

The  
Experiences  
of Faculty of  
Color  
at  
Western  
Washington  
University

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for

*The President's Taskforce on  
Equity, Inclusion, & Diversity*

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## Executive Summary

The purpose of this project was to better understand the experience of racial and ethnic minority faculty at Western Washington University and to develop recommendations to improve the climate for faculty of color. This report was derived from interviews with 25 tenured and tenure-track faculty of color conducted in the spring of 2014. Approximately two thirds of faculty reported few or no negative incidents related to their race or ethnicity. The remaining third reported numerous incidents of prejudice and discrimination. Generally, participants did not believe these incidents threatened employment but, instead, were experienced as ongoing microaggressions<sup>1</sup> that questioned faculty competence, devalued scholarship, made cultural assumptions about ethnic groups, and trivialized diversity and diversity efforts at the institution. Although many participants experienced prejudicial incidents, the most significant impact of race and ethnicity was the additional workload shouldered by many faculty of color. Women, faculty who immigrated to the United States, and faculty who taught courses related to race and ethnicity were especially burdened. The disproportionate workload resulted from a variety of sources including requests to serve on committees or perform tasks due to their minority status, serving as a support and advisor for underrepresented students, the emotional labor required to manage prejudicial events, and the additional time spent on scholarship to ensure legitimacy. Participants had several suggestions that could improve the climate for faculty of color at Western Washington University and the report concludes with a list of recommendations.

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<sup>1</sup> Microaggressions are “verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people” (Sue et al. 2007: 271).

The mission of Western Washington University is to serve “the people of the State of Washington, the nation, and the world by bringing together individuals of diverse backgrounds and perspectives in an inclusive, student-centered university that develops the potential of learners and the well-being of communities.” In order to fulfill this mission, WWU must recruit a diverse body of students, staff, and faculty who not only remain, but thrive in the campus environment. To this end, I have been speaking with minority faculty to better understand their experiences and their perceptions of Western Washington University, and to develop recommendations for improving the climate for individuals from underrepresented groups.

In 2012, I wrote a report describing the experiences of 23 lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer faculty, former faculty, and job candidates; the university has adopted many of the recommendations from the report. In 2014, I interviewed 25 tenured and tenure-track, racial and ethnic minority faculty members on campus in order to better understand their experiences at the university. This report summarizes those interviews, discussing and illustrating what I believe are key experiences and considerations as well as offering recommendations to improve the climate for racial and ethnic minority faculty.

I would like to begin by acknowledging how difficult it is to summarize a set of interviews like this. I feel a great responsibility to the participants who shared confidential and, sometimes, difficult information with someone they did not know. Many of them took risks in discussing events and experiences with me, and I was moved and sometimes distressed by their accounts. Because this is a summary, I am not able to share every experience, even some that are interesting, insightful, and important. Instead, I try to include examples of ideas or events that were reported by more than one person and/or issues that I felt lent themselves to

concrete recommendations for the university. Although it is unusual in a research project, I also included “hearsay” because I believe it is an important addition to this type of report. Many times, individuals who feel marginalized are not willing to talk directly about their own experiences with an interviewer. For that reason, I consider discussions of the experiences of “other faculty of color” to be an important addition to the data.

### **Data and Methods**

For this report, I interviewed 25 tenured and tenure track faculty from a variety of disciplines. The interviews took place between February and April of 2014, guided by a series of broad, open-ended questions (see Appendix A) that sought information about the hiring process, and about experiences, both negative and positive, while working at Western Washington University. Interviews took between 45 minutes and one and a half hours and were conducted in my office or the interviewees’ office.

I recruited participants using a few strategies. I developed an initial list of potential participants from personal knowledge. After completing an interview, I asked the participant for names of other potential interviewees. I also went through lists of faculty in several departments and emailed a personal request to candidates whom I did not know, but appeared to be racial or ethnic minorities. Because I am a white researcher, I also asked personal contacts to vouch for me when a participant did not know me and seemed reluctant to be interviewed for the project. These strategies garnered a list of 31 potential participants. Of the 31, one person declined the invitation and five indicated some interest, but never scheduled an interview. Overall, the response rate was 81%, relatively high since the topic could be viewed as potentially threatening to employment.

The participants included 13 males and 12 females from a variety of disciplines and colleges. While there were participants from all colleges, the College of Humanities and Social Sciences provided approximately half of the participants. Both the College of Humanities and Social Sciences and Fairhaven College were overrepresented in the sample while the Business & Economics and Science & Technology colleges were relatively underrepresented. It is unclear whether this is due to under- and over-representation of faculty of color<sup>2</sup> in these colleges or my lack of access to racial and ethnic minority faculty in particular colleges.

Faculty's time at WWU ranged from less than 1 to almost 30 years. The average number of years at the university was eleven. The participants approximately reflect the proportion of racial and ethnic minority faculty on campus.

	Percent of faculty	Number at WWU	Percent of faculty of color	Percent of sample	Number in sample
Asian	8%	37	50%	52%	13
Latino/Hispanic	3%	16	22%	20%	5
Native American	2%	9	12%	8%	2
Black/African American	1%	5	7%	16%	4
Multi-Racial	1%	6	8%	4%	1

Participants used a variety of terms to describe their racial and ethnic identities including African American, American Indian, New Yorican, African, Chicano, South Asian, Filipino American, mixed, and person of color. For descriptive reasons, I aggregated individuals' racial/ethnic descriptions into 5 categories: Asian, Latino, Black, Native American and Multi-Racial. Thirteen participants were Asian, five were Latino, four were Black and two were Native

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<sup>2</sup> Some faculty objected to the term "faculty of color" while others did not care for "racial or ethnic minority," since they are only minorities in the United States. No term adequately captures everyone's experience or views, so, as a compromise, I used these common terms interchangeably.

American. While several people reported being multi-racial when asked how they describe their race/ethnicity, only one used a multi-racial descriptor as their primary term. It is possible that other participants described themselves as multi-racial on Western Washington University forms thus my categorization may not perfectly align with the university's.

When attempting to describe individual experience, aggregating individuals into broad categories can seem unnecessarily reductive, yet because particular demographic factors influenced participants' experiences, categorization is an important step in analysis. The experience of participants seemed especially influenced by national origin. Ten interviewees did not grow up in the United States; for six of them, English was not a native language, and nine participants spoke with noticeable accents. I mention this because students sometimes negatively evaluated faculty based on their accent and the perception that English was not a native language for them.

A substantial weakness of this study is that I did not interview former faculty members. Several faculty reported a significant loss of African American faculty around 2006 or 2007. Because of the project's constraints, I was unable to follow up on these reports directly with former faculty members. This is particularly unfortunate because there are only 5 black tenured or tenure track faculty on campus currently and only 2 grew up in the United States. In addition, I did not interview contingent faculty; they may have very different experiences due to their weaker position in the institutional structure relative to tenured and tenure track faculty. It also would have been useful to have the resources to interview all Latino, Black, and Native American faculty on campus who were willing to talk with me. The small numbers mean that each individual's story could significantly contribute to our understanding of the position of

racial and ethnic minority faculty on campus. And on a final note, I chose not to interview faculty of color who are also lesbian or gay. This may leave the inaccurate impression that no faculty of color are lesbian, gay, or bisexual. This is far from the case, but because resources are limited and I interviewed several lesbian and gay faculty of color in my previous project, I chose to limit my sample to faculty whom I had never interviewed.

