University affinity groups have a new home

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This is the first in an occasional series of articles looking at affinity groups at the University.

University affinity groups, which provide faculty and staff from different communities a way to connect and collaborate with each other, have a new organizational home. The groups will now be under the umbrella of University Initiatives.

The University's roster of affinity groups covers employees from several ethnic backgrounds as well as veterans, members of the LGBTQ community and people with disabilities. Colina Ramirez, vice president for university initiatives, says the groups provide benefits for employees and the University.

"It's important for the University to offer these groups because we know it's valuable and beneficial for these populations to connect with others who have had similar experiences," Ramirez said. "We want to recruit and retain a diverse population of employees and these groups help support those efforts."

The University Initiatives website provides details, contact information and upcoming events[1] for each of the affinity groups. They are listed below.

- 2SLGBTQIA+ Faculty & Staff Association[2]
- Asian American Faculty, Staff, and Alumni Association[3]
- Disabled Staff and Faculty Coalition
- Latinx Faculty & Staff Association[4]
- Native American Faculty & Staff Association
- Sankofa, Black Faculty & Staff Association
- Veterans Faculty & Staff Association

Ramirez says the affinity groups provide important mentoring, networking and social opportunities for historically underserved communities.

"We know that a lot of people have felt isolated because of the pandemic, so this seemed like the right time to increase support for these groups," Ramirez said. "These groups can be especially helpful for new employees who don't know many people yet."

In the past, Ramirez said, affinity groups at the University have formed organically. Under the new structure, the groups will receive logistical support as well as $3,000 each in funding to be used for events or to cover other expenses.

Ramirez said the University also wants to create opportunities for affinity group members to talk with University leaders and provide input on their experience at the University.

While it's too early to have a good count on how many employees are involved with the affinity groups, Ramirez said hundreds have already taken part in early events.

The University also offers several faculty-only affinity groups, which remain housed under Faculty Affairs.

"These groups often focus on building community, professional mentorship, and supporting activity for promotion and tenure," said Andrea Romero, vice provost for faculty affairs.

Contact information for these groups is also listed on the University Initiatives website. The groups are listed below.

- Black Faculty Group
- Faculty Women of Color
- Latinx Faculty Group
- Professors of Color
- UA Native Faculty
- UA Faculty of Chinese Heritage Association

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