

# A timeline of “Inclusive Excellence” activities at Georgia Southern University:

- Fall 2018: University announces Inclusive Excellence initiative, which was designed to strengthen and deepen the culture at Georgia Southern University of respecting all people and valuing diversity and inclusion that prepares students for success in a multicultural, global economy.
- Aug. 13, 2018: Fall semester begins. First-year seminar courses now include as a learning component to discuss diversity and inclusion through:
  - Examining their own identity and life experiences to understand how these influence their view of the world and how one behaves and interacts with others.
  - Exploring the differing experiences of privileged and/or minoritized identities and the common ground all identities share.
  - Articulating the challenges and rewards of interacting with others who differ from themselves and the role we all play in creating inclusive and exclusionary environments
- Oct. 25, 2018: Dr. Damon Williams’ keynote address on Statesboro campus: *From Awareness to Action to Innovation: Empowering Leaders Through Inclusive Excellence*. (Dr. Williams is one of the nation’s recognized experts in strategic diversity leadership.)
- Nov. 6, 2018: Dr. Damon Williams’ keynote address on Amstrong campus in Savannah: *From Awareness to Action to Innovation: Empowering Leaders Through Inclusive Excellence*.
- December 2018: Inclusive Excellence Survey launched.
- Feb. 21, 2019: Moveable Feast event in Savannah: *Everyday Anti-Racism Panel: “Everyday Anti-Racism: Images, Institutions, and You”*
- February 25, 2019: Inclusive Excellence Design Summit, featuring action-oriented sessions that focused on best practices to support diversity and inclusion and to prepare Georgia Southern graduates for success in a multicultural, global economy. Open to all students, faculty and staff, this event was facilitated by Dr. Damon A. Williams.
- April 1, 2019: Dr. Marrero starts as new president and commits to furthering Inclusive Excellence efforts.
- July 1, 2019: New university budget begins; includes funding for university’s first-ever Chief Diversity Officer - an Associate Vice President for Inclusive Excellence.
- August 14, 2019: New strategic plan introduced during president’s State of the University address. The plan, which sets our vision, defines our mission and articulates a strategy for achieving goals that are consistent with the core values of the institution, includes:
  - As one of our values: Openness and Inclusion: Georgia Southern University values the diversity of all people, communities, and disciplines with an unwavering commitment to equity and inclusion.
  - As one of our strategic pillars: Inclusive Excellence: Georgia Southern University celebrates diversity in all its forms. All populations will feel valued and respected, regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, religion, national origin, age, sexual orientation or identity, education, or disability. In addition, the University will capitalize on distinctive, unique campus cultures while encouraging strong institutional unity.
- Aug. 14, 2019: “Leadership Scorecards” announced, many of which include diversity and inclusion as a required element for professional developments, as evidenced by divisional priorities that are outlined at <https://president.georgiasouthern.edu/performance-excellence/>
- Aug. 28, 2019: Dr. Carl Reiber, provost and vice president for academic affairs, sends to all faculty, staff and students a report compiled by Dr. Williams that provided an objective third-party

assessment of diversity and inclusion at Georgia Southern as well as recommendations to help the university.

- From the email: *This report is honest and, in some cases, not very flattering. As we expected, it validates our need to focus on these issues, and reinforces our plans that the president outlined in his state-of-the-university address.*
- The report included seven specific recommendations that the university adopted:
  - #1: Rapidly prototype a new strategic diversity leadership framework, accountability system and launch plan to guide your work.
  - #2: Choose big-bet action steps to drive change.
  - #3: Develop the role of AVP for Inclusive Excellence and build an Office of Inclusive Excellence.
  - #4: Strengthen GSU's institutional diversity brand in the area of diversity, equity and inclusion.
  - #5: Elevate the strategic campus integration journey across Statesboro, Armstrong and Liberty campuses.
  - #6: Develop a campus-wide lateral diversity infrastructure in every school, college and divisional area.
  - #7: Engage the campuses to develop a campus climate survey.
- Sept. 16, 2019: first meeting of the President's Student Advisory Council (PSAC), a student-only advisory group to the president that meets every two weeks to provide honest, on-going discussions between various student groups on campus and the president. A series of town-hall-style meetings, called Courageous Conversations, are planned from this group.
- Oct. 2 & 3, 2019: Dr. Damon Williams hosts two Inclusive Excellence Open Forums.
- Oct. 9, 2019: Author Jennine Capó Crucet speaks on campus; some students are seen on social media burning her book.
- Oct. 11, 2019: President Marrero sends the following email to the university:
  - *I know many of you are concerned and disappointed about the incidents that have been reported over the past two days following a visiting professor's talk on our Statesboro campus.*

