



RHODE ISLAND COLLEGE'S NEW DIVISION of Community Equity and Diversity

by Gita Brown

Members of the Division of Community, Equity and Diversity, from left: Unity Center Director Antoinette Gomes; Director of Institutional Equity Margaret Lynch-Gadaleta, Esq. '85; Associate Vice President for Community, Equity and Diversity Anna Cano Morales, M.S.W. '99; Affirmative Action Office Assistant Linda Dorgan; and Disability Services Center Director Keri Rossi-D'entremont.

Over the past several years, Rhode Island College has seen a dramatic shift in the demographics of its undergraduate student body. Recognizing diversity as a basic strength and committed to supporting those of differing beliefs and backgrounds, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender and ability, RIC has made “inclusive excellence” one of its core missions.

In alignment with that mission, a new division was created in February 2017 – the Division of Community, Equity and Diversity, led by Associate Vice President Anna Cano Morales.

A native of Central Falls and a RIC alumna, Cano Morales earned her Bachelor of Science degree in 1991 from the University of Rhode Island, where she specialized in human development, counseling and family studies, with

a minor in Latin American literature. In 1999 she earned a Master of Social Work degree at RIC, specializing in policy, administration and systems.

For a decade, she worked as associate vice president for grant programs for the Rhode Island Foundation and most recently served as director of the Latino Policy Institute at Roger Williams University. There she was responsible for stimulating public policy discourse and enhancing the public's understanding of the Rhode Island Latino experience through data and research.

Cano Morales has also served on several nonprofit and state boards, including the Rhode Island Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, the University of Rhode Island Foundation Executive Board of Directors and the Rhode Island Latino Political Action Committee. She is currently chairwoman of the Central Falls School Board of Trustees



Trainings for faculty, staff and students are also planned, along with partnerships with faculty to further education on diversity and inclusion.

The goal, she said, “is to create a campus culture that embraces and fully engages diversities across divisions, schools, departments and offices.”

“I cannot do it alone,” she added. “I am the chief diversity officer, but all of the departments on campus have a responsibility and a role to play in diversity, equity and inclusion. It really involves all of us working together.” Cano Morales believes “we will never perfect a culture of inclusion,” for it is an ongoing process involving daily mindfulness. “It involves asking ourselves every day how we can do the best by our students,” she said.

Assisting Cano Morales is another new hire and RIC alumna, Director of Institutional Equity Margaret Lynch-Gadaleta, Esq. ’85. Lynch-Gadaleta leads the Affirmative Action Office and has the additional titles of affirmative action officer and Title IX coordinator. She supports Cano Morales by serving as the main point person regarding issues of access, equity, opportunity and Title IX.

Cano Morales not only leads her division, she is the president’s lead coordinator for the Inclusive Excellence Commission, and works with the Dialogue on Diversity Committee, a longstanding, campus-wide, presidential committee.

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Looking back on the past five months, the new vice president has felt extremely welcomed by the campus community and has accepted almost every invitation to attend student, faculty, staff and alumni events. She said she looks forward to deepening partnerships, both on- and off-campus, and investing in initiatives that enhance communication, promote active involvement and support RIC’s highest priorities.

“President Sánchez has charged all of his vice presidents to become regional and national leaders in our areas,” she said. “That’s exciting. I know if President Sánchez publically commits to something, he is committed to succeed. So, we’re going to get there. We might not get there as soon as we may want, but by the next three to five years, we’ll get there.”

and a Practice Seminar Senior Fellow for the Rhode Island Core Program of the Institute for Nonprofit Practice at Tufts University.

“Throughout her career, Anna has been a respected leader and champion for the Rhode Island community,” said RIC President Frank D. Sánchez. “Her extensive experience in social work and policy in Rhode Island makes her a natural fit to lead the effort to integrate diversity, equity and community into the college’s core mission, vision and strategies. We are fortunate to have her on board as a member of our senior leadership team.”

In her new role, Cano Morales leads the Office of Disability Services, the Affirmative Action Office and the Unity Center. (The Unity Center comprises the Interfaith Center, International Student Services and the Women’s Center). All of these offices serve to promote an inclusive campus culture.

Cano Morales said her immediate goals are to develop a strategic plan, budget and work plan, promoting investments in infrastructure, staffing, programming and student support services.

In addition, she intends to gather input from students, faculty, staff and alumni through a comprehensive survey to gauge how they experience RIC’s culture and community.