

WESTERN WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY
ITEM SUBMITTED TO THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

TO: Members of the Board of Trustees

FROM: President Sabah Randhawa and Provost Brent Carbajal

DATE: December 15, 2017

SUBJECT: **Update on Western's Diversity Initiatives**

PURPOSE: Discussion Item

Purpose of Submittal:

Provide the Board of Trustees with update on Western Washington University's Diversity Initiatives.

Last Fall we provided an update on a number of new diversity-related initiatives at Western. As we approach the end of our strategic planning process and begin implementation of the plan in the New Year, one thing is clearer than ever: creating and sustaining a more diverse, welcoming and inclusive community for current and future students, faculty and staff is absolutely central to advancing our mission as a university. For, at the core of that mission lies our commitment to advancing inclusive success: not only welcoming more students from first generation and diverse backgrounds to Western, but ensuring that they persist and graduate at the same rates as those from backgrounds that have traditionally had more access to higher education.

Although there are many dimensions along which we will measure our success in increasing diversity and inclusion at Western, this is a particularly powerful metric because it is so central to everything that we do in a residential community of learning and scholarship. If we are truly successful in eliminating achievement gaps for diverse students, this success will be due to fostering a more inclusive Western, where the diversity to which we aspire is reflected among the faculty and staff, and the institutional culture is one in which people of all identities feel respected, supported, and valued to the same degree as their colleagues. This work begins and ends in humility, with a recognition of the great distance we have yet to go and the ongoing nature of the challenges we face as a society and as an institution.

Just one recent example brings home the urgency: There have been multiple incidents this Fall involving hateful and threatening anti-Islamic graffiti on the public message boards on the first floor of Haggard Hall West. University Police and the Equal Opportunity Office are tracking these incidents and have been working to identify the perpetrator(s), but given the open access to the hallway we do not know whether they are from the on- or off-campus community. What we do know is that this kind of hateful and loathsome expression has no place at Western and does not represent what we are about. If you have information about these or other bias incidents, or seek referral to support services such as counseling, please contact the Equal Opportunity Office at 360-650-3307.

That our Muslim students and colleagues deserve an environment free from harassment and discrimination should go without saying. The fact that fear of such harassment is a common companion for them, and for other diverse members of our community, confirms that we must be more effective as an institution and as a community in improving our climate.

To that end, we are pleased to announce the creation of two new groups that will be working to further advance diversity and inclusion at Western:

The Commission on Gender Equity will provide advice and recommendations related to promoting gender equity, parity, and inclusivity related to hiring, professional advancement, leadership development, salary equity, and student success. The Commission will also identify ways to foster a more diverse, safe, and welcoming campus environment that recognizes the contributions and challenges faced by Western's female population, and by people with gender identities outside of the gender binary. Gender equity is more than just a human right; it is also an economic and development imperative. Only by making explicit the strong connection between pervasive cultural gender norms and gender inequalities, will we be able to achieve fully workable, equitable solutions to many of Western's – and the world's – most pressing equity challenges. The Commission will be co-chaired this year by Raine Dozier, Professor of Health and Community Studies in Woodring College, and Stephanie Bowers, Vice President for University Advancement.

The Council for Equity, Inclusion and Social Justice will identify structural barriers to equity, inclusion and social justice at Western and recommend policies and practices that help create and sustain a more just and inclusive community. Building on the work of the predecessor Task Force on Equity, Inclusion, and Diversity, the Council will examine campus climate issues and recommend changes that enable our success as a more diverse and inclusive community. The Council will be co-chaired this year by Debra Salazar, Professor of Political Science, and Melynda Huskey, Vice President for Enrollment and Student Services.

Both groups are composed of a cross-section of the University community, including faculty, staff and students, who will advise us and other university leaders, and make recommendations on university policies, practices, and programs to enact constructive change in these areas. They will also work collaboratively with existing offices, committees, and leaders who have been engaged in advancing this work, including the Equal Opportunity Office and the Faculty Senate Social Justice Committee, among others. It is our intention to ensure that recommendations and progress updates from these groups are posted for review and feedback on the President's website.

