

Racial Justice Advisory Committee Campus Report 2023

January 31, 2023

Candy McCorkle, Ph.D.

Vice President of Diversity & Inclusion



The Racial Justice Advisory Committee (RJAC) was charged to serve as a catalyst for creating a more inclusive environment and equitable structures at Western Michigan University.

The committee spent the past two years identifying areas in which inequities existed and developed recommendations on how to begin to address the systemic inequities. Each of the recommendations provides a description of the issue being addressed, strategies for changing and identifying champions of the change. It is important to note that these recommendations are not meant to solve every systemic issue on campus but to be a start that will hopefully foster more change.

The work of the committee was guided by the following principles based on the work of the Center for Urban Education's Embedding Equity -Mindedness:

- Evidenced based
- Race Conscious
- Institutionally Focused
- Systemically Aware
- Equity Advancing.

It is important to note that each sub-committee worked with stakeholder groups to assist in identifying issues, cultivating recommendations and strategies, as well as using institutional data. These are recommendations and not mandates. Each sub-committee has put forth at least one recommendation. We have a total of 11 recommendations.

This report will list the recommendations by sub-committee, the issue it is addressing, the targeted champions and the status of the recommendation.

Equitable Physical Campus Environment Sub-Committee

Members: Yvonne Jackson, Ph.D., Vicki Carter, Jeff Breneman, Candy McCorkle, Ph.D., Victoria Hastings, David Prellwitz and Rashid Deme

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the Board of Trustees, Foundation Board and President be provided with a comprehensive rubric on a process for naming future buildings and designated spaces in order to align with the university's mission and values. It is also recommended that a thorough review be conducted to ensure that current buildings and designated spaces meet the criteria identified in the rubric.

This recommendation addresses the issue that other campuses as well as WMU has had in buildings and spaces being named for individuals whose philosophies and/or actions have not aligned with the concepts of diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging.

The recommendation will positively impact retention of students, faculty and staff by creating spaces that promote diversity. This recommendation would also provide a consistent and clear process for name selection of buildings and spaces.

The champions for this recommendation are the Board of Trustees, the Foundation Board and the president.

This recommendation is still in sub-committee review and will go to the cabinet in March.

Equitable Policies and Reporting Sub-Committee

Members: Edward Eckel, Amy Brimmer, Adriana Cardoso Ryes, Adam Wall, Ph.D., Soongmin Chow, Ph.D., Joelle Sanders, Smith Moore, William Chheu, Kahler Schuemann, Ph.D., Evelyn Winnfield-Thomas, Ph.D., and Deunique Dorris

Recommendation:

The recommendation is to hire a non-WMU consultant with demonstrated expertise in higher education equity policy analysis, equity and diversity law, and data collection to conduct an equity audit of select institutional and administrative policies of the campus police department. The consultant would conduct an audit in order to identify issues of systemic inequities and to provide recommendations on how to address the inequities at a policy, procedural and practice level.

This recommendation will assist the institution in identifying any policies that have potential or actual adverse impact on the retention of students, faculty and staff, especially from racially or other minoritized populations.

The target champions for this recommendation are the President, Provost and Board of Trustees.

The recommendation has been reviewed by the President's cabinet and has been implemented. General Counsel, Director of Logistical Services and VP for Diversity and Inclusion have written a Request for Proposals (RFP) to solicit consulting firms. The RFP's were sent out and the deadline for submission is February 3, 2023. A committee has been created to review the RFP and a set of criteria has been developed to evaluate the RFP's for selection of a consulting firm. A firm will be selected by February 17, 2023 and the audit will commence no later than February 23, 2023. The cost of the consultant will be covered by Mountain Top Initiative funds.

Equitable Programs Sub-Committee

Members: Tiana Gee, Mariam Konate, Ph.D., Marilyn Kritzman, Allegra Ellis, Candy McCorkle, Ph.D.