## **Findings**

Only fifteen percent of tenured and tenure track faculty at Western Washington University are racial or ethnic minorities compared to nineteen percent nationally (NCES 2012). Research suggests faculty of color often face challenges due to their relatively small numbers on most campuses. Many of these challenges such as being overburdened with formal and informal service and facing scrutiny as scholars are well-documented (Jacobs, Cintrón and Canton 2002; Stanley 2006). The emotional and psychic burden of coping with and addressing prejudicial events is less documented. I begin by discussing prejudicial instances and the consequent “emotional labor” that some faculty of color must engage in, then follow with descriptions of the additional workload that some faculty of color experience.

To begin with, it is important to note that faculty of color at Western Washington University report few instances of egregious discrimination that could (or did) materially affect their work outcomes. In addition, more than half (15) of participants report very few or no negative experiences relating to their race or ethnicity on campus. The few incidents described include assumptions that participants were “diversity hires” or being aware of or engaged in activity regarding the negative experiences of other faculty of color. They did not report feeling any threat to their



employment or ongoing challenges to their work environment due to these instances.

The following statements illustrate the types of comments made by these faculty members:

I don't notice any differential treatment here at Western or in general in Bellingham.

So I feel like I'm pretty well respected and I was fortunate that I landed in a department that was very supportive of me from day one.

I can honestly say I believe that we have a program and maybe a department where the issue of diversity and social justice, every faculty member that we have in our program, understands.... I couldn't have always said that. To me, that is really important as a person in one of those underappreciated groups...

When faculty discussed instances of overt discrimination and/or threats to tenure and promotion, many incidents took place ten or more years ago. While two participants reported more recent experiences that could be perceived as threatening tenure, only one reported an actual attempt to block tenure:

Some faculty rated me the lowest they possibly could in all areas and I thought that was personal... A higher percentage of the faculty said "no" to the promotion, but it was bi-modal. Part of it was I think they didn't know me and the kind of work I did because it didn't fit within their grid of doing things. It was the people who knew me who gave me the high ratings....The committee said "Yes," the dean said "Yes," the provost said "Yes." ...I had more publications than all but one of the full professors during my time here....

Another participant described circumstances that were potentially threatening to tenure. After the participant challenged the chair's authority to make a decision regarding her employment terms, he retaliated. "He physically hid external letters of recommendation from my file that I knew were there and that I had to ask somebody to go into his office to find. ... He routinely would pit me against other faculty members."

Rather than egregious acts of discrimination, faculty were far more likely to report microaggressions—“brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people” (Sue et al. 2007: 271). Faculty report a variety of microaggressions ranging from subtle attitudes to unintentionally hurtful statements to explicitly prejudicial events. As one faculty member puts it, “Nowadays it’s just the thousand little cuts. So on most days, I say, ‘Let that go.’”

### **Microaggressions**

The following section describes several types of microaggressions experienced by faculty of color at Western Washington University including assumptions about their culture or behaviors, challenges to their competence, hostile incidents, minimizing their culture or difference, and trivializing diversity efforts.

#### **Cultural assumptions**

Some Asian faculty members who immigrated to the United States found that students, staff, and faculty had expectations for their behavior based on stereotypes of Asians as quiet and accommodating.

I think people find it surprising that I am very direct and very clear in my communication. I think that often throws people off. I think they are expecting me to be quiet...[It’s] an Asian or Indian stereotype.

I really only have a few, 2-3 people, I communicate with because I always feel the barrier. “She is [Asian] so she doesn’t experience the same way as we are.” So they always send those kind of feelings toward me or they don’t ask me so many questions....When they show more respect, I feel more connected....Those things are really hard. I always feel [they believe], “I’m a professor. I’m white. I have to be treated like a king!” ... Really!

It is important to note how this participant connects stereotyping and a lack of respect to her sense of isolation. Another respondent who immigrated to the United States, whom I would characterize as especially isolated, also describes both hostile behavior and an inability to respond due to cultural stereotyping. “You are expected to behave differently. You are expected to tolerate insults. You are expected to suck it up and if you react, then it’s like, “Yeah, that’s the way they do!” Individuals who were not raised in the United States seemed especially vulnerable to cultural stereotyping.

Not only does cultural stereotyping create isolation for some faculty of color, it can also create stress in the classroom. When faculty of color serve as mentors and role models for students, the bar can be especially high. Faculty must negotiate students’ expectations based on the faculty’s social position as a minority—they are sometimes held to a “mythical standard.”

The expectation on the part of students that the faculty of color are going to be a certain way and their disappointment when we are not, whatever it is they are imagining. I've had many students say that I'm a sellout because I worked in private industry.... When I was in law school people would say, “It will be so great for you to work for your people.” That was the assumption.... The reason I’ve ended up doing what I'm doing is largely because I kept getting pushed to do it. Ultimately I'm good at what I do... and I love it....but that was never what I set out to do.

### **Hostility**

Some faculty reported hostile incidents, many of them with students. One faculty member reports challenges with students because English is not her native language. “Students sometimes will [question] the use of terminology and say, ‘Is that really an English word?’ Again, I have to explain, ‘Yes, it is a word. Go check the dictionary or go online and Google it....’”

Here she describes another incident:

One time I had an interaction with a white male student, a work study student...I asked the student to do something and he was just trying not to do it. He was holding his pizza in his hand and I told him not to get pizza on my students' papers. He said, "Whatever," to me, right in the office with other undergraduate students there! ...I talked to my department manager who asked him to apologize to me. So what he did was block me in the water room, a very tall white male standing right in front of [me]. I couldn't get out. It's this very subtle thing.

Some faculty members describe interactions with students and faculty that while not overtly hostile, consistently question their right to exist in academic space, their expertise, and whether their scholarship area is academically legitimate. One faculty member reports consistent suspicion from students, "Students are essentially asking, 'Are you that bright or is it just because of your color that you are here?'"

Several faculty who teach courses related to diversity or race/ethnicity describe students who challenge the faculty member's ability to be "objective" because of their minority status. This type of hostility also includes accusations that the professor has an inappropriate "agenda" around particular topics. Interestingly, during these incidents students imply that only faculty of color risk bias when teaching topics related to race/ethnicity and inequality. I would imagine that students would be unlikely to claim that only men could objectively teach courses relating to the social position or history of women.

### **Trivializing diversity efforts**

Recently, the administration has placed increased emphasis on the value of diversity and inclusion at Western Washington University. At the same time, faculty of color report many instances that trivialize diversity and efforts to increase diversity on campus. For example, one participant said colleagues and students have prefaced statements with, "I know race is

important to you..." She responds, "It's not to you?" Another participant described bringing in ethnic minority academics to discuss a culturally underrepresented approach to the discipline. After their visit, he reported, "I was talking...about bringing in other speakers and the response was that it was interesting information, but there was nothing there for other faculty to bring back with them to use in their classes... But the thing was, there were all sorts of things they could have taken with them."

