



COMMISSION_{ON}
DIVERSITY_{AND}
INCLUSION

Undergraduate Report

Submitted to:
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Provost Holden Thorp

June 28, 2017

Recommendations for Undergraduate Student Diversity

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INTRODUCTION

The Undergraduate Student Diversity Working Group (Group) convened its first meeting on Friday, February 24, 2017. Adrienne Davis, the Chair of the Commission on Diversity and Inclusion provided the Group with the following charge, per action item #1: “The University will commit increased financial resources to ensure that we recruit, admit, and support a diverse population of undergraduate, graduate, and professional students... Per this charge, the focus of Working Group’s recommendations is on undergraduate students enrolled at Washington University in St. Louis; some of these recommendations may align with the recommendations of colleagues reviewing graduate and professional student diversity at the University. The composition of the working group represents a cross-section of students, faculty, and administrators.

Colleges and universities are addressing a cross-section of intersecting challenges that have framed discussion on the value proposition of a college education. Some of these challenges include financing the institution, overall governance structures, academic freedom, the canon of teaching, and support for the intersections of undergraduate student diversity. Admitting and developing a diverse undergraduate student body, a perennial challenge for all major universities, is being addressed through collaborations between the Office of Undergraduate Admissions and the new Center for Diversity and Inclusion (CDI). The Office of Undergraduate Admissions has directed greater effort to increasing the number of Pell Grant-eligible students while enhancing overall need-based financial aid. The CDI, directed by Emelyn de la Peña, was developed to enhance and strengthen the University’s commitment to fostering a diverse and inclusive student community.

Academic pipeline programs, which span the academic continuum from K-12 initiatives to the initiatives such as the College Prep Program are also a critical part of our blueprint for student diversity. The Working Group recognizes and appreciates the University’s commitment to admission and retention of underrepresented students, illustrated by the allocation of financial resources requisite to that cause. The Group recommends a continued focus on improving student diversity, while supporting new and existing programs that ensure student success. It is the latter issue, support for the intersections of undergraduate student diversity, which will be addressed in this report of the Undergraduate Student Diversity Working Group.

Following Adrienne Davis’ comments, there was a robust discussion, surrounding the charge and responsibility for the Working Group. A part of this discussion focused on

how the University described the term diverse populations. One description of the term diverse populations was provided in “A Report of The Steering Committee for Diversity and Inclusion”:

Washington University welcomes difference on our campus in the form of gender, race, ethnicity, disability, geography, socioeconomic status, age, politics, religion, philosophy, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, and veteran status. We seek to bring these different backgrounds and perspectives to the great problems facing the world.¹

The Group was receptive to this description of the term diverse populations. However, the Group acknowledged two issues associated with this description. The first was an acknowledgement of the broad, yet specific nature of the aforementioned description. This description of a diverse population underscores the richness of diversity through illustrating

¹ Holden Thorp, “Provost Statement on Diversity,” Washington University in St. Louis at <https://provost.wustl.edu/diversity/> (dated 6/29/17 from website).

its complex intersectionalities and also highlights its challenges. The second acknowledgement was the manner in which this description of diverse populations challenged the charge of the Group. The key concern with

this description is the limitations in how to accurately measure support for this complex narrative of a group of students. In consideration of both issues, the Group decided to not focus time on an extended discussion in

reference to the specific description of diverse populations, but to instead focus on how institutional support appears to diverse undergraduate student populations.

BACKGROUND

The issue of support for diverse populations was organized into five areas to concentrate on a deeper study of the issue. Sub-groups were

developed and addressed the following five themes, intellectual, emotional, financial, experiential equity, and spatial/accessibility. Definitions of these themes remained organic to encourage

creative thinking and recommendations to develop. The direction of each subgroup's work was guided by the following four questions:

1. How is support in these areas currently represented?
2. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the support in these areas?
3. How can support be improved in these areas?
4. How can we establish measurable outcomes for assessment purposes?

However, after several weeks of meetings and discussions on this issue, a reoccurring theme emerged regarding the undergraduate student diversity experience at the University. This theme was a review of privilege at a highly selective, private university. Another way to frame this matter is to consider how privilege affects the personal growth, achievement and satisfaction of college students. Included in this culture of privilege viewpoint is the consideration of how privilege encourages participation in college activities and overall satisfaction with campus life. By extension, there is also the consideration of how privilege creates exclusion within the campus experience. It is important to note that the most evident expressions of a culture of privilege by students are through the disbursement of the cultural capital they possess.

Cultural capital influences how students navigate campus life and experiences. It is reflected in their familiarity

with particular, usually elite forms of knowledge that are important in their daily comfort level and in their ability to excel in the classroom.² Further, cultural capital also pertains to students' capacity to take advantage of college resources once enrolled through attitudes about seeking help, speaking with faculty members and other college authority figures, and perceptions of what is both appropriate and valuable.

