HR Directorship back to UCHC

Retention of faculty and staff—particularly BIPOC employees—remains a central concern. Building on prior years' emphasis on exit interviews and KPIs, the committee continued to monitor progress on the rollout of exit interview processes.

In 2024–2025, the committee highlighted the need for:

- Systematic exit interview data collection
- Disaggregation by identity and unit
- Integration with broader retention strategies and KPIs

Current Year Developments & Concerns

- The anticipated expansion of exit interviews to the Storrs campus remains unclear in implementation and outcomes.
- The departure of Lakeesha Brown, who had been leading this work, raises concerns about continuity, leadership, and institutional prioritization of retention efforts.
- There is still limited transparency regarding:
 - Participation rates
 - Key findings
 - How data informs policy or intervention

Recommendations

- Reaffirm institutional commitment to exit and “stay” interviews as part of a broader retention strategy
- Ensure continuity of leadership and accountability following personnel transitions
- Align retention efforts with Strategic Plan KPIs, including climate, belonging, and faculty/staff diversity
- Provide an annual public summary of findings (with appropriate confidentiality protections)

Topic 2 Final exam schedule and religious accommodations

Concerns were raised regarding final exams scheduled for Saturdays and conflicts with religious observances. This builds on prior committee engagement with religious accommodation issues, including Senate scheduling adjustments for religious holidays.

The Dean of Students Office emphasized that:

- Students frequently seek assistance navigating religious accommodations and academic responsibilities
- Support structures exist, but navigation can be complex and inconsistent across courses

Key Issues

- Lack of consistent policy implementation across departments
- Burden placed on students and faculty to self-advocate

Recommendations

- Conduct a systematic review of final exam scheduling practices, especially Saturday exams
- Develop clearer, standardized guidance for faculty, students, and staff on religious accommodations

Topic 3 Parking accessibility costs

Summary

Accessibility and equity concerns were raised regarding parking policies, particularly:

- The requirement to pay for Area 1 permits in order to access disabled parking spaces
- Financial and logistical burdens for UConn students, faculty, and staff, as well as visitors to campus, who have temporary or permanent disabilities

Campus Facilities reported upcoming policy changes:

- ADA and special reserve spaces will be accessible to those with both a paid permit and a state-issued handicapped placard
- Accessible van services continue to operate during peak hours

Key Concerns

- Continued cost barriers for those requiring accessible parking
- Equity issues for individuals with:
 - Temporary disabilities (e.g., surgery, pregnancy)
 - Lower financial means
- Lack of clarity for visitors and regional campuses

Recommendations

- Reevaluate the requirement that individuals must pay for standard permits to access ADA parking
- Consider waived permits for those with documented need
- Improve communication about policy changes
- Expand consideration of accessibility beyond compliance toward equity-centered design

Goals:

Strengthen Retention and Climate Efforts

- Ensure full implementation and transparency of exit/stay interviews
- Advocate for measurable, public-facing retention outcomes

Advance Equity in Academic Policies

- Address religious accommodations in scheduling
- Promote consistent and transparent policy implementation

Improve Accessibility and Affordability

- Advocate for equitable parking and physical accessibility policies
- Expand focus on financial accessibility

Enhance Data Transparency and Use

- Push for disaggregated, accessible data dashboards
- Align DEIJA priorities with Strategic Plan KPIs

Support Student Success and Well-Being

- Strengthen collaboration with Dean of Students and advising units
- Focus on disproportionately impacted student populations

Reinvigorate DEIJA Engagement

- Continue outreach to campus stakeholders
- Develop actionable recommendations tied to institutional decision-making