Several participants reported incidents during hiring processes that minimized the importance of diversity among faculty and/or implied that faculty of color were less qualified. "...in the faculty meeting when they were discussing hiring new faculty of color, one of the faculty members said, 'Well, we don't need to hire an Asian because...we already have one.'"

In another incident, a participant tried to directly address racial issues in the department and was told it was not appropriate:

The [chair] said, "Look, the way you are talking about these issues makes people really, really uncomfortable." ... He said to me, "In the future, you should not use the word 'white' or 'white people' or 'white way of doing things.'" ...The chair also told me, "You should not use [these] terms...when you have conversations with your students in the future." [I responded], "So if you don't want me to call people like you white people, how do you want me to address people like you?" He said, "Just, people." ...[Later], I printed the President's speech and said, "See, the President spoke that. He used those words."

In addition to downplaying the importance of diversity and topics related to race and ethnicity, some participants had negative interactions with white faculty who believed the participants were either hired solely to increase diversity or received preferential treatment because they were racial/ethnic minorities. I include a few different instances here because the experience was common:

Sometimes people make the suggestion, “Well, you are here just to up the quota.” ...and I say, “Yeah, I’m just filling the quota, I’m a token, I’m the only guy.” Things along those lines... [I] make them think, “Oh, something is going on here.” ...Sometimes when you are from a diverse background there is the assumption that quality and rigor is actually going down; it’s being sacrificed.

I actually had someone comment to me, he said, “I thought being a minority was an advantage at Western.” And I was actually really hurt after I heard this. If you lived my life for one day you would not say anything like that.

I went out to lunch with a colleague and when I revealed that my chair was trying to push me to go up [for tenure] early after my 3rd year, he paused, then said, “Is the university stressing diversity?” ... It’s like, he doesn’t know my record but because I’m a person of color he assumes I get to go up early. I was just so caught off guard, I didn’t know what to say and let it go.

It is important to note that two of these three quotes were from faculty whom I characterize as having few to no problems at Western Washington University. That is, even in relatively supportive departments, these assumptions are widespread.

As a white person some of these stories were difficult to hear as I had not been exposed to this type of prejudice, yet for some faculty of color the incidents seemed commonplace. The literature on minority stress discusses how experiencing prejudicial events can lead to negative health outcomes (Frost, Lehavot and Meyer 2013; Meyer 1995; Pascoe and Richman 2009). In addition to experiencing a prejudicial event, minorities<sup>3</sup> must grapple with the psychic toll of interpreting meaning, deciding if and when to respond, and evaluating the level of threat (Meyer 2003). This endlessly repeating process can be exhausting for minorities who are in a heavily majority workplace. One faculty member describes his running notebook of negative experiences:

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<sup>3</sup> In this report, I use the term minorities to mean any minority group that is underrepresented and has a history of prejudice and discrimination, e.g., racial, ethnic, sexual orientation, gender identity, ability, and religious minorities.

I would say it's more in terms of microaggressions and the purpose of writing that notebook was that I needed an outlet, which also meant that there's not that many people right now that I feel I can talk with. And these microaggressions occur on different levels...the institutional level, the interpersonal level, as well as departmental.

### **Faculty of Color – Carrying an Extra Burden**

While some racial and ethnic minority faculty experienced ignorant comments, prejudice, and, even, discrimination, some of the most impactful effects of minority status do not result from negative interactions—instead, faculty of color often carry additional work burdens. One would assume that both white faculty and faculty of color would have a similar workload for the same position (e.g., assistant professor), yet this assumption is not always accurate. Often faculty of color work additional hours due to their minority social position and a complex set of factors surrounding race and ethnicity in academia. These factors include being more likely to research or publish in a field that is contested or viewed as less legitimate in mainstream academia, a greater likelihood that English is not a native language, additional requests to serve on committees that need a “diverse” perspective, greater service as an informal mentor for students and/or employees of color, and the emotional labor experienced by some racial/ethnic minority individuals who work in a largely white environment.

### **Scholarship**

Several faculty members reported challenges to their scholarship by colleagues. While some believed this was directly due to their minority status, others saw it as deriving from the focus of their scholarship. Racial/ethnic identity and scholarship agenda, however, are linked—faculty of color are more likely to address race, ethnicity and inequality in their research resulting in challenges to the legitimacy of their scholarship. In addition, faculty of color may be

more likely to have an interest in making their work more accessible to non-academic audiences, especially if they are in the social sciences or cultural studies. “So when it comes to whether we are treated fairly, I think it's complicated. Because we still have the same requirements, but... [for example] I'm really intentional about where I publish. I want to make sure that I publish in journals that have more of a mass reach and are really reaching communities, or that practitioners are in audience. I don't publish in the high elite ones and I don't seek those out.”

While some faculty consciously choose to publish in venues that are less prestigious in order to increase accessibility, others find that journals that address their scholarship interests are less valued in the academe. For some, this results in tenure challenges:

When I went up for tenure...I get published in quite a few ethnic studies journals. I think some people question that in terms of the validity.... A lot of times when you're doing race and ethnicity, the data sets you are going to use are not...going to make it into these high-powered journals....So a couple of times I've heard that maybe I need to shoot higher, and so I think there is a perception that these journals aren't as rigorous, but they focus on these issues I'm doing.

The questions of diversity sometimes are not legitimate subjects or topics of research. That's very problematic because then when you are evaluating somebody for tenure and that's the assumption, that's going to make things really, really difficult. So that would be something we need to work on.

Another faculty member describes the devaluation of work focused on minorities because it is viewed as not generalizable to the majority population:

Yes [faculty of color must work harder], particularly if you're doing critical work....The presumption is that anything you do with minority groups is somehow not part of the mainstream. As if a minority family experience is not family studies, because it does not generalize to the mainstream. So that's the issue that we always face. You just have to acknowledge the fact that you're not going to get that kind of recognition.... I'm okay with that aspect, particularly now that I have a job.



The rigidity within which disciplines are often defined can leave little room for academic work outside the standard approach, making it difficult to conduct scholarship using a culturally different perspective or a fundamentally different cultural paradigm. In addition, the journals where this type of work might be published are viewed as less legitimate. One faculty member reports that she is consistently given the feedback that she needs to aim higher.

But I don't think the comments were given with an understanding of the context. I'm doing a non-mainstream topic, from a different country. I collect my own data and I use different research methods. ...I had three publications in one year and some published with students [but evaluations were conflicting] because of the quality of the journals.

In addition to facing questions about the legitimacy of their scholarly work, some faculty reported that they aimed to publish more because their topics were contested, the publication venues were viewed as less prestigious, or they felt vulnerable to discrimination due to their minority status:

For example, given the history of institutions and minority faculty, I know when I go up for tenure I would rather have four publications than three<sup>4</sup>.... I am well-educated and informed enough that I know the system cannot be trusted.... [Also] there is an expectation that I should be more productive ... because I am...Asian....You are also being compared to a racial stereotype, not just other people.

