

The JEDI Conference: Fostering Belonging at UMass Amherst

The Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion [\(JEDI\) Conference](#) at the University of Massachusetts Amherst represents a pivotal event dedicated to nurturing a sense of belonging within the university community. Now in its third year, this annual conference provides a dynamic platform for educational workshops, engaging talks, panel discussions, and networking opportunities designed to inspire and empower participants.

Event Overview

The JEDI Conference will be held at the Student Union Ballroom and Campus Center. This two-day event aims to inaugurate the new academic year by uniting students, faculty, and staff in meaningful dialogues and learning experiences focused on justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion. Attendees will engage with thought leaders and peers, fostering a collaborative environment that promotes shared understanding and commitment to these critical values.

Keynote Sessions

The conference will feature keynote sessions from leading [DEI speakers](#) that will also be livestreamed for those unable to attend in person. These sessions will cover vital topics such as:

- Fostering Belonging through Intergroup Contact Interventions: Exploring strategies to enhance interpersonal connections across diverse groups.
- Cannabis Social Equity Programs: Examining their impact on the legal cannabis market and their potential to address systemic inequalities.

Leadership Panel Discussion

A key feature of the conference is a panel discussion moderated by Vice Chancellor Marsha McGriff. This session will include prominent members of the new UMass leadership team:

- Fouad Abd-El-Khalick: Provost and Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs
- Nandita S. Mani: Deputy Chancellor for Institutional Effectiveness
- Sheri Neshiem: Vice Chancellor and Chief Human Resources Officer
- Shelly Perdomo-Ahmed: Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs and Campus Life

This discussion offers attendees insights into the leadership team's values, vision, and mission, as well as the strategic initiatives aimed at enhancing the university community. Ms. McGriff will be joined by high-profile [leadership speakers](#) to assist her in this panel.

Engaging Workshops and Presentations

The JEDI Conference will feature a diverse array of workshops and presentations covering critical topics, such as:

- Introduction to Dialogue Practices: Learning how to foster understanding and bridge divides through effective communication.
- Technology's Impact on Mental Health: Analyzing the role of social media and technology in community wellbeing.

- **Strategies for Supporting Wellbeing:** Exploring ways to leverage technology for positive community impact.

These sessions are designed to provide practical tools and insights to promote inclusivity and understanding across various settings.

Why Attend?

The JEDI Conference offers numerous benefits for attendees, including:

- **Networking Opportunities:** Connect with a diverse range of individuals from the UMass community, building relationships that can foster collaboration and support.
- **Exposure to Innovative Research:** Discover cutting-edge initiatives and research in justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion.
- **Engagement with University Leadership:** Gain insights into the future vision of the university through direct interaction with its leaders.
- **Practical Strategies:** Learn actionable approaches to foster belonging and inclusivity in various environments.
- **Contribution to Campus Inclusivity:** Participate in shaping a more equitable and inclusive community.

Featured Guest Speakers

The conference boasts an impressive lineup of guest speakers, each bringing valuable expertise to the event:

1. **Elena Li (Manning College of Information and Computer Sciences and Psychological Brain Sciences):** Specializing in technology and psychology, she will discuss how AI and machine learning can advance inclusivity in tech fields.
2. **Samyuktha Badri (College of Social and Behavioral Sciences):** An expert in social equity programs, she will present research on cannabis social equity initiatives and their broader implications.
3. **Kofi-Charu Nat Turner (Department Chair of Teacher Education and Curriculum Studies):** Leading a workshop on integrating DEI principles into curriculum development, he emphasizes culturally responsive pedagogy.
4. **Ximena Zuniga (Professor of Education, Social Justice Education):** Known for her work in intergroup dialogue, she will host a session on fostering meaningful conversations across diverse groups.
5. **Dave Neely (Director of Diversity Education and Training):** He will present strategies for creating inclusive workplace environments through effective training programs.
6. **Sam Miller ([Parenting Teenagers Academy](#)):** He will talk about how diverse students are being effected at schools around the country,

Engaging Discussion Panels

Several discussion panels are designed to foster open dialogue and encourage the sharing of diverse perspectives. These panels will provide spaces for:

- Campus leaders to discuss DEI initiatives and their commitment to creating a culture of belonging.
- Community members to share their lived experiences, challenges, and successes.
- Exploration of evolving language and understanding surrounding neurodivergent experiences and the importance of inclusive practices.

DEI and Student Career Development

The JEDI Conference 2024 emphasizes how DEI principles can significantly impact students' career paths. Key elements include:

1. **Skill Development:** Workshops on cross-cultural communication and emotional intelligence will prepare students for diverse work environments.
2. **Networking Events:** Dedicated sessions for students to connect with industry professionals and alumni who successfully integrate DEI practices in their careers.
3. **Career Panel: DEI in the Workplace:** Representatives from major companies will share insights on their DEI initiatives and how inclusivity enhances organizational success.
4. **Internship Opportunities:** A special session will highlight companies committed to DEI, providing information on internships and entry-level jobs.
5. **Entrepreneurship and DEI:** Workshops focused on starting inclusive businesses will explore how DEI principles drive innovation and business success.
6. **Global Perspectives:** Sessions on international business practices will highlight the importance of cultural competence in a globalized economy.
7. **Leadership Development:** Workshops on inclusive leadership styles will address how DEI awareness can enhance leadership capabilities across various fields.
8. **Industry-Specific DEI Challenges:** Breakout sessions for different industries (tech, healthcare, education, finance) will address unique DEI considerations and strategies for driving change.

By participating in these sessions, students will gain valuable insights and skills that can enhance their career prospects and empower them to become leaders in promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion in their future workplaces.

Attending The Event

The JEDI Conference at UMass Amherst promises to be a transformative experience for all attendees. By uniting diverse voices and perspectives, the conference aims to strengthen the university's commitment to building a community where every individual feels a sense of belonging. This event not only enriches participants' understanding of justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion but also empowers them to implement these principles in their personal and professional lives, creating a lasting impact on their communities.