Tribal Relations Liaison Position

While a draft position description for a Tribal Relations Liaison was developed last Spring in response to the "Letter of Urgent Needs" put forth by the Native American Student Union, it became clear to us that more was needed after talking with advisors both on and off campus. It became clear also that we need to listen and learn more from tribal elders in order to develop and sustain more meaningful and authentic relationships with the Native American tribes in our area. To that end, we have been meeting, and will continue to meet, with leaders from our neighboring tribes to seek their advice on the position. We intend to convene the search committee in January with the goal of selecting a candidate by the end of the academic year.

LGBTQ+ Resource Position

Last year, based on needs identified through surveys, interviews and SCOT (strengths, challenges, opportunities and threats) analyses involving the LGBTQ+ community at Western, the Taskforce on Equity, Inclusion and Diversity recommended the University create a position to facilitate, coordinate and provide oversight to LGBTQ+ activities and resources for all students, faculty and staff. A committee is finalizing the position description included with that recommendation, and will advertise the position in January. We hope to fill the position by the end of the academic year.

The Provost's Diversity & Inclusion Hiring Initiative

Recognizing the need to hire, retain, and advance faculty who are committed to effectively educating and mentoring Western's increasingly diverse student body, this year the Provost's Office has set aside funds for new tenure track faculty positions that require applicants to have demonstrated experience cultivating diverse and inclusive classroom and departmental environments. It is expected that under the leadership of the Dean, the hiring department and college will support the success of the appointee by implementing ways to formally value their efforts related to diversity and inclusion in teaching, service and scholarship.

HERI Campus Climate Survey Results

Late last Spring, as part of our commitment to advancing a more diverse and inclusive culture at Western, we partnered with the UCLA Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) to conduct distinct, anonymous surveys for faculty, students, and staff about our campus climate. The HERI Narrative Summary Report, along with accompanying data for all three surveys, are now complete and available at www.wvu.edu/eoo/diversity-climate-survey-reports.shtml. We have intentionally disaggregated the data by race, gender identity (including non-binary gender identities), sexual orientation, and disability in order to most accurately understand how members of these communities experience Western's climate. Overall, the findings confirm that we have much more work to do at Western to create a more inclusive and equitable environment. In our faculty ranks, women, people of color and LGBQO (lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer and other) people report experiencing greater stress due to subtle discrimination compared to their male, white and straight colleagues. Individuals belonging to these identity groups also perceive a significant need to work harder than their counterpart colleagues in order to enjoy the same respect. Similarly, students from these same demographic backgrounds, along with students who identify as GQGN (genderqueer, gender non-conforming, and different gender identities), and students with disabilities, tend to report more frequent experiences with discrimination and harassment, feel more skeptical about our institutional commitment to diversity, and overall report feeling a weaker connection to campus. While the student response rate was quite low—7.5%, which does not permit generalizing findings to the entire student body—we nevertheless take this feedback as significant, and as a call for immediate improvement. Similar trends are reported by staff from marginalized identity groups who feel that Western's efforts aimed at advocating for and improving diversity are inadequate.

We will be following up on these survey results in several ways:

- Gathering additional qualitative data through focus groups and additional opt-in interviews;
- Charging the Commission on Gender Equity and the Council for Equity, Inclusion and Social Justice to thoroughly review the results and make recommendations in response;

- Conducting periodic follow-up surveys to benchmark our results and assess the effectiveness of our response to these survey results going forward;
- Undertaking more effective advance planning and communication about the next round of surveys to ensure greater participation across all groups, especially students.

We would like to conclude on a note of gratitude. First, we would like to thank all of the faculty, students and staff who are so deeply committed to helping Western become a more diverse and inclusive place. Second, we would like to thank everyone who responded to the HERI survey, and the faculty, students and staff from diverse backgrounds and marginalized identities who have shared their experiences with us. Thank you for highlighting the places where Western can and must improve. We feel confident that Western will do better, and we welcome the opportunity to continue learning from you about how we can better address your experiences. Finally, we would like to thank the Western campus community which has so resoundingly identified improving our campus climate as a matter of central importance to all of us. We look forward to the ways that we will, together, improve this critical element of Western's future success, and in so doing, ensure the success of future generations who will become part of the Western community.