Others were also aware of the potential for discrimination regarding the evaluation of scholarship during the tenure process. While it is expected that all faculty will have concerns about the tenure process, faculty of color feel uniquely burdened by the potential for discrimination, resulting in a differential view of tenure expectations. While some white faculty

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<sup>4</sup> In order to be awarded tenure in this participant's department, the candidate must have a minimum of 3 peer-reviewed publications since time of hire.

view rubrics and quantitative standards as overly restrictive, some minority faculty appreciate the protective quality of these specifications:

People in my department say, “This rubric is too cumbersome; it’s too much. We should just trust one another to decide.” I said, “You know what, I’ve seen too many colleagues of mine who have published 15, 16 articles and are still denied tenure because they didn’t know what they had to hit. I’d rather know up front what I need to hit.”

While this report mainly focuses on the challenges experienced by faculty of color, it is important to note that departments can also foster a positive environment for scholars who address race and ethnicity or other typically marginalized topics. The department can employ a broader interpretation of scholarship, creating the possibility for less traditional research:

I think it was a collection of people who really wanted everyone to succeed. The leadership was not exactly *laissez faire*, but not intrusive. So if there wasn’t anything going on that was perceived as a problem, they didn’t get in your way....All they wanted to see was what was your productivity, are you making an impact, getting national attention, but they let you define what the impact was.

**Non-native speakers.** In addition to questions around the legitimacy of scholarship, a few faculty who were non-native English speakers discussed the additional workload involved in writing in English. Not only did they discuss the additional time spent writing academic work, but also in crafting communications, grant proposals, and developing course materials.

Scholarly work not only required more time, but also resulted in additional costs:

I will have to hire professional editors to do it....when you're a non-native speaker. Here's an example—my dissertation advisor told me, “You've got to hire an editor.”... It's like \$2000! Where do I get this money?

Sometimes I read papers written by native speakers and you see mistakes, grammar mistakes and everything. But it’s interesting that the assumption sometimes is that because you are not a native speaker, you are going to have more problems. So that always creates a feeling of insecurity in terms of my writing....I always find myself, like, “Oh, I have to have somebody read this to at

least assure me.” ...I have good friends, that, when it’s a paper, they can actually read it pretty quickly, but if it’s a manuscript, I have to hire somebody.

### **Overburdened by Service**

The disproportionate service obligations for faculty of color are well-documented (Jacobs, Cintrón and Canton 2002). While faculty of color at Western Washington University are prized for the unique perspective they might bring to a variety of tasks, they make up only 15% of the faculty body. As a result, many racial and ethnic minority faculty are asked to serve in a variety of capacities at the department, college, and university level. One faculty member succinctly explains, “Because many parts of academia are not very diverse, I tend to be on a lot of committees.”

Faculty of color are asked to commit to various long-term committees, but also to short-term tasks such as search committees, sometimes outside of their department, and even their college, due to their small numbers.

I will admit I think I got asked to do a little more work than some of my colleagues before I got tenure...like being on a couple of hiring committees that weren’t really relevant to my expertise.... The chair in my department framed it in both cases as my interest in international students and I have never done anything to suggest that I have a special interest in international students. But my feeling was that I was asked because I am a woman of color. It was code for “you offer a diverse perspective.” It was in fact one of the phrases used. I could have said no, but I didn’t have tenure...

If you are a minority faculty in a college where there are very few minority faculty and another department is hiring, and in the hiring guidelines they have to have some ethnic diversity, who are they going to call? You. And you are an assistant professor in your first year. Who are you going to say no to? Unless you have a dean or associate dean who protects you, you’re going to get pulled into that. And that’s going to get reflected in your tenure process.

The previous participant makes an excellent point. Often requests for service come to faculty of color from a variety of directions, not solely their department. An administrative ally

can protect faculty of color from service requests, especially in their first years when developing courses and setting a scholarship agenda is particularly important. Some faculty report getting better at setting limits over time, but, generally, this is after they have tenure and feel less tenuous in their position.

In addition to serving on committees, some faculty and staff of color are asked to serve as the “face of the institution.” While they might be interested in serving the university in this way, so few faculty are in a position to do this type of work, that they are disproportionately burdened. One first-year faculty member reports being on two search committees, advising over 50 students, and speaking at several university-related events. “Every other weekend I was doing some kind of speech.” While this new professor is deeply committed to social justice work, especially related to underserved students, it is difficult to imagine that anyone could sustain this workload and make a successful bid for tenure, especially when this type of work is not formally counted as scholarship or service in most departments during the tenure and promotion process.

In addition to formal committee work and other service to the institution, faculty of color also disproportionately support students of color. While this has been a longstanding additional burden for faculty of color, one can anticipate the burden will only increase as the university’s student population becomes less white. Not only do faculty of color support students of color, they often appear to disproportionately support first generation students, LGBT students, and other students who are challenged by institutional culture and norms. It is important to note that the support students seek is often emotional and social—someone to listen and validate their experiences, rather than academic. Several faculty of color report a

conflict between deeply caring about and wanting to serve underrepresented students and perceiving a lack of institutional support for struggling students.

When I see students who are suffering and I can tell they've been through a lot... they won't see a counselor on campus<sup>5</sup>....These students need a lot of support and it worries me because some of them are holding on by a very thin thread....I feel like the student body will change much quicker than the faculty demographics will change. So at the end of the day, you're going to have the handful of folks who will become overburdened.

While much of the support students seek from key faculty of color is not academic, sometimes they are also called upon for academic support by underprepared students:

A couple of years ago I tutored an African American woman in biology and I couldn't believe I was doing it. I mean, I was learning it with her. We were making up notecards....I was trying to teach her learning and study skills. I know I took it on, but she said to me there was literally no one else who would do this with her.... We did go see her professor and I understood her professor's point of view: ...“I teach this class; I have these tutoring sessions”—which she did go to—“and I can meet you for my office hours and the rest is up to you.” I get it, but she needed more.

The desire to serve underrepresented students often conflicts with the usual responsibilities of the job—sanctioned service to the university and scholarship, plus the additional service burdens shouldered by many faculty of color:

One of the most difficult things for me as an assistant professor was to learn to say no, because, of course, my heart and my political commitment is to diversity.... That's the problem...they want us to be mentors in a particular way...but there are other responsibilities departmentally and university-wide that pull us away from it. There's a substantial unreasonable tax on faculty of color and that tax is that we want to assist and we want to be models and we want to be mentors, but we also have these other real responsibilities that we also have to handle....

...The burden of those things fall disproportionately on women of color faculty. We've all gone through it and we've all had to figure out a way to put some

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<sup>5</sup> A few participants noted the lack of ability to get into the Counseling Center and a lack of racial, ethnic, sexual orientation, and gender identity minority counselors at the university.

boundaries around it. ... My strategy had to change because I would routinely let students come in here. I had a couch there [gestures]. Students would come in and tell me their life stories, sob. And I had to stop that...I can't take it in. It's just too much for me. So I really have become much more professional in my relationships with the vast majority of students in order to preserve my ability to keep doing it.

