

## **Recommendation to Create a Structural Equity and Bias Response Team**

March 16, 2020

In response to President Randhawa's charge to the 2019-20 Council on Equity, Inclusion, and Social Justice, the following is a recommendation for the creation of a Structural Equity and Bias Response Team (SEBRT) at Western Washington University. This recommendation provides conceptual and specific suggestions regarding the Team's purpose, structure, and protocol, while also leaving additional details for development by University leadership and those staff positions with key responsibilities for implementing the Team's work.

### **Background and Summary**

Responding to bias incidents in a way that is timely, caring, and educational is crucial. Furthermore, the Council understands bias incidents as symptoms of structural and historically rooted systems of power and oppression that deeply inform the experiences of all students, staff, faculty, and alumna at Western and throughout our society. In light of our institutional commitment to advance inclusive achievement and pursue justice and equity, we recommend situating the work of bias response within a structure that also examines and offers alternatives to conditions at the University that give rise to bias incidents. Doing so will allow Western to be both proactive and reactive, and will provide an organizational structure in which incidents of bias that do occur directly inform programming, policy development, and revision of practices to create more just and equitable outcomes. For this reason, we propose creating a Structural Equity and Bias Response Team (SEBRT).

This recommendation is intended to create a SEBRT that will:

- Respond caringly, promptly, and effectively to reported bias incidents, and to significant incidents of bias beyond the University that impact people in our Western community.
- Provide programming and recommend changes to policies and processes to reduce structural inequities and interpersonal acts of bias, and to support students in respecting the rights and dignity of others as they make positive impacts in the state and the world.
- Provide a transparent and well known structure and process for bias response and proactive efforts undertaken to prevent future acts of bias, while also maintaining appropriate confidentiality and discretion in the sharing of sensitive information.
- Engage in a process of continual improvement aimed at bettering responses to bias incidents and remedying structural inequities.

Specific recommendations, when provided below, are intended to be helpful; we recognize that there may be other effective ways to achieve these objectives and that the particulars of how

SEBRT works will evolve over time. An implementation team may be useful in establishing the SEBRT based on this recommendation.

### **Structural Equity and Bias Response Team**

The Structural Equity and Bias Response Team (SEBRT) provides leadership and accountability in responding to bias incidents and making institutional progress towards structural equity at Western Washington University. SEBRT works collaboratively with University departments to facilitate all of its work. SEBRT is not a disciplinary body; it does not conduct investigations or impose sanctions or discipline.

SEBRT is composed of two sub-groups, the Bias Response Team and the Structural Equity Team. A Core Team of professionals serve on both teams, facilitating SEBRT in making necessary connections between individual acts of bias and institutional change aimed at decreasing bias incidents and structural inequities.

SEBRT holds regular periodic open meetings with the University community to discuss its work. A report summarizing SEBRT's work is generated annually by the Structural Equity Team and made available to the public.

### **Bias Response Team**

The Bias Response Team provides restorative and educational responses to bias incidents occurring in the Western community, which negatively impact the University community and do not align with Western's commitments to create an inclusive and welcoming culture. This Team identifies and coordinates responses to bias incidents to (1) support targeted and impacted members of the community and (2) educate the community about impacts and histories of such bias and actions to prevent future bias and respond in solidarity with those most impacted. The Team often works in collaboration with various University departments to determine and implement the University's responses to bias incidents. All incidents brought to the attention of the Bias Response Team are shared with the Structural Equity Team in order to inform that team's ongoing efforts to create an inclusive and equitable Western culture.

The Bias Response Team also anticipates likely impacts of and reactions to instances of bias occurring in the community beyond Western, including at the local and national levels, and coordinates proactive support for students potentially impacted by off campus occurrences.

Bias incidents may be brought to the attention of the Bias Response Team via an online notification form or direct referral by a member of the University community to a member of the Bias Response Team. It is recommended that a SEBRT website clearly list team members and contact information. When incidents are reported, the Team, led by the co-chairs and in communication with the most direct target(s) of the incident (unless the incident is shared anonymously or there is no specific target), will decide best course(s) of action. At a minimum,

individuals targeted by bias incidents will be contacted by a member of the Bias Response Team and referred to the University department best able to provide further support. The Team may notify the Equal Opportunity Office, Office of Student Life, Residence Life, Human Resources Department, and/or University or local law enforcement of the incident so that perpetrators may be held accountable through appropriate investigative and disciplinary processes.

The Bias Response Team will have standing weekly meetings, and will be convened additionally by either co-chair as needed to promptly respond to incidents.

A **bias incident** is language or an action that demonstrates bias against an individual or group of people based on actual or perceived race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, gender identity or expression, disability, sexual orientation, age, or veteran status. Examples of bias incidents can include, but are not limited to, vandalism to personal or University property, defacement of posters, verbal slurs, and physical assault.

