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## Women in Leadership and Social Justice' talk contextualizes strides toward gender equity at UMaine

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# 'Women in Leadership and Social Justice' talk contextualizes strides toward gender equity at UMaine

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Photo by Antyna Gould.



Abigail Martin

Campus & Community, Culture | March 22, 2021



University of Maine President Joan Ferrini-Mundy hosted "The Women in Leadership and Social Justice: The Importance of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion" talk on March 15 at 4 p.m. This talk was a part of Women's History Month and focused on discussing women's issues and the importance of diversity.

The talk featured three female panelists: Angela Okafor, a Bangor City Council member, attorney and business owner; Leigh Saufley, the dean of the UMaine School of Law and a former chief justice of the Maine Supreme Judicial Court and Shontay Delaloue, the vice president for institutional equality and diversity at Brown University.

The panelists spoke about inclusion and diversity in a professional setting, also touching on what inclusion and diversity means to them on a more personal basis. The panelists spoke of their own personal experiences and perspectives regarding social justice and equity in society.

In addition to leading the discussion of equity and social justice, President Ferrini-Mundy was able to provide insight from a more educational context as both the UMaine and UMaine Machias president.

Saufley graduated from law school in 1980. "The number of women in law was about equal to the number of men," she explained, saying how incredible this statistic was, as it was the first time that she had heard of these numbers being equal.

Saufley also works for the University of Maine System. Saufley's main focus in the talk was advocating for equal access to education. Saufley also noted that despite some demographic shifts for the better concerning women's involvement in higher education, cost remains a "frequent barrier," citing her experience in law school during the 1980s.

She recommends the educational system provide a larger, more varied pool of scholarships for education than what is already available to help mitigate this barrier.

"There hasn't been investment in this regard," Saufley said. She noted this type of investment would make a huge positive impact and would therefore be worthwhile for the future of our country, but finding the money to implement systematic change can often be a challenge.

"There has to be access assistance...[and that allocating resources for education] is something we [UMaine] can be intentional about," Ferrini-Mundy said, in response to Saufley.

In a similar light to Saufley, Delaloue explained how a longer discussion is necessary in



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order to really address financial barriers, but understood that a substantial shift in resources will be required to fulfill a meaningful discussion to further progress.

Delalue then spoke of the difference between equality and equity as advice to students and young adults. First, she emphasized how important it is to find allies with patience and respect.

"[One] undoes one-hundreds of years of an unhealthy and unfair system," Delalue said.

Okafor explained that we need to be inclusive in relation to one another and that purpose is an important aspect of diversity and inclusion. Noting the important role of empathy in cultural awareness, she explained how only when we enter conversations with openness about vulnerability and about our system, then we will be productive.

"We all have limits to our own knowledge [so it is important that] diversity [be] an access point," Okafor said.

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