In conclusion, one faculty member describes the need for some sort of acknowledgement of the extra contribution and unseen service often provided to the university by faculty of color:

We have to incorporate their contribution some way. Today, for example, let's say a Latino faculty works with all these new Latino students coming in. They show up at this faculty's office, he or she talks with them, and keeps them in college.... These advising initiatives and experiences they are engaging in do not get reflected anywhere in their professional development....Minority faculty tend to get penalized for doing the things that, covertly, the institution is asking them to do....Nobody is telling them, "You should do this," but... why do minority students seek out minority faculty? Because they do not get that support from majority faculty. It comes down to that. So what we are doing from an institutional level is pushing those students who are already marginalized to the marginalized faculty, and saying, "You deal with them, so I can focus on my research."

Another faculty member acknowledged the need for more supports for students of color and offers this advice: "The way to manage the predicament is to increase the number of people who have an affinity towards that work, which is likely to mean they are of those groups, and also have the appropriate skills—not all academics have those skills."

While the desire to be mentors, supports, and role models to students was strong, not all faculty members expressed an interest in this type of service work. While not working closely with students appeared to help faculty be more traditionally successful as academics, it also meant that perhaps half of the participants were shouldering the burden of informally mentoring underrepresented students. Certain faculty of color appeared to bear the brunt of

student need—women and faculty who taught courses related to race, ethnicity, and marginalized populations regardless of their own race or ethnicity were especially sought out by students for this type of support.

In addition to directly supporting students, some faculty members described other instances of what I would term, “social justice work.” Two faculty members described an informal network of faculty who, over the years, have pulled together during crises such as challenges to the tenure of racial/ethnic minority faculty, incidents of egregious discrimination or, recently, when white supremacists were on campus. The burden has rested for many years on the same small group of people. One participant expressed concern that these faculty members were aging. Another participant described her frustration with trying to get new faculty of color involved:

A few years ago, I was talking to a couple new faculty of color.... I said, “Gee, I don’t see you at these meetings.” And they basically said, “I duck. I duck because I know I’m going to be called on that over and over and over and I want to do my job, my research. I don’t want to get involved in that.” So part of me is like, “Huh, that’s not very helpful” and the other part is like, “Huh, I wish I could have done that.”

### **Emotional Labor**

In the classroom, faculty can be exposed to students’ ignorance, defensiveness, and hostility. Faculty who belong to minority groups or teach subjects related to minority groups may be particularly likely to experience these negative encounters. Some racial/ethnic minority faculty at Western Washington University expect to encounter minor prejudicial incidents, yet remain committed to “educating” whites on topics related to prejudice, privilege, and particular cultures. In my previous interviews, lesbian and gay faculty also reported expecting a certain

level of ignorant comments and uncomfortable moments due to their relatively small numbers on campus.

The emotional labor required by some faculty of color when negotiating a largely white environment is an additional burden not often discussed. While participants indicated a commitment to being at the institution and addressing issues as they came up, the ongoing need to tactfully negotiate prejudicial incidents and educate members of the majority group can be stressful. One aspect of microaggressions is the process of “rescuing offenders”—the need to take care of majority group members, even in the face of a prejudicial action or statement (Sue et al. 2007). I believe this may be especially common among faculty whose courses focus on race or ethnicity.

There are days when I wish I could just go lecture to the people....What would life be like where nobody questions you, your authority, your credibility, your knowledge, or anything like that? When I teach [race/ethnicity] courses, inevitably I’m going to have...these non-minority students who are coming in for the first time and they don’t understand why the n-word is so bad...and then they use the word and I try to explain to them that language matters, words matter. And they’re like, “Right, I get it, but I don’t understand why this word...” And every time they say it, I’m cringing, and I see the students of color ready to throw up and I’m feeling like my heart’s beating and I feel awful. It’s those moments when I think, “What would a math class be like?” [laughs]

After describing an incident where a student became extremely agitated and threatening, one faculty member summarized:

I get it, in the sense that if you are a white person who has not had much experience with diversity and suddenly a person of color is in authority and making a decision which is essentially about your life... that’s very scary to people. And the thing you are going to respond to is the race aspect of it, or the minority aspect of it....I get that I disrupt their interactional patterns, and how difficult that is for students.



Another faculty member discusses the value minority faculty can bring to students, but, when prompted, acknowledges the personal costs:

Going back to my question about the critical edge that diversity can offer, that particular feeling of being always outside but also inside can be very productive.... For example, the accent always singles me out. There's no way around it, which is fine....I make a point of this with my students, I tell them, "It's your problem, it's not my problem. You have to get used to a different accent." So that's what I mean by seeing myself as alien to this society can actually be quite productive in terms of questioning the boundaries.... Oh yes, [personally and socially] it's not that great.

In their role in the classroom, faculty must often juggle the needs of students of color and white students. One participant described a classroom experience that felt validating for the small group of students of color, but also required the faculty member to skillfully manage the feelings of the white students:

And you can see all the white students tense and quiet. It's not comfortable to talk about [racial inequality]. As a professor, I find it very difficult, given my minority status, it's very difficult to talk about.... And [students of color] are so excited that a professor identifies with their feelings. But I don't want the white students to feel they are being attacked....It's very hard for them to not take it as an attack.

Although faculty speak about the emotional labor of teaching courses related to race, ethnicity, and inequality, they also voice their commitment to supporting students in this learning process. However, the classroom is not the only venue where faculty must manage ignorance and avoid confrontation around prejudice:

...[I] don't speak English as a first language....[My supervisor] always thinks that I could write better, could speak better, although none of my students really have an issue with my language or my delivery of classes.... A simple example—when she wrote emails to me she would use capital letters very often and use exclamation marks quite often....That might be an indication [that she thinks I don't understand English]....I shared this with other faculty members of color, from other departments and they feel very frustrated for me. They say, "You should fight back."

...I sometimes let comments go or, this is going to sound terrible, but I actually pander to [staff] with little gifts, because I just want it to go smoothly. I don't want a confrontation. I just want to do my job, but I feel like I'm beholden..., like "Oh, don't piss her off, even though what she said was...." And I don't want to sit down and have that uncomfortable conversation because I don't know where it's going to go and I'm pretty sure it's going to end up with me getting screwed over and not getting what I need from that person, so I just let it go.

One faculty member told a story about a faculty-staff group exercise related to microaggressions. In the group, she recounted a microaggression she had experienced in the community. Later, a staff member sought her out to assure her that the experience was not racist. "It was so important to her to make sure that it wasn't about racism, that she had to come tell me that I should substitute my own experience of that with hers."

While these various experiences may not qualify as "prejudicial events," participants report that addressing them can take a great deal of emotional and mental energy. When faculty of color are devoted to educating and supporting students around topics of race, ethnicity, and inequality, their leadership role serves to make them a "lightning rod" for students' distress and confusion. In addition, as other faculty and staff grapple with issues surrounding cultural competence and awareness, faculty of color bear the brunt of their inaccurate assumptions and ignorance.

### **Enduring ignorance**

Most faculty of color who experienced prejudicial events implied that they believed a certain level of ignorance was inevitable in a predominantly white environment. A participant who had a colleague question whether he was a "diversity hire" later reflected: "I attribute that one to be just an ignorant comment. I think after he saw my record...because now he is always

behind me. He always asks me for advice, after that time when I think he saw my promotion files.”

