

Holistic Wellness Recommendations

June 12, 2020

Preface

Institutions of higher education hold a unique space as a microcosm of the world around us. This includes bringing together individuals of diverse racial and ethnic identities, indigeneity, gender identities, sexual orientations, ability, socioeconomic status, immigration status, and religious backgrounds, among other social experiences and positions onto, and into, a shared physical and cultural environment. In so doing, we must recognize how systems of oppression can be replicated through the actions and behaviors of members of a university community, while at the same time acknowledge that the institution can also champion and foster an environment that addresses oppressive structures and is proactive in creating an ethic of care and wellness for all community members.

We, members of the President's Council on Equity, Inclusion, and Social Justice, have developed the following recommendations to address concerns brought forth by student groups who consistently experience greater marginalization in the Western Washington University community. In our efforts to create a holistic approach to wellness, we crafted these recommendations to reflect the needs of students, faculty, and staff with a belief that cultivating wellness across all dimensions of the university will create space to promote and engage healing processes among the student body. In addition to student voice and experience, we were guided by the Western Washington University Strategic Plan, as well as frameworks that emphasize the need to move towards healing as a collective (e.g., French et al., 2020; Okanagan Charter, 2015). It is critical to engage in wellness on multiple levels and expand our notions, beliefs, and definitions of wellness to recognize how each component of the university ecosystem inherently interacts with and impacts all others.

We further recognize these recommendations as ever-changing, in the sense that the recommendations outlined here speak to the issues the WWU community is facing in this current historical timepoint. As broader U.S. and global society gains awareness and recognizes the nuance of social identity, how oppression manifests in lived experiences, and the systemic impacts on different communities, these recommendations must adapt to these realities. This is the nature of healing. Moving beyond fixed ideas of identifying and eliminating illness (e.g., a linear path), and shifting into a flow that allows for being proactive and cultivating strategies that will allow us to face new challenges as they arise. In doing so, we recognize the need for continued learning, engagement, humility, and grace in order to maximize a holistic healing approach.

Recommendations

The Committee has three broad recommendations for Western Washington University:

- 1) Demonstrate a Commitment to Health, Wellness, & Healing**
- 2) Increase Cultural Competence and Bias Awareness**
- 3) Deepen Communication, Connection, and Community**

Demonstrate a Commitment to Health, Wellness, & Healing

We recommend that Western Washington University ...

- Sign on to the Okanagan Charter and make a commitment to become a “Health Promoting” Institution.
- Review and engage with the 8 Dimensions of Wellness as a means to frame and understand the needs of students, staff, and faculty, and to make policy and operational decisions across all divisions and colleges.
 - The 8 dimensions are: Emotional; Spiritual; Intellectual; Physical; Environmental; Financial; Occupational; Social
- Continuously assess student needs, at and beyond academics, in order to understand the issues impacting student engagement and success at Western.
 - Needs assessments can be both quantitative (e.g., distributing a survey) or qualitative (e.g., town hall meetings; listening sessions) in order to get a fuller understanding of what students are experiencing.
 - These needs assessment must reflect proactive efforts on the part of WWU administration in order to demonstrate dedication to these concerns.
 - For example, if a survey were distributed to students at Fall and Spring quarters, each Fall quarter survey could incorporate the results from the previous Spring.
- Respond to student needs in ways that will connect different parts of the university community as part of the conversation.
 - This can involve active engagement with staff members across the university, as well as student staff, who can provide input as to how to address concerns and implement change.
- Recognize how social injustices on a national level impact the wellbeing of students of color, with an explicit focus on anti-Blackness as perpetuated on numerous systemic levels.
 - This calls for university administration to not only release statements of understanding or solidarity, but to work towards meaningful action steps to provide support in the midst of collective trauma.
- Ensure recruitment and retention of health and helping professionals (e.g., Counseling Center staff) that understand the needs of marginalized student populations and are engaged in efforts to increase multicultural competency.

Increase Cultural Competence and Bias Awareness

We recommend that Western Washington University ...

- Develop and hire an upper administrative position, that reports directly with the President of the WWU, with an explicit focus on and dedication to access, equity, inclusion, and social justice.
 - More than one position is desirable, as social justice work is highly taxing and often falls on one person; however, the immediate need calls for *at least* one position.
- Revise existing General University Requirements (GURs) to incorporate a GUR that requires students to examine their own identities, social positions, and relationships to structures of power, privilege, and oppression.

