

COLUMBIA'S COMMITMENT TO ANTI-RACISM: A MIDYEAR PROGRESS REPORT (FALL TERM 2020)

Report of the Staff Experience Working Group

December 15, 2020

REPORT

Introduction

President Bollinger, in his email to the University Community on July 21, stated that “no matter how committed one has been to challenging these deep injustices and providing remedies, whether as a person, an institution, or a society, we are all rightly being called upon to do more and to begin again, with a great sense of honesty and new purpose. I am committed to that task, but, more importantly, Columbia is committed to it.” To demonstrate resolve and “to ensure that we are continuing to pursue new ideas, address needs, and deepen our commitment” he tasked senior central administrators Suzanne Goldberg, Executive Vice President for University Life; Dennis Mitchell, Vice Provost for Faculty Advancement; Anne Taylor, Vice Dean of Academic Affairs, Vagelos College of Physicians and Surgeons; and Flores Forbes, Associate Vice President for Community Affairs, with engaging the entire community so that together, we can have the discussions that will inform the recommendations for addressing and enhancing support for students, faculty, and staff, while identifying systemic issues in our own community and formulating solutions to address them.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion cannot be a one-time pro forma event. In order for it to be meaningful and have the opportunity to seep into all aspects of our University life and community, we must view it as an ongoing evolution guided by a framework which has at its core, the University’s recognition and appreciation for the contributions of all its staff, including those of color. President Bollinger, in his email, has provided the impetus and support to commence these discussions and create the framework that will ultimately cultivate a University community where the contributions of all of its members are respected, valued and celebrated.

This Status Report reflects the Working Group’s efforts to date, and is organized into the following sections, with an Appendix.

- Mission
- Working Group Composition, Structure and Process
- Areas of Focus for Further Exploration
- Next Steps
- Appendix

Mission

Under the leadership of Dan Driscoll, Chief Human Resources Officer and Flores Forbes, the Staff Experience Working Group was established to carry out the President's mandate for enhancing support for minority staff.

To accomplish this work, three subcommittees were formed to focus on the University's organizational culture and staff experience, the employee lifecycle (recruitment, onboarding, and retention), and professional development, including advancement opportunities. The overarching goals include:

- Review and discuss existing practices, programs, activities, and resources currently in place and identify opportunities to enhance their effectiveness and ability to meet the diverse needs of staff.
- Identify best practices and strategies utilized at other organizations in support of diversity and inclusion.
- Make recommendations for the development of an inclusive and diverse approach based on three core areas: organizational culture and experience; the employee life cycle (recruitment, onboarding and retention); and professional development and advancement.

Working Group Composition, Structure and Process

The Staff Experience Working Group is comprised of University representation from Schools and Departments, including colleagues from CUIMC. The Staff Experience Working Group convened on a biweekly basis for most of the Fall semester to discuss and clarify the goals and objectives of the group, share individual experiences and perspectives, and present updates on the progress made by each subcommittee. To aid in this endeavor, the group conducted an analysis of our current status, available resources and, using empirical data, drafted preliminary recommendations to support a more diverse and inclusive workforce in our University community.

During the Fall semester the three subcommittees met weekly. Each subcommittee includes one central resource and co-chairs, who are tasked with facilitating the discussions, capturing the ideas of the group, and articulating recommendations.

Subcommittees

Organizational Culture and Employee Experience

Purpose: In order to effect actual positive cultural change, the goal is to understand the experiences and racial experience of employees at Columbia University. With a focus on Black employees and other historically underrepresented communities, this committee will propose solutions that will result in a more diverse and inclusive University where the needs, viewpoints and assets of all members are valued and included.

Employee Lifecycle (Recruitment, Onboarding and Retention)

Purpose: Review each part of the employee life cycle with the goal of attracting and retaining a talented workforce of individuals with diverse backgrounds, skills, perspectives, experiences, beliefs, and values. Ensure that each phase of the employee life cycle embeds key principles of diversity, equity and inclusion and creates a culture where employees feel they are valued, have opportunities for advancement, and can positively contribute to the University's mission.

Professional Development and Opportunities for Advancement

Purpose: Develop recommendations that promote professional development and advancement opportunities for our diverse workforce with an emphasis on continuing education, skills development, and career progression. Create a dedicated development and advancement space to easily share resources and educational opportunities, with the broader CU community.

Areas of Focus for Further Exploration

Demographic Data

To assess the current state regarding diversity, the Staff Experience Working Group was presented with anonymous gender and ethnicity demographic data for University Officers of Administration and Support Staff as of June 30, 2020, across all campuses. As a point of comparison, New York City Workforce Demographic Data from the 2018 New York City Government Workforce Profile Report was examined. In comparing the two, the data revealed that the University's demographic makeup is reflective to that of the New York City workforce. The following are preliminary observations.

- The University's administrative staff is 60% female and 40% male. This ratio is consistent across all ethnic groups and is similar to that of New York City's workforce.
- At CUIMC, the female/male ratio is consistent across all grades, including ungraded (UGR) roles. The female to male ratios for non-CUIMC staff decrease as the grades increase (junior to senior level roles). Specifically, the number of women at non-CUIMC roles tend to remain at higher levels than males, through officer grade 13, and then decrease to lower levels than their male counterparts at more senior levels-officer grades 14 through UGR.
- Pronounced differences are observed in the ethnicity data on all campuses. The data reveals a significant divergence for senior officer levels (beginning at officer grades 14 and 107). For ungraded positions, the demographic makeup is 82% white at CUIMC and 68% white for all other locations.