*We believe that the ideals we have been discussing over the last year and a half have begun to take hold by our students, faculty and staff. I must say, I have been heartened by some of the reactions to this incident. For example, our student government president Juwan Smith wrote an open letter that says, in part, "Opening the door to organic conversations is essential to learning and appreciating our differences. As we develop these competencies, we become better equipped to understand to address the challenges that accompany diversity and the inclusive environments that we seek to foster."*

*From what we have been able to determine, the night's events were another example of freedom of expression and a continuing debate of differing ideas, which are tenets of our ongoing efforts to align with our values and initiatives encompassing inclusive excellence.*

*Specific to the reported events of that evening, while it's within the students' First Amendment rights, book burning does not align with Georgia Southern's values nor does it encourage the civil discourse and debate of ideas.*

*Yes, I wish our students had engaged in a reasoned discussion. And yes, I wish these discussions had not deteriorated or led to broad generalizations that paint an ugly picture about our university.*

*I continue to encourage each of us to remember to care for each other, including our university guests, and lift each person on our campuses up as one community, remembering that it is our common goal to provide the best environment for our students to learn, grow and succeed. We can, and should, work together.*

*For example, we had a wonderful event on Thursday night, called Protect our Nest, where more than 100 students gathered with local law enforcement officers to really engage and get to know each other as human beings. This event showed us how those relationships can be established and provide a better understanding of each other — in this case what officers face every day and the transformational power of education to our students. Events like that one will bring us closer together as a community, all under the guise of inclusive excellence. We are in this journey together.*

*People. Purpose. Action: Growing ourselves to grow others.*

*Kyle*

- Oct. 14 & Oct. 16, 2019: President Marrero hosted open forums on the Statesboro and Armstrong campuses (for a total of about 5 hours) with students to express fears and frustrations related to the book-burning issue.
- Oct. 15, 2019: The History Department hosts a teach-in about book burning entitled “Book Burning, Censorship and Free Speech in Historical Perspective”
- Oct. 16, 2019: Faculty members hosted a read-in, electronically linking campuses with a back-and-forth presence of readers to “stand up for the values of the institution - inclusiveness excellence - and for intellectual engagement.”
- Nov. 1, 2019: Newly redesigned Inclusive Excellence webpage launched. Linked from the university’s homepage, the page summarizes much of our efforts and links to important campus groups that contribute to this dialogue <https://www.georgiasouthern.edu/inclusive-excellence/>
- Nov. 16, 2019: A GS student posted a video of his class presentation on his own social media account.
- Dec. 2, 2019: A website spreads awareness of the students’ video, saying it was part of a “white nationalist recruitment” effort.
- December 2 & 4, 2019: “Courageous Conversations” events held on Armstrong campus in Savannah and on Statesboro campus. Sponsored by the President’s Student Advisory Committee (PSAC) on Inclusive Excellence, the conversations focused on “Privilege, Respect, and Social Responsibility.”
- Dec. 3, 2019: Georgia Southern reaffirmed our actions and values around Inclusive Excellence with an email sent to all faculty, staff and students (titled “Reaffirming Georgia Southern’s unwavering commitment to equity and inclusion”) announcing that the President’s Diversity Advisory Council has finalized, in a statement, what Inclusive Excellence should mean for all of us at Georgia Southern University. You can see the statement and the email at <https://president.georgiasouthern.edu/communication/messages-from-the-president/message-president-december-3-2019/>
- Dec. 6, 2019: The university releases the following statement to media outlets inquiring about the students’ presentation:

- *It is our understanding this video emanated from a class assignment on a subject of the student's choosing. What he did with his assignment outside the classroom is beyond the control or reach of the University. While individuals are free to express their views, these views in no way align with the values and statements of diversity and inclusion at Georgia Southern University. While it is difficult to hear presentations with which we vehemently disagree, we must uphold the Constitution of the United States. It is even more reason why we at Georgia Southern University must continue our unwavering commitment to equity and inclusion.*
- Jan. 17, 2010: Faculty development workshop around Inclusive Excellence attracts 360 participants
- Jan. 20-22, 2020: Three finalists brought to campus for final stages of the search for Georgia Southern's Chief Diversity Officer. The inaugural AVP & CDO will be asked to lead institutional efforts to implement and refine the strategies and action steps included in the Georgia Southern University Strategic Plan.
- March 1, 2020: Dr. TaJuan Wilson begins as Georgia Southern's first AVP of Inclusive Excellence and chief diversity officer.
- March 27, 2020: Faculty, staff and students sent a short survey to receive feedback as the university begins the process of developing our inaugural Inclusive Excellence Action Plan.
- Spring 2020: Student Government Leaders and faculty senate finalize a joint resolution regarding diverse faculty hiring.
- April 23, 2020: Expanded President's Diversity Advisory Council meets to provide input into an Inclusive Excellence Action Plan.
- May 11, 2020: Dr. TaJuan Wins sends a message to faculty and staff:

Dear Georgia Southern University Community,

Whether the reason is work stress, current events, personal struggles or the quarantine, we would like to remind everyone that help is available to Georgia Southern students and employees.

Many in our university community have come forward to say they are troubled by the shooting death of Ahmaud Arbery, the African American jogger who was killed while unarmed in February in the Satilla Shores neighborhood in Glynn County, Georgia.

While the case is under investigation by local and state agencies and details have not been fully ascertained, we understand how our learning community can be genuinely affected and concerned by events that appear contrary to our value of respecting the diversity of all people. We acknowledge the trauma that accompanies shooting deaths and understand the multiplied complexity when racism is the suspected culprit.

As such, Georgia Southern University is committed to extending support to our students, faculty, and staff. We encourage you to engage with our dedicated professionals by utilizing the many on-campus resources available to you that are detailed below as a member of the Georgia Southern University family. Furthermore, I am personally available to provide support to any member of our learning community who needs space to process their thoughts and feelings safely.

You can always reach out to me via the Office of Inclusive Excellence at 912-478-5018 or by email at [tajuanwilson@georgiasouthern.edu](mailto:tajuanwilson@georgiasouthern.edu). I am available on the Statesboro, Armstrong, and Liberty campuses.

Additionally, here are some other resources available to faculty, staff and students:

### **The Counseling Center (students)**

Statesboro Location

Forest Drive

Phone: 912-478-5541

Armstrong Location

7000 Compass Point Annex

Phone: 912-344-2529

### **The Psychology Clinic (students)**

Clinic Website: <https://cbss.georgiasouthern.edu/psychology-clinic/>

For appointments: 912-478-1685

### **The Dean of Student Office (students)**

Statesboro Campus

Phone: (912) 478-3326

[deanofstudents@georgiasouthern.edu](mailto:deanofstudents@georgiasouthern.edu)

Armstrong & Liberty campuses

Phone: (912) 344-2514

[armdeanofstudents@georgiasouthern.edu](mailto:armdeanofstudents@georgiasouthern.edu)

### **Employee Assistance Program (employees)**

USG has partnered with KEPRO to provide employees and their family members with a comprehensive Employee Assistance Program (EAP). Full-time and part-time employees, family, and household members have access to the program. Services are free and confidential, within the bounds of the law. See [https://www.usg.edu/hr/benefits/2020\\_benefits/eap](https://www.usg.edu/hr/benefits/2020_benefits/eap), contact KEPRO at 1-844-243-4440 or go to [www.eaphelplink.com](http://www.eaphelplink.com) and use the company code USGcares.

