

# **Worcester State University Campus Climate Committee**

## **Academic Year 2019-2020 Final Report**

**Submitted May 11, 2020**

### **Committee Membership**

Executive Chair: Lois Wims

Co-Chairs: MaryJo Marion and Johnathan Flowers

Committee Members: Matt Bejune, Lori Dawson, Elaine Dukes, Dawn Eades, Adrian Gage, Joanne Jaber-Gauvin, Sarah McMaster, Susan Monaghan, Emanuel Nneji, Victoria Porteiro-Cejas, Manuel Reyes-Ponce, and Sarah Strout

Ex-Officio: Alex Briesacher, Maria Isabel Gariepy and Stacey Luster

### **Introduction**

During the spring 2016 semester, President Maloney announced his Five-Point Plan of Action toward a more inclusive campus climate and stated that he would like to pursue a data-driven approach to evaluating WSU's campus climate. To that end, WSU partnered with NERCHE (New England Resource Center for Higher Education) at UMASS Boston and the National Institute for Transformation and Equity (NITE) at Indiana University. For two years, WSU pursued a multifaceted approach toward an institutional cultural climate assessment. In the spring 2018, one of the recommendations adopted was the formalization of three committees, including the Campus Climate Committee (CCC). The CCC has been actively pursuing its agenda and purpose as designed, and it has also pursued other matters of climate on campus. This report is intended to review existing campus climate efforts, highlight the work of the CCC, outline committee recommendations, and continue to engage the campus community in a plan toward a more inclusive campus climate; while we underline the importance of the conversation around how equity considerations are moving forward. Finally, we provide a status update on surveys and plans for future climate assessment while we recognize the impact of the current Covid-19 global pandemic. The committee continues its steadfast commitment to driving our institutional vision on principles of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

### **Surveys and Focus Groups Overview**

The CCC efforts to survey different segments of the campus population through a student survey in 2016 and a Faculty survey in 2018; the Staff Survey was administered in February 2020 and

approximately 15% of eligible respondents completed it. The Staff Survey Results were prepared by Dr. Sarah L. Strout on March 10, 2020.

- ❖ Responses from marginalized staff members demonstrates a broad variety of experiences of discrimination and marginalization at the university. Highlights:
  - LGBTQ+ members were less likely to agree that their department considers a diverse range of opinions.
  - ALANA staff were more likely to have had discriminatory remarks/behaviors directed at them.
  - Staff who have a disability had lower ratings for many items including easily obtaining materials to do their job efficiently, meeting their supervisor's expectations, and feeling respected by their supervisor.
- ❖ Comments demonstrated a lack of consensus concerning diversity and equity as well as oppositional attitudes towards diversity as a value and WSU diversity efforts broadly, so we should definitely have open-ended questions on the next survey. Some highlights include:
  - There were a few negative comments regarding equity as only being for whichever group the administration has chosen, that diversity, equity, and inclusion has led to hiring practices that elevate diversity over competence, that white privilege as a term is racist.
  - Comments show that most people equate equity with 'treating everyone the same.'
  - A subset of people answered they were not sure how equity, diversity, and inclusion affected their activities.
  - Regarding sense of belonging, there were more negative comments than positive comments.
  - Regarding what WSU can do to improve Diversity, Inclusion and Equity, quite a few comments were related to hiring practices focusing on diversity over competence.

### ***Survey and Focus Group Issues and Resolutions***

- ❖ Participation in the Campus Climate Staff Survey was low (15%).
- ❖ The CCC needs to identify a single instrument for annual surveys of Faculty, Staff and Students. Currently, we are exploring the viability to re-engage with CECE, Modern Think and WSU Institutional Research to develop such survey tools going forward. The goal is for the three surveys to be administered once per year, at the same time.
- ❖ Similarly, we need to identify and define the administration of Faculty and Staff focus groups in the near future; and of Students focus groups in the next cycle of surveys/focus groups to take place. In relation to Faculty and Staff focus groups, a consultant that

previously worked with WSU at the beginning of this process has provided a quote (Renga Consulting).

