

# Office of Intercultural Affairs

Fall 2019



*A Letter to the LMU Community:*

The heat of early September often catches me by surprise. It seems that the advent of the fall semester should somehow immediately also include fall weather, the air crisp and cool, leaves on the cusp of changing colors. But, of course, that is my idea of what early September looks like, even though that is often not the reality of early autumn in Southern California. And I was born and raised in this state.

This observation reveals how, even when we know better, our expectations color our perceptions. Exposure to images and messages saturated with implicit bias can also influence us, even when they run contrary to the evidence of our own realities and truths. And while it is one thing to have expectations of what seasons ought to look like, it is an entirely different matter to be affected by overly simplistic, often negatively-hued, sketches of what people from different groups are like. Our perceptions of others--whether based on national origin, sexual orientation, language, religion, and gender identity, or even housing status, health/mental health conditions or any number of other social categories that represent boundaries between “us” and “them”—have consequences. And these consequences are not equally distributed. Indeed, the consequences for others who are most similar to “us” tend to be positive (“ingroup favoritism”) while for others who feel outside the boundaries of “us” and end up as “them,” the consequences can be negative (“outgroup derogation” or “outgroup bias”). That is how we are fundamentally cognitively wired. That is, we are wired for bias.

[Implicit biases](#) are “attitudes, both favorable and unfavorable, that are activated without awareness or intentional control...that are different from and sometimes in contrast to explicit self-reported beliefs.” At LMU, we recognize that we all have implicit biases and are actively working to counteract these invisible currents that continually shape our perceptions of the world, and others, around us.

This year, our proactive efforts are reflected in department-wide workshops to mitigate implicit bias during search processes (13 workshops thus far and counting). Additionally, [staff](#), [faculty](#), and [students](#) have other opportunities to learn about strategies for tackling implicit bias in department-specific retreats and initiatives. Although the distinction may feel subtle, the purpose of these efforts is not to promote preferential treatment for particular groups, but rather to recognize the negative impact systemic bias in our society has on them.

These efforts help us to not only build a more diverse community and but to also create a more inclusive campus community and climate. In our tenure-track searches, for example, the intentional efforts of our deans, departments, and careful, deliberative processes of our search committees and departmental faculty have enabled us to welcome [an outstanding and diverse tenure-track cohort](#) this fall. Pipeline programs such as the [PhD Project](#) have contributed to helping our faculty thrive: for example, [three of our newly tenured professors](#) in the College of Business Administration (CBA) demonstrate how it is possible to develop, recruit, and retain an outstanding diverse faculty through intentional mentoring and support. There are a number of [affinity groups](#) at LMU that provide informal support that also contribute to an inclusive climate, where a sense of belonging and connection can grow stronger.

At OIA, we are committed to cultivating an inclusive climate in which everyone can thrive. In our new monthly feature through LMU this Week, we will feature different elements and examples of efforts to promote an inclusive climate across our campus community. Stay tuned.

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