

Re: Racial Equity Actions for Institutions Letter

November 2020

Dear Presidents, Vice Presidents, Commissions, and Councils,

We write today from a sense of urgency, crisis, and opportunity.

First, we acknowledge the Indigenous First Nations of the Pacific Northwest tribes who have resided here since time immemorial, whose lands have nourished our bodies, minds, and souls.

DEI in Washington CTCs

We are a multiracial and interdisciplinary group of people across all the Washington community and technical colleges (CTCs). We represent multiple employment groups, as well as community organizations committed to racial and economic equity in higher education in Washington State.

We began convening in March of 2020, and we have continued to meet as the “two pandemics” rage on. Systemic racism is the original pandemic of the United States, and it has continued, unabated, for hundreds of years. ¹King County Public Health acknowledges that “racism is a public health crisis”: “White privilege and anti-blackness cannot be fully addressed until the same systems that have ‘worked just fine’ for white people while acting as the foot of oppression for indigenous, Black and brown communities are dismantled. In its place, we need new systems coming from the communities most affected by racism, oppression, and colonization.” As the WACTC resolution states: “the violence against Black people continues to escalate in America with too many senseless deaths including Trayvon Martin in Florida, Michael Brown in Missouri, Sandra Bland in Texas, Eric Garner in New York, Breonna Taylor in Kentucky, Ahmaud Arbery in Georgia, and now George Floyd in Minnesota.” The authors of this letter also add Manuel Ellis in Tacoma, Washington and Jacob Blake in Kenosha, Wisconsin to the growing list of casualties of systemic racism.

In 1963 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote in his *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*, “For years now I have heard the word ‘Wait!’ It rings in the ear of every Negro with piercing familiarity. This ‘Wait’ has almost always meant ‘Never.’ We must come to see, with one of our distinguished jurists, that ‘justice too long delayed is justice denied.’” It is our moral and ethical responsibility to interrupt the historic march of white supremacy. This moment offers our system an invitation, and it is not to rebuild or wait for the return to “normal.” Prior to the pandemic, “business as usual” did not work for our most marginalized students, employees, and community-- particularly our students’ families. We have copious qualitative and quantitative evidence to tell their stories.

As practitioners and advocates of higher education, and as your colleagues, collectively we share a deep concern: that the COVID-19 virus will continue to highlight and exacerbate racial equity gaps. We are obligated to address the growing racial equity gaps, especially given the

¹ <https://publichealthinsider.com/2020/06/11/racism-is-a-public-health-crisis/>

complexity of the adaptive challenges posed by the pivot to remote operations, the defunding of higher education in Washington State, and the record population growth for people of color projected by the 2020 census.

The DEI in WA CTCs is an effort to seize the opportunity to restore and build a system that truly leads with racial equity. We want to not just build upon or amplify; we desire to collectively *reinvent* our efforts to recruit, retain, and educate our 100,000 minoritized students of color and our 3797 faculty and staff who identify as Black, Indigenous, Latinx and other people of color in the spirit of the SBCTC Vision Statement. We must build a community of collective care in a way that makes space for mutual concern, care, and responsibility to one another.

The WACTC resolution further elaborates, “We commit our system to the development of an action plan to dismantle systemic injustices against Black Americans and other historically marginalized groups.”

The Opportunity

[House Bill 1783](#), established by Governor Inslee in 2020, stated that every state agency must create or expand funding for an office of equity, and CTCs in the system have begun to establish such campus-wide equity offices and positions. However, this racial equity work is the responsibility of all members of campus communities, including boards of trustees and prof/tech advisory boards. Racial equity work requires a strong infrastructure, because this work permeates everything. The work impacts decision-making, curriculum design, hiring, the structure of campus leadership, institutional policy, funding, permanent budget lines, and more. We now have the opportunity to build more just campus ecologies by centering the voices, professional expertise, and lived experiences of BIPOC faculty, staff, administrators, and students.

Tools of Opportunity

We invite institutional leadership to take concrete action and make robust, lasting, and impactful change to the ways in which our colleges operate. Here, we share two tools and one research document to help institutional leadership begin the systematic work of identifying where racial equity needs to be addressed. These tools and resources were created by individuals and teams within our local WA CTC system, and we ask college presidents and vice presidents to choose at least one of these options to implement or apply in their contexts this year. If one of these tools is already being used, perhaps consider adding another to the college work plan this year:

Tools for Equity Audits, Assessment, Hiring/Retention

1. The Departmental Diversity Self Study (D2S2)

The [Departmental Diversity Self Study \(D2S2\)](#) is a research and planning tool created by the Green River (College) Diversity & Equity Council (led by Vik Bahl and Michael Tuncap) in 2014. This tool, which can be applied over one or more quarters, allows for

individual departments, programs, or divisions to undertake their own assessment of diversity and equity gaps related to outcomes, staffing, racial inequities, and past efforts. Each department, program, and division can then develop collective analysis, concrete proposals, and action steps, as well as seek resources to address the equity gaps.

2. The Racial Equity Resource Bank Tool

At the institution-wide level, the [Racial Equity Resource Bank Tool: Inventory](#) created by Drs. Richardson and Davis-Jones and their team at Spokane Falls Community College in 2019 as requested by the WACTC Equity Council. This tool supports institutional leadership in identifying barriers to racial equity for students, staff, and faculty on our respective campuses. The tool helps colleges to assess both the need for and currently available resources on campus to support retention.

3. A Resource for Equitable Hiring Practice - DEHPD's 17 Steps

One aspect of retention is building the community of faculty and staff of color on a college campus. The [DEHPD 17-Steps in the Hiring Process](#), created by a cross-institutional team of faculty and staff within the WA CTC system, provides a research-informed list of recommended steps from the start to the end of a hiring process. The DEHPD four-year research project is helpful for hiring authorities to minimize racist practices within the process by providing a framework for training human resource directors and search committees.

As the United States and Washington State, specifically, have become more ethnically, racially, and linguistically diverse, the representation of that diversity in leadership at all of our institutions have not kept pace with the shifting demographics of our state or nation. Please see the attached appendices. This is not because people of color are underprepared or ill-equipped for the work as [Black women](#) have become the most educated population in the nation in 2016. Thus, the DEHPD's 17 Steps should be considered an essential part of diversity hiring and retention procedures for increasing the numbers of Black, Indigenous, LatinX, and people of color in our faculty, administrative, and institutional leadership ranks.

Much work lies ahead to reconstruct a more equitable and just collegiate environment across all of our programs on all of our campuses. As your respective colleges are busy creating new equity tools, we would like to invite you to share them with us to share throughout the system. We look forward to partnering with you in bringing true and lasting equity into full realization for our current and future students. It will be hard work; we may not always get it right, but we must press forward and do it anyways. Our students and communities of color can wait no longer.

In solidarity,

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in WA Community and Technical Colleges (DEI in WA CTCs)
Policy Workteam

Xyan Neider, co-chair
Michael Tuncap, co-chair
LuLani Tomaszewski, co-chair