- ❖ The start date for administering focus groups could be uncertain due to COVID-19.
- ❖ The CCC does not yet know what / if any budget will be available for focus groups administration/ design/ delivery in the 2020-2021 academic year. The committee recognizes the need for creative funding through this time.

### *Next Steps for the Survey and Focus Groups*

- ❖ By fall 2020, the CCC Research subcommittee will finalize exploring the viability to re-engage with Renga (formerly NERCHE), WSU CCC or other vendors responding to RFP.
- ❖ A draft RFP has been created for external organizations to assist with administering focus groups for the faculty and staff surveys.
- ❖ The Research subcommittee developed Goals for the upcoming single instrument Campus Climate Survey, which incorporated specific experiences, by groups of students, faculty and staff. See attachment.
- ❖ To improve survey response in the future the CCC should engage with survey. participants in multiple ways (i.e. emails, reminders in listservs, personalized reminders to directors, department chairs, etc. so that they remind their colleagues). Depending on the budget, the CCC may also want to consider entering survey participants into a drawing to win a prize.
- ❖ The CCC should continue to seek a vendor to design and conduct Focus Groups, in person and/or remotely. The CCC should secure a vendor and be ready to begin the research as soon as protocols regarding return to campus are clarified.
- ❖ Ensuring the CCC has sufficient funds in order to cover the cost of the external organization who will administer the faculty focus groups.
- ❖ The CCC will seek a vendor to design and conduct Faculty Focus Group Discussions to understand faculty perspectives on issues of diversity, inclusion, and equity so as to identify responsive strategies to improve campus climate. With support from CCC, the vendor will take the lead in developing, planning, and conducting the 5 focus groups discussions with WSU adjunct and full-time faculty.
- ❖ The tasks of the vendor are to:
  - recruit focus group participants for 5 Focus Groups for a total of 50 participants;
  - identify and secure a focus group location;
  - ensure cultural responsiveness of the focus group materials;
  - conduct focus groups;
  - interpret and summarize the data from the focus groups; and
  - develop reports.

## **Proposed Recommendations /New Initiatives & Resources Needed**

### ***Campus Climate Committee Composition***

Currently, the CCC is composed of 1 executive chair (Provost) and 2 co-chairs who will assist in convening meetings, lead data-based conversations, and ensure committee work is completed. The Assistant Vice President of Human Resources, Payroll, AA/EO and the Director of Diversity, Inclusion, and AA/EO will serve as ex-officio members and work closely with the executive chair and the co-chairs of the CCC. Ideally, the CCC will have approximately 4 faculty, 4 staff, and 3 students.

The CCC proposes that the committee composition indicated in the Purpose and Charge of the committee be treated as the minimum composition of the committee and that the committee should achieve parity among stakeholders, staff, faculty, and students, to ensure full representation of the campus community. Moreover, the committee believes that staggered membership, or multi-year terms, to ensure continuity would best enable the work of the committee.

### ***University Wide Committee Composition***

The CCC recommends that all university wide committees strive to represent, in their composition, the diversity of the campus community and the employee groups (classified/ non classified). Committee appointments should, ideally, ensure an opportunity for all members of the campus community to serve.

### ***Diversity tiered training***

The committee proposes efforts to provide tiered Diversity & Inclusion training for Staff and Faculty. These sessions may be available individually or as part of a comprehensive Certificate program. Currently, the Office of Diversity and Inclusion is evaluating comprehensive proposals that include different options offered as a scaffolded type of larger/ ongoing session, or on an individual basis, such as:

- Diversity & Inclusion for a Welcoming Environment
- Power & Privilege in Higher Education
- The Impact of Bias
- Mindfulness as a Catalyst for Equity & Social Justice
- Inclusive Pedagogies (Faculty led)

### ***SLOs- RASE Plan/ Diversity as its own Content Area***

On January 17, 2020 the CCC met with RASE Plan leadership in order to provide feedback and input in regards to the prospective changes to LASC per the RASE Plan. Discussions included the need for clear definitions of Diversity and Diversity across the curriculum to measure effectiveness of current and prospective initiatives. In order to assist with this issue, on February 14, 2020 the

CCC endorsed the definitions of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion for campus wide usage (definitions can be found below under the Definitions section).

