

## Q&A With the Diversity Task Force Leaders

University Relations - Communications  
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Last week, UA President Ann Weaver Hart announced the creation of a broad-based University task force charged with helping to build a more diverse and inclusive campus environment at the UA.

The Diversity Task Force is chaired by **Javier Duran**, professor of Spanish and border studies and director of the UA Confluentcenter for Creative Inquiry; **Bryan Carter**, associate professor of Africana studies; and **Tannya Gaxiola**, UA assistant vice president for community relations and chair of the UA Diversity Coordinating Council.

The group met for the first time yesterday. (*Read about the meeting in this [Lo Que Pasa article](#) [1].*)

As the task force begins its work, Lo Que Pasa talked with Gaxiola, Carter and Duran about how the group's efforts will benefit everyone on campus.

### Why is it important for us to have this task force, and why now?

**Gaxiola:** President Hart convened this task force to bring together folks from across campus to work on issues of diversity and inclusion. These are core values for UA and something we take pride in, but the recent listening tours with the students showed us that we have a lot of room for improvement. We want to make diversity and inclusion a competitive advantage for UA, so there is no better time to work on these issues than now.

**Carter:** As a land-grant institution, and because it really is the right thing to finally implement at the institutional level as part of our very visible core values, I believe this task force, along with a socially conscious group of students, faculty and staff, can join a rising number of voices calling for positive change. This is a change that will ultimately benefit all if we can only dispel fears, mistrust and instead make a courageous stand. Now is the perfect time.

**Duran:** The timing of the students' demands is a local reflection of the national conversation regarding the place of underrepresented students in higher education. Hence, the creation of the task force responds to these conversations and also intends to dovetail to bring to the forefront recent work done on campus regarding diversity and inclusion issues.

### What will be the task force's first priorities?

**Gaxiola:** The priorities of the task force will be set once we kick off, so I can't say what those are yet. But one thing is for sure – we are going to stay focused on the student experience and on the feedback we received in listening tours and in the students' letter.

**Carter:** We will also work hard to gain the trust of those with whom we are working most closely and try to encourage levels of optimism. Priorities will be based in part on the demands sent out by the students but also looking at the larger picture that will make the institution better for all.

### Who is represented on the task force?

**Gaxiola:** A broad range of departments and constituents are represented on the task force – everyone from athletics to UAPD. The full list is available on [diversity.arizona.edu](https://diversity.arizona.edu) [2]. And there will be an opportunity for even more people to work on the task force through the subcommittees that will tackle subsets of the issues.

### Why should campus care about diversity and inclusion?

**Gaxiola:** We are getting our students ready to be successful in an increasingly global world. That means that when they enter the workforce, they are going to need to collaborate with people who may not look like them or share their same beliefs. A truly diverse and inclusive campus – one where everyone can thrive – will best prepare our students for that future. We also know that bringing together people from different backgrounds is an advantage in research and discovery. That is why our emphasis on interdisciplinarity is so important. Diversity is another way that we can bring together folks from different life experiences and answer those bigger questions that we love to talk about.

**Carter:** I believe the campus should care about diversity and inclusion for several reasons. First and foremost, it is the right thing to do to try to get students and faculty to understand that everyone should be treated equally and given the same opportunities to succeed. Secondly, the world is changing and no longer looks like it did just one generation ago. All of our students need to know how to interact with others as equals, without privilege or bias. Faculty and staff should care so that we all do our part in preparing a student body with a broad and inclusive education in all areas so that they will be successful when they leave U of A, departing with positive memories of their time here instead of negative ones. Our administration should care about diversity and inclusion so that decisions can be made at the institutional level and those values can be fought for on the political front, protecting the educational opportunities for all of our students.

**Duran:** We should care about diversity and inclusion issues as they are a crucial part of our social fabric and a reflection of our institutional values. Our geographical location in a place like Tucson stresses the need to highlight our diversity and inclusion as strengths and as comparative advantages. Our institution needs to reflect more effectively this geocultural and intellectual diversity as its population moves demographically to mirror our community and region.

**What is the difference between the Diversity Coordinating Council and the Diversity Task Force? Will both continue to exist?**

**Gaxiola:** The Diversity Coordinating Council was convened by Provost Comrie about a year and a half ago, and it brought together people from across campus who work in diversity as part of our formal roles. We are the diversity "doers," if you will. Our first charge was to reimagine the chief diversity officer's role and office, and that work will culminate with the end of the CDO search, which is currently ongoing. The next task that we have set ourselves is the development of a University-wide diversity strategy that will integrate with the Never Settle plan. We will be sharing information about that effort soon. The Diversity Coordinating Council will continue to exist and will partner with the new chief diversity officer to support ongoing diversity efforts. The task force is a focused effort with more specific issues to tackle.

**How can interested parties on campus get involved with or support the task force?**

**Gaxiola:** We welcome input from folks across campus and in the community. Information about the meetings will be posted on the [diversity.arizona.edu](https://diversity.arizona.edu) [2] website. All meetings are open and we will save time for comments and questions from people who are not on the task force. If someone wants to engage in one of the subcommittees, they can reach out to me or any of the chairs and we will be happy to include them.

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**Source URL:** <https://uaatwork.arizona.edu/lqp/qa-diversity-task-force-leaders>

**Links**

[1] <https://uaatwork.arizona.edu/lqp/diversity-task-force-begins-work-campus-climate> [2] <https://uaatwork.arizona.edu/diversity.arizona.edu>