

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

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Columbia's Anti-Racism Commitment: A Midyear Progress Report

As our nation wrestles with its deeply rooted legacy of anti-Black racism, Columbia students, faculty and staff have been working intensively to examine and address anti-Black racism in and around our own University community. This Mid-Year Progress Report responds to [President Bollinger's call to action on anti-racism](#) and describes many new and ongoing efforts in our schools, institutes and central administration.

These efforts require us to ask hard questions about how various aspects of our institution have come to be, both in recent years and since Columbia's founding in 1754. The questions themselves are not new, as history makes clear, but they are being asked with new momentum as the Black Lives Matter movement galvanizes heightened attention to racism's structural presence and systemic effects. With this closely in mind, the work being done across Columbia looks to the future as much as to the present.

A long-range vision for anti-racist work, including work challenging anti-Black racism in particular, is essential to Columbia thriving as an institution. It connects directly to the University's mission as a diverse, international, higher-education institution committed to advancing knowledge and learning at the highest level and fully engaged as a partner with our neighboring communities and the broader world around us.

It is inspiring to see so many people from across the University dedicating their time and expertise to addressing anti-Black racism, from Trustees, Deans, and other institutional leaders to students, faculty and staff in every setting. This speaks to the urgency of the work and the reality that becoming an anti-racist institution is a collective effort. Every person in this community has much to contribute through sharing knowledge and insight, listening to others' perspectives and experiences, and taking action with a commitment to continuous learning and meaningful change.

We are grateful to President Bollinger for asking us to lead some of this work and to report back to him and the University community. We are also grateful to so many Columbia colleagues and students for their partnership in the efforts described here and for the work together that lies ahead.

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A Reader's Guide to this Report

Anti-racist work is not new at Columbia, yet this Fall term has seen a transformative shift in both the breadth and depth of efforts around the University, including a deliberate and specific focus on anti-Black racism. This report provides an overview of many of these efforts, along with highlights of some prior work that serves as a foundation for current and future initiatives.

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This report includes four important appendices, as just noted. We encourage readers to review these with care, as they contain detailed information about extensive work in progress in every school and many other parts of the institution.

I. Opening observations about efforts across Columbia to address anti-Black racism

These observations shed light on themes that emerged during the Fall term and may help guide efforts into the future:

- Columbia's cross-institutional work to address anti-Black racism has many aspects: identifying important questions; gathering with others to share ideas, conversation and analysis; discovering and uncovering relevant information and research, including about past work to inform future actions; generating and testing ideas; and implementing and evaluating actions.
- Discourse and debate outside of the University have essential roles in informing and enriching our work within.
- Multi-level work on anti-racism is essential to shape the campus and workplace climate at the "local" level as well as more broadly across the University. Each effort, however small or large, connects to and supports other work happening elsewhere. A conversation, meeting or activity may spark ideas that can be put into action in that setting or carried over to others.
- Work to address anti-Black racism is supported and amplified by other work focused on fostering diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging across Columbia.
- New actions have been effective in prompting new ideas that enable additional, continuous change. Put another way, each effort enables greater clarity about additional questions to be asked and new steps to be taken.
- Even in a short period of time, we have found new areas of partnership and synergy with our surrounding communities in Harlem and Washington Heights, launching new projects and exploring others.

- In this term, we have seen an extraordinary dedication of energy and resources toward addressing anti-Black racism in the immediate and long term. Even with personal and professional strains stemming from the pandemic, which themselves have a racially disparate impact, students, faculty and staff have contributed their time and talent to efforts across Columbia.
- Continued attention, engagement and support for this work will be essential over time, recognizing both the urgency of the present and the need for sustained and enduring action into the future.

II. Earlier work across Columbia that provides a foundation for current initiatives

Many new initiatives build on related work that has been ongoing for many years and, in some cases, decades in the University's schools, centers, institutes, and offices. The sampling below draws from President Bollinger's call to action and adds other areas of work that may be less well known but also make distinctive and important contributions.