LASC did not have operationalized SLOs but rather general ‘overarching goals’ that do not lend themselves to program assessment. In order to create a solution to the problem, Faculty committee members created nine SLOs and assisted with drafting the new diversity content area proposal, which was finalized on Monday, April 20 and submitted as a separate but concurrent proposal. The proposal was approved with modifications by UCC and was set to be discussed by AUC at its May 5th meeting.

At the May 5th meeting, AUC chose to table the Diversity Content Area pending its review by APC. The earliest the Diversity Content Area could be reviewed is October or November, depending on the ongoing COVID-19 situation.

### ***Definitions of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion***

During the February 14, 2020 meeting, the CCC endorsed the definitions of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion for campus wide usage. Resources needed will involve publicizing these definitions on the WSU webpage as well as distribution as needed by the different committees and the Office of Diversity & Inclusion as it relates to ongoing efforts. These definitions were shared with the Strategic Planning Committee and workgroups in February 2020; and have been referred to the Cabinet Policy Committee in an effort to implement them university wide. The CCC recommends that, after the Cabinet approval process, these definitions undergo support from the Board of Trustees and be incorporated into the upcoming 2020-2021 Catalogue in an effort to further institutionalize them. They are:

- **Diversity** includes all the ways in which people differ, encompassing the different characteristics that make one individual or group different from another. While diversity is often used in reference to race, ethnicity, sex, and gender, we embrace a broader definition of diversity that also includes age, national origin, religion, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, socioeconomic status, first-generation status, education, marital status, veteran status, language, and physical appearance. Our definition also includes diversity of thought: ideas, perspectives, and values. We also recognize that individuals affiliate with multiple identities.
- **Equity** is the fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for all people, while at the same time striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation of some groups. Improving equity involves increasing justice and fairness within the procedures and processes of institutions or systems, as well as in their distribution of resources. Tackling equity issues requires an understanding of the root causes of outcome disparities within our society.

- **Inclusion** is the act of creating environments in which any individual or group can be and feel welcomed, respected, supported, and valued to fully participate. An inclusive and welcoming climate embraces differences and offers respect in words and actions for all people. It's important to note that while an inclusive group is by definition diverse, a diverse group isn't always inclusive. Increasingly, recognition of unconscious or 'implicit bias' helps organizations to be deliberate about addressing issues of inclusivity.

Definitions were adapted from the definitions used by the Independent Sector, a national membership organization that brings together the charitable community—a diverse set of nonprofits, foundations, and corporations—to advance the common good.

<https://independentsector.org/resource/why-diversity-equity-and-inclusion-matter/>

### **Other Committee Contributions**

- ❖ Feedback to Enrollment Management regarding the Spring College Marketing Plan:
  - Ryan Forsythe solicited feedback from the CCC re: a new WSU Marketing Campaign scheduled to launch in March 2020. The campaign, which was developed by Vision Point in conjunction with WSU, targets prospective students who are currently juniors in high school. Enrollment Management received negative feedback about the campaign tagline—From Grit to Great—as well as the affiliated advertising copy. The feedback addressed racist undertones associated with the use of the word grit. Ryan referred to an article written by Andre Perry about the problems associated with grit. The CCC discussed the concerns from the faculty and found the use of the word grit to be problematic. Enrollment Management and Marketing worked with the vendor to redevelop/ relaunch an alternate campaign.
  - Ryan Forsythe e-mail to the CCC on March 6th: “All WSU marketing efforts seek to gain the attention and interest of our target audiences while also representing the university well. On Thurs., Feb. 20th, when we first became aware that members of our campus community did not believe the proposed campaign did the latter, it caused us to rethink our message. It is common for marketing efforts to receive a range of positive and negative feedback; however, when questions about the campaign message’s inclusivity were raised, that was a different story. After reviewing the campaign with you all and learning of the multiple interpretations of the message, we have decided to discard the From Grit to Great campaign message and move in a different direction.”