An understanding of privilege and the by-product, cultural capital, helped shape the process of how the guiding questions were considered and how each sub-group finalized their work. At the University, there is a culture of privilege which leads to the ability to leverage influence for those who can fully participate in and benefit from this central culture through the weight of their cultural capital. For each of the subgroups, (intellectual, emotional, financial, experiential equity, and spatial/accessibility), the culture of privilege and capital is

manifest differently and is experienced differently.

Intellectually, the culture of privilege is often evidenced by faculty members' perceptions that all students have taken AP/IB coursework and thus, their syllabi and focus of instruction shifts towards that mean. Intellectually, students from affluent backgrounds and in possession of more cultural capital are often accustomed to asking for assistance inside in the classroom as well as outside, (i.e., academic mentoring, disability resources, teaching assistants, etc.), or seeking the support of peers in the formation of study groups. Intellectually, a culture of privilege can be reflected in the courses and academic support we offer and in the resources, we do not offer. For example, the Asian American Studies Minor is currently handicapped by the lack of faculty who specialize in Asian American Studies (Long Le-Khac from the English Department is the only faculty member whose research focuses

² Lee, Elizabeth M., *Class and Campus Life: Managing and Experiencing Inequality at an Elite College*, Cornell University Press: Cornell, NY, 2016.

on Asian American Literature). There are currently only 3 students enrolled in the Asian American Studies minor, largely due to the lack of actual course offerings on Asian American Studies.

Emotionally, how students develop and sustain their sense of belonging in the campus community when encountering direct and indirect incursions on their self-esteem or confidence is more impactful for students who lack sufficient cultural capital within a culture of privilege. Emotionally, in this scenario, a culture of privilege may inhibit students from seeking assistance through institutional systems of support. And, the lack of cultural capital in a culture of privilege may inhibit a student's personal growth, achievement and overall satisfaction with their educational experience.

The intersection between how students financially experience the University and its culture of privilege is initially evident in the cost of attendance, projected to be over \$70,000 for AY 2017- 2018. The University's financial profile feeds the culture of privilege and generates an overlay that directly influences the level of student participation in the campus experience. The financial condition can be manifest in the classroom experience through non-disclosed but required additional costs for course materials. The financial condition can be manifest in the external classroom experience, such as who participates in study abroad and who does not and why. And, the financial aid award process may unintentionally support the culture of privilege through the provision of work-study funds that determines who can work, where they work, and how much they can earn.

Experiential equity exists parallel with financial and is filtered through the

prism of cultural privilege as many college/campus experiences will have a cost associated with them, (e.g., sponsored visits to companies for career exposure). One of the challenges with experiential equity, however, is in the determination of which extra-educational and social experiences should be addressed in hopes of providing opportunities for balanced participation for all University students. Some examples of extra-educational and social experiences include non-funded internships, attendance at local concerts, operas, plays, baseball games, lectures, etc. Experiential equity and its inherent relationship to a culture of privilege can create clear lines of social bifurcation that result in gross and overt, albeit non-intended, marginalization of some students at the University. It is also very stealth in some instances which may make it difficult to effectively measure.

The concerns associated with spatial/accessibility are initially represented by the landscape and architecture of the Danforth campus. It is a landscape and architecture that, while aesthetically appealing, is also one that was designed for the robust and sturdy-hearted. And spatial/accessibility is the one subgroup that has as a condition the ability to impact everyone at some point in their association with the University. Spatial/accessibility is also more than "wheelchair" access and ADA compliance. It is the confidence to show up as you are and to be okay with that identity; and more than being okay, also being affirmed by this environment.

These are some examples of how a culture of privilege and, concomitantly, cultural capital may show up for each subgroup. These examples are not exhaustive. It should also be noted that students may possess every privilege represented by the subgroups or there

may be intersectionality among them. For example, a student may have had the best academic preparation prior to enrollment, e.g., AP/IB classes, and may use a wheelchair, is not limited by the wheelchair, but is limited by wheelchair inaccessibility. This student has privilege in the classroom, but not so on the campus.

Washington University in St. Louis is positioned to continue to be considered an elite American university. That proposition is not about to change and thus, the University will continue to appeal to students from backgrounds that afford them more cultural capital than others. However, for the University to truly be an elite among its elite peers, it should encourage opportunities and means for students, who are lacking, to develop reservoirs of cultural capital; the research on cultural capital and students supports strong positive correlations in classroom outcomes and in community sense of belonging. These are empowering outcomes the University should strive to help every student to achieve, especially those students for whom the culture of privilege has proven to be challenging and overwhelming.