- Mandate cultural competence and bias awareness trainings for *all* faculty and staff. Furthermore, *build* on these trainings with campus-wide events and gatherings as part of a branded initiative (e.g., **Western United-Community Strong**) that continuously engage participants in reflection and learning on systemic oppressions. Such a campus-wide, leadership-supported, unified effort would have a great impact on overall student health and wellness.
 - Currently, different colleges and units of the university offer forms of cultural competence trainings, *always optional*, which result in a fragmented approach that does not reach all members of the campus community. No follow up is offered to build on the change that Western needs to see.
 - Western’s survey of non-returning students from Spring 2019 who did not return in fall of 2019 showed that over 24 percent of respondents left because of “community and connectedness” reasons, and cited “a lack of diversity,” and/or that their “whole self” or “identity” “was not supported at Western.
 - Some students stated that they “did not feel safe on campus.” (WELS Non-Returning Student Survey, spring 2019)
 - Faculty and staff of color and other marginalized groups report similar dissatisfaction in surveys.
- Engage new perspectives and gripping programming from both internal and external sources of expertise. Western has an opportunity to show our campus community, Washington State, and the rest of the nation, that we are serious about prioritizing real change. But the change cannot occur if we continue down the road of optional cultural competency, or underfunded, fragmented efforts. **We need to start something big**; we need to begin an ongoing conversation that will allow us all to change and grow.
 - Training offered should be unique, engaging and followed by next steps for participants. It should offer real opportunity for a sea-change in campus-wide understanding of what equity and inclusion actually mean and how members of campus impact it every day. (See “Undoing Racism” suggestion below.)
 - For faculty and staff, Western could implement a twice-quarterly offering of a half-day or day-long training each academic year. The President, the Provost, all Vice Presidents and Deans should publicly, enthusiastically, and frequently promote and support completion of the training with a stated goal that all current members of faculty and staff would have attended one of the trainings by the end of an academic year 21-22 (with 6 separate trainings offered, twice per quarter).
- Establish training opportunities every academic year, since the goal of including all faculty and staff in the first year is lofty (lofty, but necessary as a stated goal, to signify and new approach to effecting change at Western).
 - For faculty and staff, a training on “Undoing Racism” could be offered (The People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond, with a headquarters in Seattle, offers this: <http://www.pisab.org/programs/>)
 - A note on the program: The People’s Institute is one of the few existing programs in the U.S. that focuses on institutional and structural forms of racism. The model makes important distinctions between individual expressions of prejudice, bias and discrimination, and institutional or systemic forms of racism. It critiques the dominance of individual-level approaches that fail to address the

more prevalent, less visible, systemic dimensions of racism. The model challenges whites and people of color alike to recognize and work against those systems that provide unearned privilege to some and impose undeserved restrictions on others. It also encourages a race-based analysis of important social issues and institutions.

- A similar training could be offered in an online format for students, and Western could make the training mandatory, just like the sexual harassment and alcohol use trainings. Follow-up trainings for smaller groups could be offered. Example: EVERFI's offering: <https://everfi.com/courses/higher-education/diversity-inclusion-training-college-students/>
- Utilize the broader branded initiative (e.g., **Western United – Community Strong**) to include additional, campus-wide events that occur throughout the year.
 - These events can be in collaboration with existing student and organizational efforts (e.g., heritage and awareness months), or serve to augment existing offerings as a result of conversations with community members.
 - A Film Series could be offered, with each film followed by a guided discussion of the perspectives featured in each film.
 - A website can be created in order to boost events, provide links for training sign-ups, and host resources on the topics related to this campaign
- Dedicate and secure a consistent source of funding to maintain these events/overall campaign. Western Foundation could be involved in finding funding.
 - Funding can go towards compensating external trainers and experts, providing food for these events, securing external venues,
 - Funding must also provide compensation for any internal experts (i.e., students, faculty, staff) who contribute to this programming.

Deepen Communication, Connection, and Community

We recommend that Western Washington University ...

- Reprioritize what is deemed 'urgent' and 'essential' to college operations.
 - For funding decisions, centering questions such as: What are the implications of this decision for Black students? Will this decision allow undocumented students to feel connected to the university? Will this decision create isolation for disabled students?
 - Understand and consider the need for retention of marginalized students, staff, and faculty in making campus-wide decisions. A strong recruitment effort is one thing; but even stronger ways of *showing* how the university provides continued and engaged support is critical.
- Increase transparency in communicating intention behind the decisions made by/for the university
 - Engage with and improve systems in place (e.g., faculty senate) that call for shared governance and input from members of the broader Western community
 - Include a member specifically equipped and empowered to advocate for equity, inclusion, and social justice on search committees for faculty, ESS positions, as well as professional and classified staff as appropriate.

- Include at least one student on search committees for faculty, ESS positions, as well as professional and classified staff as appropriate.
 - If possible, and as students are able, include students from marginalized populations on these search committees
 - This is important across all domains and offices of the university if we are to take a holistic approach to understanding how each aspect of the institution impacts a diverse student population.
- Reimagine the role of the WWU Police Department in the campus community.
 - Review and examine how the university could reallocate funding from the WWU Police Department to fund increases in student support services (e.g., Black and POC counselors/therapists; Black Student Success Coordinator), retention efforts for students, faculty, and staff of color, and support additional student-led initiatives (e.g., College of Ethnic Studies).
 - Implement a model of community policing and accountability in efforts to build a stronger relationship between the WWU Police Department and the campus community.
 - Community policing can be understood as a collaborative practice in ensuring safety and well-being wherein law enforcement personnel and community members work together to identify and solve problems in the community
 - Initial steps can include hosting several town hall sessions focusing on police and community relations
 - There may be separate town halls for students, faculty, and staff to engage with law enforcement personnel in order to gain deeper insight into the nature of police work and its impact on the university environment.
 - Facilitated discussions and processing spaces to discuss instances of police violence, particularly towards Black, Latinx, and Indigenous populations.
 - These spaces can also be used to discuss histories and cultures of policing, as well current police policy, in order to create avenues for change.
 - Recognize the need for police to be made accountable by the communities they serve. More power in the hands of the police will not help, rather more responsible use of the abundant power that they already have can aid in reform.

References

French, B., Lewis, J. A., Mosley, D. V., Adames, H. Y., Chavez-Dueñas, N. Y., Chen, G. A., & Neville, H. A. (2020). Toward a psychological framework of radical healing in communities of color. *The Counseling Psychologist, 48*(1), 14-46. doi: 10.1177/0011000019843506

Okanagan Charter: An international charter for health promoting universities and colleges. (2015). Retrieved from: <https://open.library.ubc.ca/cIRcle/collections/53926/items/1.0132754>