- **Scholarship on race and racism:** Scholarly work across a multitude of disciplines continues to contribute to and define our national and global discourse on race. The University's [Institute for Research in African-American Studies](#), founded in 1993, and the [African American and African Diaspora Studies Department](#), created in 2019, are two key locations for this work, along with numerous centers, programs and departments throughout the University.
- **Faculty hiring and support:** The University's [commitment to enhancing faculty diversity](#) is a signature initiative of President Bollinger. With the support of the Trustees, the University has committed substantial resources to hiring and supporting racial and gender diversity among our faculty, including an initial dedication of \$15 million in 2005, followed \$30 million in 2012, \$33 million in 2014 and \$100 million in 2017. See below for current updates.
- **Uncovering our history:** President Bollinger launched the [Columbia University and Slavery project](#) with Professor Eric Foner to uncover Columbia's connections with slavery and with antislavery movements. Many Columbia students, faculty and staff have contributed to the project since that time. Research associated with the project informed the decision in August 2020 to [change the name of Bard Hall](#) on the Columbia University Irving Medical Center Campus and continues to inform discussions about other names and symbols on Columbia's campuses.
- **Anti-racist pedagogy:** The Center for Teaching and Learning has issued an important resource on [Anti-Racist Pedagogy in Action: First Steps](#) in addition to hosting a faculty reading group on anti-racist pedagogy and practice and related training opportunities.

- **Connecting across the University:** The [Task Force on Inclusion and Belonging at Columbia](#) was founded in 2015 to bring together students, faculty and staff to identify issues and develop responsive strategies that address students' experiences both in and outside of the classroom related to diversity, inclusion and a sense of belonging on campus. The Task Force provides crucial leadership with its support for the Campus Conversations Initiative, the student [Community Citizenship Initiative](#) and other efforts to connect students across differences.

Opportunities to gather, learn and share ideas are essential for strengthening our challenges to racism at all levels. Numerous **University-wide events**, forums and conversations hosted by the Office of the President, Office of the Provost and Office of University Life keep a focus on race, ethnicity, disparities and justice, as have myriad events within schools and institutes.

Resources to assist in **bias response and conflict resolution** exist in multiple places across the University, including a) newly introduced University Life [responding to bias](#) resources; b) trainings and workshops on University policy from the Office of [Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action](#) and c) conflict-resolution skills training, mediation and other supports for faculty, staff and students from the University's [Ombuds Office](#).

The University's **Diversity Officers Network** includes staff who have significant responsibility for diversity-related work in their school or department and meet regularly to facilitate awareness of issues and sharing of best practices across Columbia.

The **University Senate Diversity Commission** has kept a steady focus on a range of diversity-related issues across the University, including in a November 2020 report and presentation to the Senate.

The [Office of Multicultural Affairs](#), created in 2004, is a vital resource for undergraduate students, with programs, resources and support for personal identity development, mentorship, intercultural learning, social justice education and institutional advocacy. The [Graduate Initiative for Inclusion and Engagement](#), launched by University Life in 2018, works similarly with graduate and professional school students across all schools, featuring its popular Diversity, Dialogue and Dinner Series and series of Success Workshops, designed with first-generation graduate students in mind and open to all.

III. Updates and New Initiatives

Starting in the summer of 2020, many initiatives have expanded into new domains, reflecting the need for new and expanded questions and actions to address and challenge racism. The discussion here spotlights five major areas of University-level work:

- The Student Experience
- Faculty Hiring, Support and Capacity-Building
- Staff Experience
- Inclusive Public Safety
- Neighborhood Partnerships

In addition to the information here, anti-racist discussions and actions are taking place in many departments, offices, organizations and networks throughout the University. This combination of “local” efforts along with school-wide and University-wide initiatives is essential to generating and sustaining Columbia’s anti-racist commitments.

For detailed information about initiatives and activities within schools, institutes and offices across Columbia, see [Appendix A: Anti-Racism Initiatives in Columbia’s Schools and Institute](#), which supplements and broadens the discussion below.

The Student Experience:

While summer is usually a quiet time on campus, students across the University were actively engaged well before the new school year began, generating ideas, organizing discussions and presenting demands. Faculty, staff and leadership of the schools were likewise engaged with serious attention to questions of anti-racist curricula, pedagogy, admissions, career services, campus climate and more.

Each of Columbia’s 16 schools has sustained this attention throughout the Fall term and has made commitments that continue into the future, as have the University’s largest institutes. Although each has a distinct mission and set of goals given its academic focus and its student body, all are implementing an agenda of study and action to achieve meaningful change. Each also has committed to sharing its work with the community, including on the new or revised websites listed here:

[College of Dental Medicine](#)
[Columbia Business School](#)
[Columbia College](#)
[Columbia Journalism School](#)
[Columbia Law School](#)
[Fu Foundation School of Engineering and Applied Sciences \(SEAS\)](#)
[Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation \(GSAPP\)](#)
[Graduate School of Arts and Sciences \(GSAS\)](#) and [Faculty of Arts and Sciences](#)
[Mailman School of Public Health](#) (and [here](#))