Faculty who are exposed to ignorant comments must develop strategies for emotionally coping—whether it’s keeping a notebook of incidents, letting it go, laughing it off, changing behavior, or talking with a mentor or ally about it. Here are comments illustrating the types of comments made to faculty of color by white staff and faculty:

Maybe the people we work with need some more sensitivity training...when people say “those colored folk,” you know? This is 2014 and somebody is still saying that.

Like I used to wear a lot of velvet and I had a staff member come up to me and say, “Do they wear a lot of velvet in your culture?” And then I realized a couple years later I didn’t wear velvet anymore.

I’ve had colleagues called me “girl.” ...I went to a university committee and I volunteered to be the recorder and they thought I was the secretary....In those situations, it’s how are you going to respond. I said, “No, I’m not a secretary,” in a nice way. Then, “By the way, people today address them as administrative assistants. But, I’m a faculty.” I say it nicely, you try not to hurt people’s feelings.... I’m not tenured yet, so it’s tricky. You have to really pick your fights.

In summary, some participants worked more hours and expended more psychic energy due to their minority status at Western Washington University. While almost no faculty experienced prejudicial events that they interpreted as threatening to their employment, microaggressions were commonplace for over a third of participants and occasional for another third. As a result, participants reported a greater workload because of the need to legitimate their scholarship, respond to hostility from students, serve on a disproportionate number of committees, support underserved students, and expend emotional and mental energy in coping with prejudicial events.

## Other Considerations

### Cultural Isolation

Some faculty feel isolated due to their minority status both on campus and in the community. A few report racist incidents in the community in addition to events on campus. Participants report several strategies for coping with cultural isolation such as traveling during breaks, going to Seattle or Vancouver as often as possible, or planning to relocate as soon as they get the “right” offer. Others choose to live in Seattle and commute to avoid cultural isolation. One faculty member describes the difficulty of becoming culturally invisible in such a homogenous community.

I am a first generation immigrant. This is really painful to think about—my culture is going to be lost. By the time my children are second generation, when Christmas is shoved down your throat everywhere; it’s kind of hard to take. I find my culture is often being consumed rather than understood. That’s hard for me....

Having a partner appears to reduce the likelihood of feeling culturally isolated in Bellingham. It is notable that among the 18 participants who live in the Bellingham area and are married, twelve have white partners and the majority were married when they arrived at Western Washington University. Having a white partner may signal a greater willingness to exist in white spaces and/or have less involvement in racial or ethnic minority communities, a necessity for faculty who choose to live in Bellingham. One faculty member describes the characteristics that help her remain at Western Washington University: “I’ve been around white people all my life and I kind of know how to navigate and do what I need to do, but if I grew up in the south or the Caribbean or New York, I would have been gone a long time ago.”

It may be useful for the university to be mindful of the tendency for faculty of color to have white partners when addressing racial/ethnic minority faculty needs. For example, one

faculty member discussed his discomfort with the reception at President Shepard's house since it excluded his partner who is white; his wife believed the event was "kind of racist." The participant suggested, "Why don't you just have a big, 'Hey, we are going to have this event for minorities, but everybody is invited so you can interact.'" Finding ways to acknowledge the racial/ethnic complexity of many faculty of color's families seems important in creating a positive climate for them.

### **Commuting**

While the majority of participants live in Bellingham, others commute to campus from the Seattle metropolitan area, primarily for two reasons—to combat cultural isolation and because their partners do not have comparable work opportunities in Bellingham. My previous interviews found that lesbian and gay faculty commuted for similar reasons. While some faculty believe that Bellingham is a good fit for them and/or do not have a strong need for involvement with a racial/ethnic minority culture, others find cultural isolation difficult:

I'm also a member of the Buddhist temple in Seattle. So it's where the Japanese American community lives and I'm invested in that. For even just one day a week, to be with people who look like me, is kind of nice....I was concerned about living [in Bellingham] with a white husband in a predominately white community. I would be totally lost. So, adopting a baby from Japan has made me committed even more to now saying, "I need to have time in Seattle. I need to do this because I have an investment in raising my child."

One participant who contemplates her future at the university explains, "I'm still thinking about [whether to leave]. I'm thinking about other countries... I don't want my children to grow up in an environment that is all white. I don't want my children to be close-minded and think they are liberal." For faculty members who struggle with cultural isolation, the ability to commute from a larger metropolitan area may increase their likelihood of remaining at

Western Washington University where they can provide a unique perspective on cultural identity.

While some faculty appreciate the greater diversity of Seattle, others find that their highly-skilled partners have more work opportunities in the Seattle area. One participant believes faculty are increasingly in dual career families where they will need to commute for work opportunities:

I know some other more recent faculty members who are choosing to do the same thing....If you have a dual career family, it's not always easy for both people to find jobs in Bellingham...so faculty might want to live somewhere else for the same reasons that I did. It's a fine line; you don't want absentee faculty, but you also want to enable faculty to have complete lives and that complete life—Bellingham may not offer.

I talked with only three faculty members who commuted from the Seattle area, but I also talked with male faculty members who lived in Bellingham with wives who are highly skilled, yet not working. One male participant explains:

One of my colleague's wives [is underemployed], actually more than one now that I think about it. It's a difficult thing; it's a sacrifice that their partner makes. One is not working, but they have a young child as well. Another one, the spouse is working partly in Seattle and partly from home. My fiancée as well, she teaches part-time at [community colleges].

It appears that gender plays a role in whether faculty choose to commute—heterosexual families with a male faculty member may decide that the wife will opt out of paid employment or be underemployed while families with a female faculty member may be more likely to decide she will commute from the Seattle area.

It is important to note that commuting may disproportionately affect couples who are not United States citizens because their work opportunities can be more restricted. One participant reports that a significant number of faculty in her college who commute to work are

from outside the U.S. and that most of the commuting faculty have partners who are “non-Caucasian” and highly-skilled.

The greater likelihood of commuting is another factor that increases the workload of faculty of color, especially immigrant faculty, adding hours that are not taken into account or even acknowledged at the university. Instead, faculty members report feeling pressure to “prove” themselves by driving to campus for every meeting, even when faculty members who live in Bellingham don’t attend and the participant could easily call in to the meeting. One faculty member tracks all of her attendance at meetings and other events in case she is challenged. Another reports driving from the Seattle area 4 to 5 days per week for over 10 years in order to assure she is viewed as fully committed to her position.

During diversity initiatives, primarily white institutions are sometimes criticized for seeking diversity in “skin color,” but not in behavior, lifestyle, and culture. Fostering diversity requires flexibility and asks the university to go beyond supporting only faculty who live in Bellingham, love Bellingham, and embrace the rather homogenous environment. Creating an inclusive climate relies not on requiring sameness, but on valuing difference and taking steps to ensure that all faculty have the opportunity to thrive.

