

PPOHA Grant: a Game Changer for NDNU

An Interview with Provost and Senior Vice President Greg White

As part of our interviews, we sat down with Provost and Senior Vice President Greg White, Ph.D., to talk more in depth about the Title V Part B Promoting Postbaccalaureate Opportunities for Hispanic Americans Program (PPOHA) grant, DEI and social justice at NDNU.

You have been at NDNU for almost 30 years now. How has the university evolved in the areas of social justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion?

Social justice has always been important at NDNU; this goes back to the mission of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur to provide an education for those who would otherwise not be able to get one. The university was a lot less diverse when I came here in 1993. The topic came to the fore in the early 2000s, around the same time that we received a grant from the James Irvine Foundation to improve efforts in this area. Bobby Vaughn was one of the people hired through the grant. He created and distributed campus climate surveys and established the Diversity Council. This was about the same time that the Sisters started the Hallmarks development process. Work in these areas led to reworking the mission statement to include the statement that we are a “diverse and inclusive learning community.” In 2009, NDNU formally became a Hispanic-serving institution, with over 25% of the undergraduate student body identifying themselves as such.

Social justice and diversity are embedded in the curriculum of all three graduate schools. Within the School of Business, there are over 50 classes with diversity content included as part of the curriculum, and the same is true for the School of Psychology where practitioners must have this background to serve a broad range of clients. Within the School of Education, social justice and diversity values underlie everything they do, and there are three full time faculty members with exceptionally strong backgrounds in this area.

Could you talk a little about the outreach to tribal communities? Where do we stand in this area?

We are looking at this from the vantage of developing a long-term partnership. NDNU has a long history of community engagement. One of our first tasks is always to figure out a community's needs and determine how we can serve their needs. We have to find that first partner that we can serve well and build from there. Likely, our ability to provide online programs will serve these communities well and it may dovetail with the work we are doing to explore education in the “meta-verse.” If a virtual reality learning environment is attractive to the tribal communities, then we can do this fairly inexpensively with a computer, headset, and Internet.

What are your thoughts about the \$3 million dollar PPOHA grant?

It is a game changer for us. The grant will allow us to develop core classes as part of the Master of Arts degree program and Graduate Certificate in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Leadership. It is a great feather in our caps as we move these efforts along. It also raises the bar for us

internally. If we are telling people that we are helping to build a core knowledge base in these areas, then we better be doing a great job of it ourselves!

The Master of Arts Program and Graduate Certificate in Diversity and Social Justice will help us build and tap into connections to national DEI experts who could serve as course instructors and presenters for future speaker series and help us find out what is working elsewhere.

The grant also provides for diversity training for faculty members, expands wrap-around support services for students to help them complete their degree programs and greatly adds to available scholarship funds.

We are not sure how all of this will play out, but the beauty of it is that we know what results we want to achieve, and we will have the flexibility to adjust our strategies to get there. Our relatively small size is an asset to doing so.