[School of International and Public Affairs \(SIPA\)](#)
[School of the Arts](#)
[School of General Studies](#)
[School of Nursing](#)
[School of Professional Studies](#)
[School of Social Work](#)
[Vagelos College of Physicians & Surgeons](#)

[Columbia Athletics](#)
[Columbia University Irving Medical Center](#)

[Data Science Institute](#)
[Earth Institute](#)
[Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory](#)

[Zuckerman Mind Brain Behavior
Institute](#)

Two new University-wide student initiatives also launched during the Fall term:

Inclusion and Belonging addition to the student Community Citizenship Initiative:

All Columbia students had the opportunity this Fall to participate in an [Inclusion and Belonging](#) section of the [student Community Citizenship Initiative](#) in addition to the annual [Sexual Respect Initiative](#). Nearly 10,000 students have participated.

Through this new section, students engage in conversation and skills-building on topics such as the impact of bias, how to cultivate inclusion, resiliency in the face of bias and more. The initiative links these values to community citizenship at the University and asks all students to think about their role in cultivating greater inclusion at Columbia. The section was developed and tested during the 2019-20 academic year, with support from the Task Force on Inclusion and Belonging at Columbia and the Diversity Officers Network.

Racial Justice Mini-Grants: All Columbia students have been invited to apply to the [Racial Justice Mini-Grant Program](#), created by the Office of University Life, which will provide monetary awards of \$50-\$1,500 for students to develop innovative ideas to address racism, particularly anti-Black racism, through education, broadening the campus conversation and strengthening our campus culture of inclusion and belonging. The Office of the Vice Provost for Faculty Advancement and Institute for Religion, Culture and Public Life provided valuable support for this program.

Next steps: University Life is in the preliminary phase of considering what kinds of research within our own community might be most helpful in fostering inclusion and belonging within our campus climate for students, with special attention to anti-Black racism and the experiences of students of color, first-generation and students from low-income households.

Faculty Hiring, Support and Capacity-Building:

The University's efforts to hire and support a diverse faculty have been active since the early 2000s, as described above. Several new initiatives have launched since the summer.

Faculty recruitment and retention: The University has accelerated [Columbia's program](#) focus on the recruitment, the retention, and the success of Black, Latinx, and other historically underrepresented faculty members with:

- (1) new support for [faculty cluster hires](#) in two areas: [STEM](#) and [scholarship addressing race and racism](#),
- 2) the hiring of health sciences faculty whose work focuses on the reduction of health care disparities in communities of color, and
- 3) University-wide recognition for faculty service in support of diversity and inclusion.

Mini-Institute on Addressing Anti-Black Racism: The Office of the Vice Provost for Faculty Advancement partnered with the School of Social Work to offer, in August, a highly acclaimed [Mini-Institute on Addressing Anti-Black Racism](#) for faculty at Columbia.

Building on the success of the Mini-Institute, the Deans of all of Columbia's schools, along with the Provosts of Columbia, Barnard and Teachers College, and other senior Columbia leaders participated in the three-session Mini-Institute in October and November. Plans are underway to offer the Mini-Institute again for additional faculty and for the University's Trustees.

[Addressing Racism, A Call to Action](#) for Columbia Faculty and a [Faculty Seed Grant Opportunity](#): There was an overwhelming response to the first-ever call for proposals for full-time faculty members within the Columbia community who seek to engage with issues of structural racism. Members of the University Board of Trustees made generous contributions that more than doubled the University's capacity to fund projects that broaden or deepen understanding of racial inequities that may impact the Columbia community. [The Institute for Religion, Culture and Public Life](#) also funded a project in their discipline. All 57 funded projects can be viewed [here](#).

Anti-Racism in Health Care and the Health Sciences: A new CUIMC Committee was appointed by the Interim EVP and Dean for Health Sciences, comprised of faculty from all four health science schools. It was charged with identifying and making recommendations to reduce the impact of racism from healthcare and the health sciences. Aspects of health science education, research and patient care were assessed. The committee worked throughout the summer and early Fall, and reported out recommendations for specific actions to eliminate racism in six important health-related domains:

- Faculty recruitment/retention,
- Professionalism and Civility,
- Health care disparities and solutions research,
- Clinical care,
- Education/training, and curriculum
- Community/public service.