- ❖ The Hate Has No Home Here campaign was re-launched at WSU in early spring 2020 by placing posters around campus as well as distributing magnets to be placed at the top left of each classroom whiteboard. 100 magnets were distributed around campus. This initiative was signed off by all Diversity & Inclusion committees on campus, and communicated to the campus community by WSU Provost.
  - While the campaign was presented to the CCC, the committee did not have approval authority over the implementation of the campaign. The committee acknowledged the value of the campaign.
- ❖ The CCC has been actively involved with the Strategic Planning Group to ensure that WSU's strategic planning activities are aligned with the broader institutional goals of diversity, inclusion, and equity. This work is ongoing with multiple committee members as active participants of different Strategic Planning working groups as well as the different RASE Plan subgroups.
- ❖ Covid-19 committee related campus awareness and committee members involvement around equity and inclusion efforts. The university needs an equity centered commitment through all its Covid-19 related efforts. Responses to the Covid-19 crisis need to be addressed through the lens of direct implications on all campus populations: students, staff and faculty, rather than merely focusing on one group or subgroup of the campus population.
- ❖ The CCC underscores the importance of students' requests to address and provide institutional response and support regarding microaggressions and bias incidents on campus.
- ❖ The CCC looks forward to collaborating with the soon to be established Board of Trustees Diversity and Inclusion/ Campus Climate subcommittee, and awaits further guidance from President Maloney to work together.

### **In Closing**

The Campus Climate Committee recognizes the challenging current and upcoming environment due to the Covid-19 global pandemic, which has exacerbated existing institutional inequalities in society and on campus. As a result, the work of the CCC is all the more urgent and must be a critical part of Worcester State's ongoing strategic planning processes broadly understood. The equity work of the CCC should be taken in consideration as the campus prepares to return to a new normal.

Insofar as individual members of the committee participated in both the strategic planning and COVID-19 Response Groups, the committee feels that a more systemic and concerted involvement of the committee with these activities is necessary in order to ensure they proceed from an equity centered starting point, rather than equity being included after the fact.



# ATTACHMENT

## Goals for new WSU Campus Climate Survey

1. Understand the ways in which the lived experiences of power minority and power majority individuals differ.
2. Assess the extent to which individuals feel a sense of belonging-- welcome, safe, and supported at WSU
3. Create a survey that can be used for all WSU constituents with minor modifications/branching in order to make more direct comparisons about the ways in which these experiences are similar/different across roles
4. Provide an opportunity for open responses/qualitative data not captured in standardized questions.
5. Principal component analysis/factor analysis to see trends/clusters
6. Examine lived experience based on:
  - a. Role at WSU
    - i. Student
      1. Resident vs. Commuter
      2. Full time vs. part time
      3. Age
    - ii. Faculty
      1. Tenured vs Non-tenured
      2. Full time vs. part time
      3. Age
      4. Length of employment at WSU
    - iii. Staff
      1. Full-time vs part time
      2. Do you have supervisory capacity over other employees? Students?
      3. Do you have the ability authority to make independent policy decisions?
      4. Union: APA, AFSCME, MSCA, NUP
  - b. Power minority statuses
    - i. Race
    - ii. Gender
    - iii. Sexual orientation
    - iv. Gender identity

- v. Ability status
- vi. Religion
- vii. Age
- viii. Physical appearance
- ix. Socio-economic status
  - x. Immigrant/Non-native English speaker, Accent
  - xi. Education level/parents education level- students and faculty and staff

- 7. How we are addressing limitation of previous surveys
  - a. Timeliness
  - b. Focus on lived experience- positive and negative
  - c. Previous surveys were general, perceptions of WSU
  - d. Address experiences and desired remedies/suggestions for improvement