Over the course of the 2010-2011 academic year, ROAD discussed the importance of putting in place recruitment and retention policies and systems that actively encourage and support a diverse community of students, staff, and faculty.

Our interest was prompted by concerns about the UIS climate for non-majority students according to the recent climate survey combined with unfortunate alleged hate-related incidents (such as the alleged attack on an LGBTQ student last year and the graffiti incident this year that targeted students based on race/gender/sexual orientation/religion) and alleged sexual assaults and/or misconduct at UIS (as with some female student athletes and the coaches last year) as well as growing concerns about the lack of diversity among faculty. Very briefly, according to the Executive Summary of the 2010 University of Illinois Springfield Student Campus Climate Survey, only “64.40% of the survey respondents agree/strongly agree they are comfortable at UIS and have a sense of belonging.” More than 25% of our students reported the existence of discrimination based on racial/ethnic and sexual orientation differences at UIS. Thirteen percent report that they have been directly discriminated against because of race/ethnicity, another 8% report being subject to gender discrimination. And while 54% of our students report that a diverse faculty is important to them, our faculty is regrettably not very diverse. The percentage of Black faculty has declined since 1999 and this trend does not appear to have yet been reversed. The percentage of Latino faculty remains less than the percentage of Latino students at UIS. We have had few diverse finalists for faculty positions. Overall, we continue to have a problem of under-representation as determined by numbers of qualified and available potential faculty applicants of color (for instance), based on degree acquisition and other factors, versus the numbers of faculty of color actually employed at an institution. In general, it seems clear that the number of diverse faculty reveals that we have not yet properly exercised our capabilities to attract and retain a diverse faculty.

Diversity and inclusive practices and environments are therefore imperatives for the ROAD committee going forward. We can do better. And, we are pleased to report that UI system as a whole and UIS looks to be moving in a positive direction.

- Fall semester, Vice Chancellor Tim Barnett established a working group to explore the results and structure of the student climate survey and he included ROAD representatives in its membership. The committee’s work is not yet complete.
Spring semester, ROAD established three subcommittees, one each for students (chaired by Elizabeth Kosmetatou), staff (chaired by Susy Woods), and faculty (chaired by Jorge Villegas) to work toward the goal of producing a report next year to describe existing UIS recruitment and retention practices, summarize best practices, and make policy recommendations. The subcommittees began their Spring work with the idea of focusing on best practices. However, in light of other positive developments, it makes sense to wait and reassess the mission and direction of the subcommittees next fall.

Associate Chancellor for Access and Equal Opportunity Deanie Brown shared with ROAD the promising news that faculty, staff and student diversity recruitment and retention looks to be a key focus for President Hogan. The thought is that a shared practice model for the UI system may emerge, which would augment the need for strategies recommended at the campus level. Thus, it is important for ROAD’s efforts to be consistent with higher-level guidance in a way that avoids duplication of efforts. What this means for the subcommittee work will be clearer in the Fall as the UI plans evolve.

Organizers at this year’s U of I Diversity Summit in April disseminated a very useful document called "Implementing Diversity: Contemporary Challenges and Best Practices at Predominantly White Universities" prepared by the Center on Democracy in a Multiracial Society at UIUC. This document will be critical to informing the subcommittees’ work next year.

Over the course of our full committee and subcommittee meetings, a strong consensus emerged in ROAD: we strongly support a diversity framework that focuses on changing our campus environment to better support a diverse community.

This is in contrast to, for instance, a model based on underrepresented minority faculty, staff, or students viewed as deficient members of academia that we ought guide to become on a par with more established racial and ethnic groups in US universities. We believe that we can strengthen the environment at UIS by building resources, knowledge, and abilities to better welcome, recruit, and retain diverse faculty, staff, and students.

In a nutshell, we suggest that UIS emphasize efforts to improve our climate above approaches intended to “fix” minority members of our community. So, for the purposes of illustration, UI and/or UIS might provide greater financial support for efforts aimed at improving campus climate (such as the well-supported and well-received Tim Wise events), or ROAD might work with the Personnel Policies Committee to consider when difference-blind policies (policies entirely inattentive to factors like color, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation) enhance and when they impede the goal of a difference-blind campus in which those differences do not predict one’s chances of success at UIS. If we agree that our true goal is a difference-blind campus, we might revisit the place of affirmative action at UIS and/or incentives for students, staff, and faculty from underrepresented populations especially as we change in at least some colleges toward a
more flexible hiring system that has fewer tenure-track lines. We also might look at ways to better make diversity relevant to decision-making throughout and within. After all, it is often individual faculty members serving on departmental search committees or Senate and other campus committees who hold the keys to the doors of diversity and inclusion among faculty, and it is also individual faculty who must consider how to change the climate in their classrooms.

UI and UIS look poised to make real improvements when it comes to our diversity-related recruitment and retention efforts. ROAD looks forward to seeing how it can help next year as the UI plans evolve.