The six subcommittees presented their recommendations to the Medical Center leadership in late September, followed by presentations to department chairs, faculty and others for feedback. The [Roadmap for Anti-Racism in Health Care and the Health Sciences](#) – A Report from the Columbia University Irving Medical Center Task Force for Addressing Structural Racism was posted for review on December 9, 2020.

Faculty Reading Initiative: The [All-Faculty Summer Reading Initiative](#) featured readings related to race and racism, including Claudia Rankin's *Citizen: An American Lyric*, Martha Jones's *Birthright Citizens: A History of Race and Rights in Antebellum America*, and Noel Ignatiev's, *How the Irish became White*, with discussions continuing throughout the Fall term.

Staff Experience:

A significant part of President Bollinger's summer message, consistent with the University's broad commitment to a diverse and inclusive workplace, was a charge to make recommendations for enhancing support for staff in light of Columbia's commitment to anti-racism. Dan Driscoll, Vice President of Human Resources, and Flores Forbes, Associate Vice President for Community Affairs, have convened a staff experience working group to take up this charge. The group, which includes staff from the Morningside and Medical Center campuses, has been meeting bi-weekly since early October (subcommittees have been meeting weekly) and will continue throughout this academic year. The group's work primarily has focused on three areas: organizational culture; the employee lifecycle (i.e., recruitment, onboarding, and retention); and professional development, including advancement opportunities.

See Appendix C for a detailed [Report of the Staff Experience Working Group, including preliminary recommendations](#).

Inclusive Public Safety:

At President Bollinger's request, a University-wide Working Group on Inclusive Public Safety, including students, faculty and staff, has been meeting regularly since early September with this charge: to work with the leadership of the Department of Public Safety to examine existing trainings and practices and to recommend concrete strategies for ensuring that we can have truly inclusive safety for all who are on Columbia's campuses. Suzanne Goldberg, Executive Vice President for University Life, and Flores Forbes, Associate Vice President for Community Affairs, co-lead the group.

The Working Group's three subcommittees have focused on gathering experiences, insights and suggestions from Columbia community members; reviewing training and capacity-building efforts within Columbia's Department of Public Safety, and identifying promising practices from other higher education institutions and other settings that might be adapted for Columbia.

See Appendix D for the [Report of the Inclusive Public Safety Working Group](#). The report is also available on [Inclusive Public Safety Working Group's web pages](#) on the Office of University Life's website, along with the Group's meeting notes and additional information.

Neighborhood Partnerships:

The University's connections with our neighboring communities in Harlem and Washington Heights are vast, and much of the work through these partnerships responds to race-related disparities in education, the economy, health care, and access to justice. This work includes the extensive engagements of the [University's Office of Government and Community Affairs](#) and its [Neighbors Hub](#), the [Columbia University Irving Medical Center's Office of Government and Community Affairs](#) and longstanding organizations such as [Columbia Community Service](#), [Community Impact](#), the [Roger Lehecka Double Discovery Center](#) and the [Center for Justice](#).

Many hundreds of school-based activities and programs also work closely with our neighboring communities, ranging from academic partnerships and credit-granting clinics, internships and externships to well-established student organizations and one-time activities involving individual volunteers.

Next steps: There are many ways in which the tremendous array of programs and activities set out in the full Report in the Appendix might benefit from greater connection to central resources and to each other. In the coming months, there will be discussions, research and additional focus on exploring ways to support the breadth of work that takes place.

See Appendix B for [Community-Based Programs and Partnerships of Columbia's Schools, Institutes and Departments in Harlem & Washington Heights](#), for more details.

Updates and new work of Columbia's Office of Government and Community Affairs:

As noted above, [Columbia's Office of Government and Community Affairs](#) and the [Columbia University Irving Medical Center's Office of Government and Community Affairs](#) have deep connections with our neighboring communities and extensive involvement in community-based work. Detailed information can be found on their respective websites.

The discussion here offers brief highlights of new and expanded work that has taken place since the summer of 2020.

Expanding our Economic Development Partnerships in Harlem: Over the past decade Columbia University has used its intellectual capital and financial resources to improve the quality of life in Harlem and upper Manhattan, directly impacting African Americans in this community. One pillar of this policy is an economic development mission that seeks to foster and grow the small business sector by providing technical assistance, access to capital and access to world-class training and education through the Columbia Harlem Small Business Development Center.