The Group recognized that through the execution of their work, they were presented with the opportunity to "reshape" the culture of the University. Therefore, as a group, the core focus was on making the appropriate recommendations believed will guide the University into becoming a more inclusive environment for undergraduate student diversity in all of its expressions.

The Undergraduate Student Diversity Working Group presents the following recommendations for consideration from the five sub-groups, intellectual, emotional, financial, experiential

equity, and spatial/accessibility.
These sub-group recommendations

are followed by a general set of
recommendations by the entire group.

Concluding thoughts close out this
report.

RECOMMENDATION #1

Recommendations to recruit and retain a diverse student body.

- A. Continue to expand the number of Pell Grant-eligible students, while enhancing overall need-based financial aid
 - B. Regularly review signature scholarship programs such as the John B. Ervin and Annika Rodriguez Scholars Programs to identify opportunities for expansion and growth
 - C. Continue investment in high-performing academic pipeline programs.
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RECOMMENDATION #2

Recommendations to build intellectual support for a diverse student body.

- A. Increase the retention of women and students of color in STEM fields, by providing multiple pathways to be a pre-med student, expanding the use of transition and summer bridge programs, and providing financial support for summer programs.
 - B. Expand the possibilities of intellectual inquiry among all students by offering a greater diversity in course offerings.
 - C. Create a database of all available academic support services by performing a comprehensive assessment of all available academic support services and centralizing information regarding various academic support services through the Office for Student Success.
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RECOMMENDATION #3

Recommendations for providing emotional support for a diverse student body.

- A. Provide support to increase counselors at the Habif Health and Wellness Center who have experience in working with diverse populations of today's students that include addressing issues related to racial-ethnic identity or expression, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, religious expression, first-generation status, and low- income status.
 - B. Provide targeted outreach measures to encourage these cohorts of students to use the resources of the Habif Health and Wellness Center.
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RECOMMENDATION #4

Recommendations for financial transparency in the true costs associated with a University undergraduate education.

- A. Develop a centralized mechanism that supplies students with the range of non- textbook estimated costs (average to high) associated with the instructional requirements of a course, minor, and major.
 - B. Explore adjusting the Cost of Attendance (COA) calculus to provide requisite financial aid to include support of the COA for a major course of study.
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RECOMMENDATION #5

Recommendations to address experiential equity.

- A. Develop a centralized process to collect and study the intersectional-demographic data on student participation in extra-educational activities and events.
 - B. Explore expanding the Faculty Fellows initiative to include all residence halls.
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RECOMMENDATION #6

Recommendations to address spatial/accessibility.

- A. Explore the best campus locations to assign gender neutral bathrooms.
 - B. Explore the efficacy of installing elevators in pre-ADA buildings.
 - C. Advance the implementation of institutional preferred name, pronoun, and gender identity designations and centralized collection of this information.
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RECOMMENDATION #7

General Recommendation to affect the operationalization of proposals to support diverse student populations at the University.

- A. Centralize institutional efforts through the Office for Student Success to develop on- going action plans, provide updates, and to monitor outcomes.
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CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

In closing, the value proposition of education is a transformative experience that has the capacity to transform the lives of ordinary people into achieving extraordinary accomplishments heretofore not imagined. Students from diverse populations are willing to work hard and to take advantage of the opportunities that are presented.

However, these opportunities are not always made available for many students from these demographics and in the ways that these opportunities are not accessible, presents the University with a challenge to fulfill its Mission Statement to “create an environment to encourage and support an ethos of wide-ranging exploration.” Additionally, a key goal of the Mission Statement, “welcome students, faculty, and staff

from all backgrounds to create an inclusive community that is welcoming, nurturing, and intellectually rigorous,”³ was central to the efforts of the Group.

The Undergraduate Student Diversity Working Group acknowledges that this report and the recommendations, on their own, are not conclusive and on their own may not be sufficient to alter the landscape of marginalized

³ <https://wustl.edu/about/mission-statement/> (Mission statement approved by the Faculty Senate Council April 10, 2012 and approved by the Board of Trustees May 4, 2012).

student experiences as it relates to the support of diverse populations. The Undergraduate Student Diversity Working Group recognized that the topics of discussion would benefit from an extended examination as well as frequent reviews and updates to gauge the temperature of progress

associated with the raised concerns, some of them, longstanding. In all, the culture of privilege at the University, as entrenched as it is within the fabric of the institution, is not a deterrent to change. If the University facilitates the use of its resources to transport its students beyond the throes of

marginalization, then we can hope that real cultural change will follow. A hoped-for outcome would be the development of a Washington University in St. Louis culture of equitable opportunities and excellence for all of its students.

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To view the full report click [here](#);
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