Recommendations

1. The recommendation is for faculty to intentionally integrate diversity, equity and inclusion and social justice perspectives, including cultural, religious, curriculum and sensitivity to different student learning skills to name a few, into undergraduate and graduate curriculum in order to assist students to gain a working knowledge of the impact of systemic inequities and its pervasiveness across societal systems and institutions.

An inclusive, equitable and diverse curriculum will assist students to see their experiences reflected in the classroom and assist WMU in creating an authentically inclusive campus. This recommendation is to combat the monolithic perspective that is reflected in much of our current curriculum and pedagogy.

The target champions for this recommendation are the Faculty Senate and the office of Faculty Development.

This recommendation has been reviewed by the President's Cabinet. The VP of Diversity and Inclusion met with the Faculty Senate e-board as well as the dean of the Graduate College to begin to build consensus around this recommendation and its importance in creating inclusivity in all aspects of our campus. This recommendation is aligned with the AAUP contract that was ratified in 2021 requiring faculty to participate in DEI education. Currently a committee is working on the content of this education which may address the premise of this recommendation.

2. This recommendation is for the following criteria/information to be included in all syllabi or course information regardless of teaching modality: faculty office hours, link to Help Hub, information regarding The Help Desk hours of operations, and access to resources for Tutoring.

This recommendation will provide students regardless of class modality, access to information to assist them in being successful in courses and navigating e-learning technology.

The target champions for this recommendation are Faculty Senate, WMUX and Provost Office.

This recommendation has been reviewed by the President's Cabinet and has been implemented to be included, if not in the syllabus, in the course information in the e-learning course shell.

Recruiting and Retaining Faculty and Staff of Color Sub-Committee

Members: Deidre Courtney, Hardy Figueroa, Claudia Fajardo-Hansford, Ph.D., Keanah Smith, Renee Wallace, and Ron Cisler

Recommendations

1. This recommendation focuses on a missing but important piece of the process. The non-bias advocate understands how to work with both sides of the system; knows how to dismantle the power structures and also knows how to develop new structures that create a positive environment for faculty and staff. The current system of privilege supports micro aggressions, bias, discrimination, retaliation and other inequities present in the work place. This individual or office will have the power to advocate for a new system untouched by the university and to dismantle current structures. It is important for the advocate to know minority issues as well as labor relations. The advocate will implement positive change unimpeded by the university in relation to disparities like an equity analysis. Positive change also is enhanced by listening to the individuals impacted by the system that is supposed to protect them. Anecdotal and data gathering should be the drivers of these changes. The employee relations advocate supports communication and a better understanding of issues between the employee and the university. In addition, this position develops and implement programs, policies and procedures that help dismantle the power structures. Equally important, this individual or office helps facilitate change at the institutional level.

This recommendation will positively impact the elimination of or at least improving the conditions of current minoritized faculty and staff by creating new practices and structures.

The targeted champions for this recommendation are President, Provost, President's Cabinet, Provost Council, Board of Trustees and Department Chairs

This recommendation has been reviewed by the President's Cabinet. At this time, this responsibility of the recommended Employee Relations Advocate has been made part of the new Associate VP of Diversity and Inclusion position. This position is in the process of being posted for a national search.

2. The recommendation is to develop guidelines for hiring faculty and staff that support diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) in hiring processes.
 - Encourage hiring units not to seek to replace departing faculty and staff with similar faculty and staff, but rather to promote a forward-looking culture in which diverse faculty and staff are intentionally recruited in support of the unit's educational and research goals.
 - Require hiring units and hiring committee members to undergo implicit bias training.
 - Suggest an inclusive language in position descriptions; include explicit statements of commitment to DEI hiring. Use trained diversity advocates to participate in faculty and staff search processes.
 - Include a DEI statement in the list of materials required to be submitted by faculty candidates, in addition to teaching and/or research statements.
 - Develop a centralized, institutional website highlighting the area's demographic diversity and initiatives, with information about Kalamazoo and SW Michigan, and WMU administrative structures, in support of faculty recruitment.
 - Engage national diversity recruitment outlets to advertise positions (e.g., Insights into Diversity, National Center for Faculty Development & Diversity).