Since the summer, the Office of Government and Community Affairs has expanded its work on many projects that addresses the effects of racism and racial disparities, including the [Columbia Emergency Loan Fund](#), which has substantially expanded the resources and is capitalized at \$2 million. The Fund is available to support small businesses north of 96th Street as they reconfigure their operations in response to the coronavirus pandemic. Loans range from \$5,001-\$50,000. This is one of several projects that is part of the [Columbia-Harlem Small Business Development Center](#) (CHSBDC), founded in 2009, and based in Columbia Business School. Other economic educational and capacity building projects from the CHSBDC are the Columbia Community Business Program, which trains up to 30 local entrepreneurs every two years on a curriculum similar to the Business School's two-year MBA track. The Harlem Local Vendor Program is a training and marketing program that educates micro manufacturers on sound business techniques while connecting them with major retailers like Whole Foods for distribution as well as with Columbia University Dining. This is a partnership between Columbia University, Harlem Community Development Corporation and Harlem Park to Park.

Next steps: There are several additional projects being explored actively now to create new opportunities for capital formation through partnerships with Columbia and neighboring community leaders and financial institutions. The most prominent is our exploration and feasibility assessment in creating a Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI). A CDFI is a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organization regulated by the US Treasury Department, which provides access to several financial products that can assist the University and its partners with expanding and enhancing efforts at building the economic base in the upper Manhattan community. The feasibility study is underway and the findings should be available in early Spring.

Expanding and Strengthening our Criminal Justice Change Partnerships in Harlem:

Columbia University's work in the community related to criminal-justice change is a broad effort that spans across the many schools of the University. At this moment it places us at the center of conversation and debates for Black Lives Matter, ending mass incarceration, economic opportunity and equal justice for African Americans in Harlem in particular, and more broadly across the United States.

Harlem remains one of the communities in New York City most heavily impacted by mass incarceration and its related issues of gang and gun violence. Since 2014, the Office of Government and Community Affairs has developed projects in these areas and built partnerships with policymakers, government agencies, civic groups and a broad coalition of community stakeholders and community-based organizations that work in this area, bringing with the University's intellectual capital, human and financial resources and convening power to these efforts.

Since the summer, there has been additional work to provide opportunities to those who are impacted by mass incarceration through entrepreneurship support, internships, employment, tech training, course auditing and tuition support for certain degree programs, including at the School of General Studies. The other University entities involved in this work are The Center for Justice, School of Social Work, The Tamer Center for Social Enterprise, the Data Science Institute, and Columbia Human Resources as well as the Office of Government and Community Affairs.

Next steps:

Amend the 13th: In the Spring of 2014 faculty from Columbia Law School, Government and Community Affairs, community advocates and others convened a symposium to tackle a policy issue related to mass incarceration that carries significant meaning to many African Americans: the exception clause of the 13th Amendment. This past August the same collaboration convened a nationally attended Webinar to kick off the campaign to Amend the 13th hosted by CLS faculty and legal experts from across the country to continue this effort. The conveners propose to enhance this work and to continue the education process locally and nationally to advocate for a major campaign that could lead to the beginning of a process to amend the exception clause, which is at the root of the prison industrial complex.

HBCU Empowerment Project: Discussions are underway regarding partnerships and collaborations between Columbia and the 12 Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) that have strong research-based graduate schools. Updates will be included on the [Government and Community Affairs website](#) later this academic year.

IV. Conclusion and an Invitation

Columbia's commitment to anti-racism, and to addressing anti-Black racism in particular, is being carried out at all levels of the University, from the most senior leadership to our newest students, faculty and staff. This approach recognizes the need for strong and sustained efforts at the institutional level as well as within schools, departments, and organizations. It recognizes, too, that each member of our community has insights and experiences to contribute that will strengthen our anti-racist work and create pathways for support and action. None of us has all of the answers but all of us can advance the work in meaningful ways.

Many in our community are already involved deeply in these efforts. We are grateful for all you have done and will do in the months and years ahead. If you are looking for additional ways to contribute your time and talents, we welcome you, too. Broad engagement from across the University community speaks to the urgency of this work, as we wrote at the outset, and the reality that becoming an anti-racist institution is a collective effort. Through the myriad efforts described in this report and its appendices, the University has taken some significant steps toward our institutional commitment to anti-racism and illuminated new paths for action as we move toward a stronger future together.

V. Appendices

- A. [Anti-Racism Initiatives in Columbia's Schools and Institutes](#)**
- B. [Community-Based Programs and Partnerships of Columbia's Schools, Institutes and Departments in Harlem & Washington Heights](#)**
- C. [Report of the Staff Experience Working Group](#)**
- D. [Report of the Inclusive Public Safety Working Group](#)**