### **Gender and National Origin**

While this is a relatively small, non-random sample, the interviews imply that participants with particular demographic characteristics were especially likely to face challenges at Western Washington University. Women of color, non-native English speakers, and women who taught diversity-related courses were far more likely to experience difficulties. It is important to note that, while the numbers in the sample were small, it appeared no racial or

ethnic minority group seemed more likely to experience challenges due to their particular race or ethnicity. Often, Asians are stereotyped as the “model minority” and, also, are better-represented on campuses. As a result, one might assume that they would have fewer negative experiences. This was not the case in this sample, particularly not for Asians who immigrated to the United States as adults.

It is also important to note that, based on these interviews, service is especially likely to be “women’s work.” While discussing women’s social position more generally, one female faculty member stated: “There’s a very narrow idea of what it means to be a woman of color who is successful. And if you’re not doing it for the good of the people, whatever that means, then you’re doing it wrong.”

Some male faculty were aware of the gendered nature of service. One male describes being overburdened early on, until the college “hired women in [a department] so that took the burden of mentoring off.” Another male faculty member noted, “...there will be certain faculty who have the personality to want to take on more and more. It’s also gendered. We have to acknowledge that aspect of it.”

Several men described setting firm limits around service requests. One male participant described support from his chair who agreed that “diversity” service was not his responsibility and served to help limit requests for the faculty member’s time. Other men describe a variety of strategies:

Again, this has a lot to do with students asking me to serve [student groups]...I have felt pressure to do that kind of thing. [I am asked by] adults, we could say deans even. ...I said, “No.” And there was no let up, you know. Then they were a little more aggressive going after me but after my 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> “No,” I think they got the message.



I personally believe putting too much on my plate would make me inefficient, so I want to be strategic....For example, the reason I wanted to be on the admissions committee was because I knew that was where I could have the most influence, rather than going to sit at the ethnic center for 2 hours every week. That might be of value, but not strategic.

Some women described learning to set limits over time, often out of desperation. “I basically said, ‘Stop’ [asking me to serve]—to repeated numbers of people. The sign on my door is ‘No’ and that's where we start. But that is after having been spread so thin that I couldn't function.”

And finally, another male faculty member notes that gender influences the workload for women in more than way:

Gender seems to impact work level because women bear a disproportionate burden for providing service to students and in other ways. In addition, evidence suggests they, on average, get lower teaching evaluations and must work harder in the classroom if that is an important consideration for tenure.

While women may have a more difficult time setting limits around service, especially when it directly affects students, it is unfair to cast individual blame. The true challenge is not the ability to say “no,” but the lack of faculty at the institution who can support students of color and offer diverse perspectives on committees. It is possible that not everyone that serves students or represents diversity on committees needs to be a person of color—allies can also do this work. However, as long as the number of faculty of color remain relatively small, they will be disproportionately called upon to serve the university in this way.

It appears that women who are non-native English speakers must work especially hard, adding the additional burdens of carefully crafting written communications, having more challenges with students who question their competence subtly and overtly, and being more

likely to commute. Of course, not all faculty members experience these challenges, but it does appear that immigrant faculty, especially women, experience additional workloads.

### **Recommendations**

When directly asked, participants had several ideas for improving the climate at Western Washington University for faculty of color. I combined my observations with suggestions from participants to create a list of recommendations. In the interest of brevity, I have briefly summarized the recommendations then offered them in a list format. I am happy to discuss any of these ideas or how they relate to participants' comments with anyone interested. Also for the sake of brevity, I have largely left out suggestions that could increase the retention and well-being of students of color unless they directly impact the work of faculty of color. Again, I'm happy to discuss these ideas with individuals who have an interest in improving the experiences of students of color.

Overall, the most common suggestion was in some ways the least tangible and most difficult to attain—increasing cultural competence or cultural awareness among faculty, staff, and students. One participant, when asked what could be done about the climate, jokingly stated: “We need to get these white people some education!” Suggestions for increasing cultural competence and awareness include creating opportunities for deeply-engaged conversations about diversity, equity, inclusion, and privilege. Enrollment could be encouraged by incentivizing participation through counting diversity work as service in tenure and promotion expectations and incorporating it into employee evaluations, more generally. Programs could include a year-long conversation group similar to the Teaching-Learning Academy (TLA) or a summer workshop or class that “really challenges faculty to see things

differently.” In addition, creating required workshops or presentations upon entry into the university or for promotion that “challenge our basic assumptions as a culture.” Participants acknowledged how difficult it is to create change by teaching cultural awareness/competence. “It's like we need antiracist or unpacking racism training, but of course we are all too sophisticated and we don't think we need it.” In addition to possible resistance, faculty and staff consistently report the difficulty of carving out time for another commitment.

Another approach to improving the climate seems obvious—increase the number of faculty of color. This is imperative if the institution hopes to reduce the service load for faculty of color. In addition, a critical mass of minority faculty will increase exposure to diverse lifestyles and cultures for all of the campus community. Since many prejudicial incidents are based on ignorance, increased exposure to diversity is likely to increase knowledge and broaden the experiences of students, staff, and faculty.

Some participants noted the increase in racial and ethnic minority leadership which may also serve to increase exposure to a variety of cultures and approaches in addition to signaling institutional values. The university can continue to support diversifying the campus community by hiring more minorities in administration and crafting statements, policies, and programs that support diversity among students, faculty, and staff. While the university may face some detractors during this process, in the end, it will foster a more positive environment for faculty of color.

The university must also work to retain faculty by providing greater support and reducing the service load experienced by some minority faculty. Support for faculty who face challenges can include offering mentors and creating opportunities to connect with other

minority faculty and faculty in general. While providing mentors for new minority faculty seems key, it is important to note that, while many are willing to do this important work, it places an additional service burden on senior faculty of color.

In addition to offering support, the university must work to reduce or somehow compensate the additional service burden experienced by some minority faculty. Service obligations can be reduced if chairs and committees learn to limit their requests; leadership can encourage these limitations. Another important strategy for reducing service obligations is to ensure underrepresented students receive adequate support services. Below is a list of specific recommendations that could contribute to a positive climate for faculty of color:

#### **Improve cultural awareness/competence**

- Orient all new campus members to the university's views of inclusion and diversity, e.g. include explicit diversity and inclusion-related programming in faculty, student and staff orientations.
- Form cross-discipline faculty groups around diversity-related topics, e.g. teaching diversity courses, teaching non-Western history, literature or art, or addressing the needs of all learners in the classroom.
- Create ongoing events and opportunities for education and reflection related to equity, inclusion, and diversity, e.g., choose a focus for the year and include speakers, panels, films, exhibits, etc. that address the topic using a variety of perspectives and approaches.
- Create an ongoing program similar to "SafeZone" focused on cultural awareness/competence and bringing together students, faculty, and staff.
- Centralize and disseminate information regarding diversity-related events and programs through a continually updated calendar and website to reflect the variety of events at Western Washington University. A website could also offer resources, education, and topics for consideration.
- Publicize the university's commitment by showcasing successful diversity efforts. Ideas include ongoing press releases, continued blogging by the President on important issues, and coordinating an annual diversity summit to discuss teaching strategies, showcase recent faculty research, and update the campus community on the university's progress on diversity initiatives.
- Support faculty international exchange programs. Also explore nearby exchange opportunities with tribes or Canadian communities.
- Find ways to encourage faculty to travel outside the United States.