This recommendation will address the gap in the proportion of faculty and staff of color hired across campus. This recommendation will provide units with techniques to recruit and hire more diverse employees. It will also provide consistency in the hiring process in order to achieve fairness and equity.

The target champions for this recommendation are Human Resources, Deans, Department Chairs and non-Academic unit leads.

This recommendation will be reviewed by the President's Cabinet on Tuesday, February 7, 2023.

Recruiting and Retaining of Students of Color Sub-Committee

Members: Maria Roche-Dean, Ph.D., Erick Guzman, LaTonja Wilson, Christine Byrd-Jacobs, Ph.D., Dini Metro-Roland, Ph.D., Melissa Plair, Kelly Snow, Julie Alphonse and Jeff Lillard

Recommendation

1. This recommendation is to create a pilot scaffolded mentoring program (Faculty to graduate student to undergrad student) to provide guidance, support, and role modeling at all levels. The program needs a primary coordinator to ensure training of mentors, promote this opportunity, identify mentors and mentees, and evaluate/assess the program.

This recommendation will allow graduate students to develop and expand leadership skills and undergraduate students to learn academic success skills, develop professional communication skills and better understand expectations of graduate work. This recommendation will reduce the graduation gap among marginalized students by providing mentorship which is imperative to institutions of higher education.

The target champions of this recommendation are Faculty Senate, faculty and academic staff.

This recommendation has been reviewed by the President's cabinet but has not been moved to implementation.

2. This recommendation is to improve the transportation infrastructure:
 - Transportation modalities – Students who rely on public transportation find that the bus schedules and routes do not meet their needs. For example, students who finish classes at 9pm must leave early to get the last bus of the night. This leads to increased stress and decreased opportunities for class discussion and networking.
 - More effective transportation from main campus to regional sites and internship locations is needed. Conduct a survey to gauge the needs of students regarding transportation from WMU's campus including Battle Creek, Grand Rapids, College of Engineering, and common community internship sites.

This recommendation will improve access to education by considering transportation needs of the populations served by campus. This recommendation addresses the inequities created for students who lack adequate transportation to be able to participate in both traditional and experiential educational opportunities.

The target champions for this recommendation are Business and Finance, Office of Admissions and Academic Colleges.

This recommendation has been reviewed by the President's Cabinet. The next step is a meeting with logistical services to discuss the implications of altering the bus schedule on campus and to external sites.

Training of Faculty and Staff Sub-Committee

Members: Laura Weber, David Paul, Robert Harrison, Amanda Greer, Ashley Purry, Yu-Lien The, Ph.D., Tony Dennis, Shashanta James, Angela Gullon-Rivera, Ph.D., Michelle Hruska, and Arnold Taylor

Recommendation

The recommendation is to advocate for the development of a centralized Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion training space tentatively called the Anti-Racism Institute, which will synthesize work already done across the University into a curriculum that will provide education for all members of the campus community. The Anti-Racism Institute will be supported by a Director and a Board of Advisors who will report directly to the President's Office and serve as members of the President's Cabinet.

This space will facilitate cross-campus, DEI-related training that all community members will undergo to develop a common understanding of shared language, the importance of DEI work, how they can get involved to help make impactful changes and explore perspectives outside of their own lived experiences.

We envision training programs facilitated by the Anti-Racism Institute to initially center around four pillars, with additional pillars and themes to be added in the future as the Institute grows. These four pillars include –

- Implicit Bias
 - Cross-cultural communication
 - Hiring, succession, and promotion
 - Equitable spaces
 - Faculty development
- Inclusive Leadership
 - Perspective taking
 - Empathetic conflict resolution
 - Amplifying voices
 - Human Resources development
- Discussion Pacts
 - Accountability partners
 - Small group readings
- Wellness
 - Mental health

- Emotional intelligence
- Change advocacy

Within this structure, the Anti-Racism Institute could also provide training in a tiered way related to experience level, such as beginner, intermediate, advanced, to “meet people where they are” and help them “reach the next level” of understanding.

