Creating an inclusive unit involves utilizing a multidimensional approach to engage faculty with diverse backgrounds and perspectives. It is not enough to simply recruit faculty members from underrepresented groups as it is as important to create an environment that supports them throughout their time on campus. Creating an inclusive environment means that faculty members feel welcomed into the life of the department, college, campus, and community. Facilitating inclusivity requires dedication and an understanding of the particular concerns faced by underrepresented faculty members.
1. Ensure that your department has a thriving mentoring program in place for faculty members. The first step is to ask each faculty member about his or her goals and challenges. Unit Executive Officers should not assume they know the answer to this question, and should develop plans based at least in part on what the faculty member thinks she or he needs and the type of help she or he is prepared to receive. It is important to check in with junior faculty members to ensure that mentoring is occurring and continuing to meet the needs of both mentors and mentees.

2. Encourage access to resources that faculty members need to succeed. Identify formal and informal on-campus (e.g., First Book Writing Group; Thriving as an Associate Professor Seminar Series) and off-campus (e.g., Key professional organizations for your faculty members’ disciplines; National Center for Faculty Development & Diversity) opportunities that facilitate scholarly and professional development. Become familiar with programs and services that may be a sustaining resource to faculty members, professionally and personally (e.g., Faculty/Staff Assistance Services; Foundation Relations Resources for Faculty and Staff). Empower faculty members to take advantage of opportunities to connect with these programs and services, and provide appropriate resources and incentives to support their engagement.

3. Be aware of external events that affect communities with which faculty members identify. External events may impact individual faculty members’ behaviors, reactions, and interactions differently than you might expect. For some faculty members recent events involving specific groups within the community may bring about strong feelings. Staying current on local and national events, checking in with faculty members, and offering assistance can go a long way in helping your faculty members feel supported.

4. Enhance your faculty members’ understanding of issues pertaining to underrepresented groups and communities. Invite scholars from underrepresented groups and scholars who conduct research with underrepresented groups and communities to share their work at departmental colloquia, conferences, and events. Make a strong effort to support your faculty members to participate in these events. Furthermore, encourage faculty members to enhance their knowledge on policies and resources on diversity. Various entities such as the Big 10 Academic Alliance, Inclusive Illinois, and Office of Access and Equity host websites that provide detailed information on fostering a diverse and inclusive work environment.

5. Create a standing committee on Diversity and Inclusion. Some of the goals of this committee would be to help your department engage in an ongoing review of your unit’s overall work climate, identify ways to improve it, and implement strategies to enhance a climate of inclusivity within your unit. Appoint active and thoughtful faculty members and students to the committee.

6. Adopt unit policies and practices that are mindful of faculty members’ family obligations. Consider those obligations when scheduling classes, faculty meetings, and committee meetings. For example, before scheduling departmental committee meetings, it may help to check-in with faculty members to determine their availability and flexibility around specific times of the day such as during typical elementary school pick-up and drop-off times. Familiarize yourself with the campus’ policies and programs for parents, which can be found on the Office of the Provost Website.
7. Ensure that you offer reasonable adjustments to accommodate faculty members’ religious beliefs, observances, and practices. It is important to know that the university is legally required to provide reasonable accommodations at work to allow employees to practice their religion. For example, when scheduling faculty meetings and other events sponsored by your unit, it is critical to be mindful of religious holidays. Familiarize yourself with the campus’ policies and programs for religious accommodations, which can be found on the Office of Access and Equity website.

8. Consider an underrepresented faculty members’ overall service commitment before making assignments or additional service requests. Underrepresented faculty are often asked to undertake levels of service higher than those of their colleagues. Such service can be formal (e.g., committees) or informal (e.g., student mentoring). Help faculty members understand the importance of being selective with their service activities and how to manage and prioritize their commitments. It is also crucial to let them know that they can respectfully decline or defer certain service requests without repercussions to their career trajectory.

9. Focus on the process. Creating a culture of inclusion in your unit can be a challenging but ultimately rewarding process. While well-intended, your efforts to reach all faculty members may not always be possible nor will they benefit each individual similarly. With the ever shifting climate on campus and in the broader community, issues and concerns faculty members face will always be fluid. Thus, efforts to create inclusive environments will have to adapt to the changing currents and remain a work in progress.