**A Southern Oregon University “Statement on Diversity”**

***DRAFT* April 8, 2011 *DRAFT***

*Liberal learning is global and pluralistic. It embraces the diversity of ideas and experiences that characterize the social, natural, and intellectual world. To acknowledge such diversity in all its forms is both an intellectual commitment and a social responsibility, for nothing less will equip us to understand our world and to pursue fruitful lives.* -*The Association of American Colleges & Universities' Statement on Liberal Learning*

**Background**

Traditionally in higher education, definitions of diversity have been attempts to create inclusive lists of populations, cultures, beliefs, etc. They often expand to address reasons why diversity is important in the institutional context, but also remain separate from the institution itself—a component of, rather than an embodiment of the institution and its mission.

A more recent approach, forwarded by Milem, Chang, and Antonio, offers a different approach. It suggests that institutions frame diversity as a catalyst for educational excellence*. Inclusive excellence* then becomes the point of diversity and allows institutions to approach the issues of diversity and inclusion from across all elements of their missions. Their work discusses, “…recent empirical evidence that demonstrates the educational benefits of diverse learning environments….[which] indicates that diversity must be carried out in intentional ways in order to accrue educational benefits for student and for the institution."[[1]](#footnote-1)

They then recommend that universities conceptualize diversity, “…*as a process toward better learning* rather than as an isolated objective.” This has many positive implications for Southern Oregon University, as its mission statement calls for SOU to be “an inclusive campus community dedicated to student success, intellectual growth, and responsible global citizenship.” The authors also suggest that institutions clearly articulate diversity’s role in their success and how it is integral to achievement of mission and goals.

**A Statement on Diversity for Southern Oregon University**

Using the above frame, the Diversity & Inclusion Oversight Committee is recommending to the SOU community that the following be adopted as ***The Southern Oregon University Statement on Diversity***:

*The strength of the curricular and co-curricular experiences are necessarily dependent upon a campus community rich with diversity of ethnicity, race, gender, nationality, age, language, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, socioeconomic background, disability, and political affiliation. Without it, the reciprocity of the educational process is diminished.*

*This recognition—and celebration [value?]—of difference requires all members of this academic community to seek knowledge and understanding through their own unique lenses as well as to embrace other perspectives and needs as they tackle the questions and issues put before them.*

*Southern Oregon University is committed to diversity. Specifically, SOU:*

1. ***Is a welcoming community that is committed to inclusive excellence and celebration of difference; [engages all of its diversity in the service of student and organizational learning];***
2. ***Pays close attention to the cultural differences that learners bring to the educational experience and that enhance the learning enterprise;***
3. ***Is focused on student intellectual and social development through the learning outcomes of knowledge, skills, responsibilities, and integrative abilities that a twenty-first century college graduate must achieve;***
4. ***Is committed to an environment that challenges each student to achieve academically at high levels and each member of the campus to contribute to learning and knowledge development;***

*These commitments are clearly reflected throughout the University Studies curriculum, which requires students to achieve competencies in communication, critical thinking, information literacy, citizenship, social responsibility, diversity, and global awareness, in addition to coursework across the sciences, humanities, and social sciences. They are also reflected in the curricular and co-curricular focus on community-based learning and civic engagement, which require students to deeply understand and apply theory and skills to community and global issues.*

*These commitments also acknowledge that both students and the institution itself evolve in thinking, skill, and practice as the experience of difference becomes a source of excellence and an instrument of achievement.*

1. Milem, J.F., Chang, M.J., & Antonio, A.L. Making Diversity Work on Campus: A Research-Based Perspective, a publication of the Association of American Colleges & Universities’ “Making Excellence Inclusive: Preparing Student and Campuses for an Era of Greater Expectations” initiative, Washington, DC, 2005. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)