Completion of training programs could be recognized through a certification program, wherein participants would receive a special certificate demonstrating their commitment to DEI. The parameters and qualifications of earning this certificate are still to be determined.

A dedicated Institute coordinator, with full-time staff and financial resources, would be required to make the creation and facilitation of the Anti-Racism Institute possible. A cross-campus, collaborative working group committee charged with attaining, synthesizing, and developing courses that utilize the DEI-related work going on across the University would also be needed. An advisory board, also composed of cross-campus community members, including students specifically, would also need to be created to guide and assess the Institute in the long term.

This recommendation will create a DEI training institute that will provide a centralized nexus of structured training programs that will equip all community members with information, resources and understanding needed to help contribute the creation of a campus environment that is safe, equitable and empowers all individuals to thrive. This institute will allow WMU to demonstrate its commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion. The training programs will foster the transformation of WMU into an authentically inclusive campus.

The target champions of this recommendation will be the WMU students, staff and faculty.

This recommendation has been reviewed by the President’s Cabinet. It is currently being including as part of a larger campus initiative to create a professional development/training program that would include not only DEI oriented training but leadership, supervisory and technology. A cabinet committee has been created to review this further.

Training of Students Sub-Committee

Members: Diane Anderson, Ph.D., Luchara Wallace, Ph.D., and Sherrie Fuller

Recommendations

This recommendation is advocating for the development of a consistent standardized cross-campus onboarding training for student employee/leader training (RAs, OSLs, Ambassadors, RSO leadership, etc.) focused on inclusive leadership. The training would be focused on power and privilege, creating brave spaces, facilitating conversations, mentoring and assisting students with navigating self-awareness around identity and difference.

This recommendation will create opportunities for students to learn together across different units about how to help other students to create inclusive and welcoming spaces. This will also foster the development of diverse student leaders. This recommendation will assist us in moving beyond diverse to being inclusive.

The target champions for this recommendation are the Lewis Walker Institute, Office of Student Engagement and the Office of Diversity Education.

This recommendation will be reviewed by the President's Cabinet on February 7, 2023.

RJAC Sub-Committee Chairs

Members: Edward Eckel, Maria Roche-Dean, Ph.D., David Paul, Amy Brimmer, Luchara Wallace, Ph.D., Hardy Figueroa, Tiana Gee, Tony Dennis, LaTonja Wilson, Rashid Deme, Amanda Greer, Candy McCorkle, Ph.D. and Ron Cisler, Ph.D.

Recommendation

The sub-committee chairs recommended the creation of a RJAC recommendation coordinator to monitor the progression and implementation of the RJAC recommendations.

This recommendation was made to ensure that the work of this committee did not fall through cracks and that progress would be intentionally made in order to assist WMU in achieving its goal of becoming an inclusive, equitable and welcoming campus.

The target champions of this recommendation are the RJAC sub-committee chairs and the Office of Diversity and Inclusion.

This recommendation has been reviewed by the President's Cabinet. This recommendation has resulted in the creation of an Associate VP for Diversity and Inclusion whose responsibilities will include the RJAC recommendation coordinator, Employee Relations Advocate, assessment and evaluation lead for ODI and assist the VP of Diversity and Inclusion in leading ODI. A search committee has been created to review applications for this position. A job description has been created and is in the process of being posted for a national search.

Conclusion

This report provides the campus with a summary of each recommendation, how it will impact systemic equity on our campus, who should champion the progression and implementation of the recommendation, and the current status of the recommendation. The Racial Justice Advisory Committee has demonstrated a commitment to the eradication of systemic inequities on the campus of Western Michigan University as evidenced by the recommendation presented in this report. There are two additional recommendations to be presented to the President's

Cabinet that are not included in this report. This report is not the final update of the work of RJAC. As the recommendation progress the website will be updated. This update will be in the form of a timeline. This report hopefully has shown how the work for undoing systemic inequities is a community responsibility and not only the work of a few.