

President Cowen: 'We can do better' on campus diversity

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Finding ways to make significant improvements in diversity at Tulane University and foster an inclusive environment are priorities of President Scott Cowen, who told participants at a recent town hall meeting, "I think it's the right thing for this institution."



Preparing students "to navigate a more diverse world out there" means Tulane must strengthen its "cultural competence," says provost Michael Bernstein. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

A year ago, when Tulane began developing its new strategic plan, Cowen identified diversity and inclusive excellence as "the cornerstone of our vision and strategy for the future." A task force was created to take on the issue, headed by Deborah Love, vice president of [institutional equity](#), and Dr. Maureen Lichtveld, professor and chair of global environmental health sciences.

Members of the Tulane community gathered on Dec. 5 for a town hall dialogue on the topic, led by members of the task force.

Cowen addressed the group, saying that the task force did research to compare Tulane to its peer institutions in key metrics for diversity. While Tulane's progress was similar in many ways to its peers, Cowen said, "We can do better."

Lichtveld agreed. "We are raising the bar," she said, and identifying ways to measure and monitor progress.

At the meeting, faculty, staff members and students sat at round tables, working together on two assignments. First, they identified positive things at Tulane regarding race, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, and ability, as well as cultural, political, religious and other affiliations. Secondly, they listed areas needing attention and suggested solutions.

As positive examples, participants identified the [Center for Public Service](#), the [Office of Multicultural Affairs](#) and the newly created [Office for Gender and Sexual Diversity](#). One speaker reflected the views of many in saying that multicultural affairs is "overworked and under-funded."

Others called for more campuswide discussions about tolerance, especially for entering students, and pointed to the need for better recruitment efforts and financial aid funding to improve student body diversity.

The audience recommendations will be included in the task force's final report.