- Respond to important global events (e.g., tsunami) with activism, fundraising or other institutional responses.
- Foster better connections and more engagement between on-campus exchange students (e.g., Asia University students) and the broader campus community.
- Explore whether to incorporate a more explicit commitment to social justice into institutional identity.

## **Reach a critical mass of faculty of color**

### **Recruit faculty of color**

- Re-instate the post-doctoral program for minority scholars.
- Create a program for visiting professorships for minority scholars who might not otherwise choose to teach at the university.
- Create a small number of opportunity hires targeting the most underrepresented populations on campus (Black, Latino, Native American and Pacific Islander). Positions should not be based on bridge funding; some departments are hesitant to hire a faculty member in anticipation of a retirement if the candidate will not address the retiree's specialty. However, diversity initiatives are likely to bring in faculty with other specialties. If the university hired only two African American academics, they would double the number of African American faculty.
- Institutionalize the opportunity for candidates to meet faculty or staff of color, if requested, during interviews.
- Provide greater transparency and clarity regarding spousal hires.
- Improve career support and address employment issues of partners who are not U.S. citizens.
- Take an explicit institutional stance on commuting as a diversity issue—encourage departments to remain flexible and support the use of technology as an acceptable approach to reducing unnecessary commuting for faculty who live in metropolitan areas.

### **Retain faculty of color**

- Allow new faculty of color to opt-in to mentoring with a more senior faculty member who can help orient them and strategize around issues particular to faculty of color. As one participant said, “[A former mentor] was really good about doing professional development with us. ‘How would you respond to this situation? What would you do?’ The only way we were able to develop that arsenal at the time was in community, for people to share their stories and their experiences...because the microaggressions aren't going to stop.”
- Provide early support for research, e.g., course releases, research and writing circles, travel support if research is centered in a community of color outside the area.
- Provide editing assistance to support the scholarship of faculty for whom English is not a native language.

- Create connections outside the department that go beyond social groups. For example, interest groups for faculty involved in international studies, teaching diversity-related courses, research groups for faculty with similar interests, etc.
- Formalize a list of faculty willing to respond to social justice issues in order to reduce the burden on the few. “Every time there’s an issue about a minority faculty, we come together and meet with whomever we need to meet with to show support for that professor who is in trouble. It’s not a recognized committee; it’s just us saying, “Hey, we’ve got to do this.”...And when half of the old guard starts retiring, I don’t know who I will start calling, so having a fresh list would be good.”

### **Reduce service**

- Provide an explicit guideline regarding the quantity of service expected for tenure track faculty. Consider setting a weekly hourly limit for service, especially for tenure track faculty. This issue may be best addressed by the union.
- Provide mentoring outside the department for new minority faculty who would like support around negotiating the environment and setting limits on service.
- Increase awareness about the disproportionate burden of service for faculty of color among deans and chairs.
- Offer support to faculty of color (or perhaps any faculty) who can document extraordinary levels of service to students, e.g., a course release, a work study student, administrative support shared by faculty across disciplines who can document need. Some faculty of color do not like the idea of a course release because it may negatively affect students of color: “A lot of students of color are going to seek out mentors through their classes...”

### **Reduce service by supporting the well-being of students of color**

- Increase staffing in counseling and student outreach services in order to offer students immediate assistance.
- Increase representation of staff of color and Spanish speaking staff in roles that especially contribute to students’ ability to enroll in and thrive at Western Washington University (e.g., counseling, student outreach services, advising, admissions, and financial aid).
- Actively recruit underrepresented students for research/TA positions with key faculty. Create research groups with a faculty member and underrepresented students, allowing faculty to engage with more than one student at a time.
- Continue to hire racial and ethnic minority staff because their presence will “trickle down to some programmatic changes and some programmatic options” that can improve the climate for minority students.
- Create a resource list for students that includes faculty of color and allies who “it is clear, have an open door and are especially interested in seeing minority students.” The list could include scholarly interests, specialties, or areas of assistance (see staff listings in Asia University America Program for an example).

- Regularly evaluate whether there are particular courses that underrepresented students are failing and develop concrete strategies to improve their success.

A number of these suggestions seem relatively easy to implement such as maintaining a calendar, forming interest groups, coordinating training, providing updated information and suggestions on a website, and evaluating data regarding student success. However, to succeed in the long-term, an employee would need to be allocated to handle the administrative requirements of these tasks.

## **Conclusion**

While this report has mainly focused on challenges faced by faculty of color, it is important to remember that sixty percent of the participants felt that they had no or very few issues in their departments or at Western Washington University. It is also important to note that, among faculty of color, women, individuals who immigrated to the United States, and women who teach courses related to diversity and equity are especially likely to face challenges.

It was my aim in this report to summarize experiences of racial and ethnic minority faculty at Western Washington University that might both deepen the institution's understanding and lend themselves to concrete recommendations to improve the climate for faculty of color. To continue enriching our understanding, the institution could seek out former faculty of color in order to discuss their experiences and the circumstances leading to their departure. The university should also consider regularly collecting data from minority faculty using a variety of strategies in order to assess Western Washington University's progress in furthering equity, inclusion, and diversity. One of the positive outcomes of an interview project

like this is its ability to signal the value of minority employees to the institution. Several participants voiced appreciation for the opportunity to share their views and experiences during the interviews. One participant commented, “I think surveys like you are doing are a good step. It kind of reminded me of why I like my department so much, but it also made me think....Every big problem can’t be solved with big solutions, but I think the little ones – the engagement, the awareness, the diversity in the student body, making every department like [mine]...” In other words, a variety of small steps can help the institution move forward in honoring its mission to bring “together individuals of diverse backgrounds and perspectives in an inclusive, student-centered university.” It is with this goal in mind, that I offer this report to the Western Washington University community.



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## APPENDIX A Interview Schedule

### Demographics

1. How long have you been at Western?
2. What is your title?
3. What college do you work in?
4. How would you describe your race or ethnicity?
5. What is your relationship status?
6. Do you have children? If so, what ages?
7. Where do you live?

### Questions

1. When you first came to Western, how was the hiring process for you?
2. Can you tell me a little bit about your experiences working at Western as a person of color?
  - Follow up:
    - Anything else that is positive for you here at Western?
    - Anything else that is difficult for you?
3. Do you believe you have to work harder than your colleagues to be perceived as a legitimate scholar?
  - Follow up: In what ways?
4. Do you believe faculty of color are treated fairly at Western?
5. Do you feel that you have experienced discrimination, either subtle or direct, here at Western?
  - Follow up: Can you tell me a little about that?
6. How about in Bellingham, generally, as a person of color how has your experience been?
7. Have you considered leaving Western? If so, why?
8. What has made you stay?
9. Do you have any possible solutions to some of the challenges you have faced?
10. Do you have any ideas how Western could be more supportive of faculty of color?
11. Is there anything else you'd like to say about your experience as a faculty member of color?
12. Is there anything else you'd like to add about the climate for people of color on campus (students, faculty, or staff)?