**Additionally, the College of Education**, which houses the master's of counselor education program, has graduate students willing to help the GS family connect and cope with current work and non-work-related tensions. **Any student** in the Georgia Southern community who would like to receive services,

please complete the following forms: (1) [Participant Intake Form](#) and (2) [Participant Informed Consent](#). **Faculty and staff** can contact Dr. Wells via email to set up a consultation by emailing her ([pwells@georgiasouthern.edu](mailto:pwells@georgiasouthern.edu)) with the word “Consultation” in the subject line.

- May 31, 2020: Office of Inclusive Excellence and Office of Multicultural Affairs sends a message to faculty, staff and students:
  - *To: The University community*

*From: Office of Inclusive Excellence and Office of Multicultural Affairs*

*Earlier this month, we wrote to you all regarding the shooting death of Ahmaud Arbery, the African American jogger who was killed in Glynn County, Georgia. It breaks our heart to write to the Georgia Southern University family again to express our hurt, pain, and sadness regarding the killing of George Floyd. We make no excuses for these events and condemn any violence that impedes personhood, regardless of the source. We extend our deepest condolences to the families involved and all members of our learning community who are personally affected by these tragedies—especially our students, faculty, and staff of color.*

*We fully support our community as they exercise their 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment rights to peacefully assemble and express themselves. Our hope and full intention are to aid our community in doing so, authentically and safely.*

*At Georgia Southern University, our greatest catalyst against racial intolerance and intolerance of all kind is education. Education is the key to being change agents and helping ensure our community continues to move toward Inclusive Excellence—the understanding that our success as an institution is dependent on how well we engage in all matters of diversity, equity, and inclusion.*

*The Office of Inclusive Excellence (OIE) and the Office of Multicultural Affairs (OMA) are working together to develop and promote space to support opportunities to fully honor our students. It’s also important to note that our support mechanisms are not, and should never be, limited to the OIE and OMA. Meaningful actions by our community, in all forms, catapult us toward our value of Inclusive Excellence. Every member of Eagle Nation has an obligation to promote Inclusive Excellence by ensuring our environment is equitable, safe, engaging, and fosters a sense of belonging. Please also continue to use the Counseling Center and University Police Department as resources of support during these challenging times.*

*As an institution, we are working diligently to turn our ideas into tangible action. This summer, we will be adopting and sharing our inaugural Inclusive Excellence Action Plan. As we continue drafting our roadmap, please let us know directly what steps we can take to improve your experiences using our Inclusive Excellence Idea Catcher: <https://academics.georgiasouthern.edu/diversity/inclusive-excellence-idea-catcher/>.*

*Please take every measure to take care of yourselves during this time and know that your well-being is our highest priority as well.*

- June 1, 2020: President Marrero sends message to faculty, students, staff and alumni about the George Floyd tragedy:

- *I want to acknowledge the anger, hurt, and fear that many members of our community are feeling in the face of the tragic events of the past months, and most recently, the killing of George Floyd. My heart is heavy with this somber reminder of the senseless death and violence that impact so many members of our Georgia Southern family.*

*While we can continue to make statements that condemn such actions, we must take measures to stand up for our shared values, and for one another. As one Eagle Nation, we must remain united in our resolve to address injustices and hatred in our community. We must continue to learn, grow, and lead in an increasingly diverse and global society, working together as agents for meaningful change in our communities.*

*I am proud of the steps we have made in the last year, but it is not enough. We must continue our efforts to promote a safe and welcoming environment at Georgia Southern where each and every voice is heard, where individuals feel valued and respected, and where we all strive to achieve Inclusive Excellence, together.*