It is important to note that the information above is a preliminary analysis of Columbia's demographic data. The subcommittees will examine additional demographic data, benchmark information and review the University's current practices and programs, as

they continue to explore their areas of focus, and further develop specific, measurable, time-bound recommendations, preliminarily referenced below.

- **Development and Utilization of a University-Wide Employee/Climate Survey**

As the subcommittee defined its purpose and discussed process, it was clear that in order to truly understand the experiences and potential racial barriers of employees at Columbia University, a forum was needed to ask and to listen to University employees. This information would provide an opportunity to more fully understand current state, target recommendations and prioritize them based on need and anticipated impact. Sample surveys, focus groups, 1:1 interviews, and other tools were considered. However, a conclusion was reached that a formal survey deployed to all University staff would be the most effective and time efficient method to obtain needed information.

A University-wide employee survey has never been undertaken at Columbia and would signal a significant positive change to employees. Some schools/departments have conducted employee surveys such as CUIMC, the Office of Alumni and Development, and the Earth Institute, and still others are considering surveying staff in the near future as part of their Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) strategic planning. A comprehensive employee survey deployed across the Institution would gather important data and provide the foundation to make evidence-based decisions to improve the staff experience. Further, it would bring the University in alignment with Ivy peers, Harvard and Yale, who have already conducted University-wide employee surveys.

Resources Needed – Considering the scope of the survey and the focus on DEI, a consulting firm with experience in this area or a faculty resource may be required to develop the survey and analyze results. An advisory group of Columbia employees should be formed to provide input and feedback on the survey design.
(Organizational Culture and Employee Experience)

- **Creation of an Office of Diversity and Inclusion**

An Office of Diversity and Inclusion should be created to illustrate the importance of DEI at Columbia and to oversee the implementation of the recommendations provided by the Staff Experience Working Group. This office, lead by a Chief Diversity Officer (CDO), should be adequately staffed (research officer, program officer, administrative assistant, communications officer, etc.) and chartered not only to ensure ongoing diversity, equity and inclusion momentum/focus, but to promote synergy across schools and departments and throughout the University. To support sustained cultural change, diversity, equity and inclusion must be championed by University leadership and resourced beyond the work of a singular office.
(Organizational Culture and Employee Experience)

- **Creation of a Standardized Onboarding Program**

Create a standardized onboarding program for the first year of all University employees. The program will include important periodic checkpoints to ensure staff development, acknowledgement, address challenges, and celebrate key milestones and success stories during their first year. It is important to note that the program would supplement, and not replace the University's New Hire Orientation. The yearlong onboarding program will proactively introduce new staff not only to University resources (e.g., employee resource groups, mental health and wellness services), policies and practices around internal mobility and professional development, but also help them obtain greater appreciation of the unique cultural characteristics found at Columbia University. **(Employee Lifecycle -- Recruitment, Onboarding and Retention)**

- **Development of a Career Pathways to Success Program**

There are opportunities for the University to tap into the existing network of staff from underrepresented communities who have inspiring success stories. They can serve as motivation for staff who may not otherwise know how to advocate for and avail themselves of the programs and opportunities available to them.

Suggested components of the program include:

- Highlight stories of employees who have grown their careers at Columbia by taking advantage of professional development opportunities.
 - Profile employees on Careers Page
 - Develop a staff-based branding campaign
- Create brand ambassadors to promote staff development
- Have staff at New Hire Orientation share their success stories
- Organize events and forums to provide staff with opportunities to share their experience **(Employee Lifecycle -- Recruitment, Onboarding and Retention)**

- **Establishment of a Mentoring Framework**

Implement a flexible centralized mentoring framework that departments across the University may participate in. The purpose of the program is to help staff develop the talent and knowledge needed to have a successful career at the University. In addition, the program would establish a system that creates connectedness, engagement, and knowledge sharing among staff members of varying levels of skills and experience. It is important to note that there is data showing that mentoring programs reduce costly turnover by developing employees and increasing their productivity and job satisfaction. Given how decentralized the University is, it is recommended to avoid a typical one-size-fits-all approach and create a flexible program that can meet the diverse needs of the staff. **(Employee Lifecycle -- Recruitment, Onboarding and Retention)**

- **Proposal for a New Program: Administrative Leadership Development Fellowship Program**

Inspired by the [Provost Leadership Fellows](#) program, the subgroup proposes the development of an administrative fellowship program for Black, Latinx and Native administrators, grades 12 and 13/CUIMC 104 and 105. The purpose of this program would be to provide administrators of color more information about the structure and opportunities for growth at Columbia, as well as concrete leadership and management skills with the benefits of a cohort. The program may be an extension of current leadership and management development programs, including alumni participation to act as mentors. Ideally, development could begin in 2021. **(Professional Development and Opportunities for Advancement)**

- **Policy/Practice Review and Enhancement**

- HR Town Halls to further promote the University's tuition reimbursement benefit and highlight career opportunities at CU
- Development of the following:
 - Administrative Career Tracks
 - Criteria for promotion within one's unit and corresponding policy for units/managers for internal promotions
 - A robust communications strategy that highlights the success of administrators of color who have advanced their careers at Columbia.**(Professional Development and Opportunities for Advancement)**

Next Steps

The Staff Experience Working Group will continue its mission during the Spring semester. In doing so, concrete steps forward will be taken to yield a final set of recommendations for President Bollinger's consideration. These steps will include, but are not limited to, evaluating the University's current practices; employee demographics and human resources; performing benchmark studies of peer institutions; and reviewing best practices.

Appendix A

Staff Experience Working Group Membership List - Fall 2020

Organization Culture and Employee Experience

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