A bias incident may contribute to creating an unsafe environment or have a negative psychological, emotional, or physical impact on an individual, group, or community. A bias incident may occur whether or not there is an intent to cause a negative impact, and whether or not the incident constitutes a crime or violation of Washington law or Western policy.

### **Structural Equity Team**

While the Bias Response Team responds to incidents that occur, the Structural Equity Team uses information about these incidents, and deeper examinations of the conditions leading to specific incidents, to inform longer-term actions and recommendations aimed at building and sustaining an equitable and just environment. The Structural Equity Team plays an important role in eliminating structural inequities at the University and limiting the impacts of broader societal inequities that influence University operations and community members. The Structural Equity Team includes members of the Core Team as well as student, faculty, and at-large participants.

The Structural Equity Team is forward-thinking and proactive, for example by:

- Proactively examining University policies and practices and making recommendations to the University President and Vice Presidents regarding revisions and new structural actions that would further equity, limit bias incidents, and support the University in responding most effectively when incidents occur;
- Organizing educational programs to foster senses of belonging and inclusion, and;
- Generating an annual public report providing information about reported incidents of bias, responsive actions taken by the Bias Response Team, and work undertaken by the

Structural Equity Team, all of which then informs future work of the Structural Equity Team and the University more broadly.

The Structural Equity Team will have regular meetings during the academic year (Fall through Spring quarters) and will be convened additionally by either co-chair as needed.

## **Considerations for Implementation of SEBRT**

### **Composition of SEBRT**

We recommend including the following positions on SEBRT and its sub-teams. We also anticipate that the Core Team, Bias Response Team and Structural Equity Team might include additional individuals whose expertise would be beneficial in advancing the SEBRT's work.

Because pursuit of justice and equity in our policies, practices, and impacts is one of Western's four strategic goals, and because the involvement of University leaders with greatest authority and access to implement structural changes supports the efficacy of the SEBRT's work, we suggest that the Structural Equity Team include positions that do not typically serve on institutional committees, such as roles at the vice president or associate/assistant vice president level.

Core Team: Members of the Core Team serve on both the Bias Response Team and the Structural Equity Team.

- Associate Dean of Students
- Director of Multicultural Student Services
- LGBTQ+ Director
- Equal Opportunity Office representative
- Other staff who make significant contributions to effective bias response and strategic advancement of structural equity, appointed by the President and Vice President for Enrollment and Student Services

Bias Response Team includes the positions above, plus:

- Residence Life representative
- University Police representative
- Ethnic Student Center representative (at least until MSS Director hired)
- Counseling Center representative

Structural Equity Team includes the Core Team, plus:

- Vice President for Enrollment and Student Services
- Another vice president or their assistant/associate vice president designee
- Associated Students Vice President for Diversity or designee
- An Associated Students Student Senator
- Two at-large student representatives
- Faculty union representative

Faculty senate representative  
At-large staff and faculty representatives  
Classified staff union and PSO representatives

### **Job Responsibilities and Recognition of Service**

Service on these teams would be an important responsibility, with an expectation of regular attendance at meetings, participation as necessary between meetings, and engagement in appropriate training with other team members before one's service commences.

- For key staff who serve on the Core Team as part of their regular job responsibilities, we recommend that job descriptions reflect this responsibility.
- For students, faculty, and staff serving in at-large positions on the Structural Equity Team for a limited period of time, a widely publicized process could be established via which individuals apply or are nominated to serve. The process for review and selection of such applicants would need to be determined.
- To allow some continuity between academic years, it may be advisable for students to serve for one year terms, while staff and faculty serve for two year terms. The implementation team may consider staggering terms to provide some consistency from year to year.
- For faculty, service on the Structural Equity Team should be recognized as a significant service commitment. For staff, especially classified staff, time away from one's regular job responsibilities should be granted to engage in this work. For students, we encourage exploration of whether credit could be provided for this work via an internship or ISP.

### **Professional Development for SEBRT**

Effectively doing the work of bias response and structural transformation requires appropriate professional development. We recommend that the Core Team participate in robust development together, for example via [AACU's Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation Institute](#).

We recommend that participants in the Bias Response Team engage in periodic professional development together, for example with the [University of Southern California's Race and Equity Center](#).

We recommend that the Structural Equity Team participate in periodic development together as well, possibly beginning with an opportunity such as [AACU's Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation Institute](#), the [Racial Equity Institute](#) or [Race Forward](#). Given the need for students to prioritize their academics, and because learning opportunities might occur during school breaks, it may be that some staff and faculty participate in professional development

together and then share this learning with students and other faculty and staff serving on the Structural Equity Team. When bringing on new team members, a shadowing component of development could also be included, whereby new team members shadow current team members during Spring quarter before assuming their responsibilities the following Fall.

### **Communication**

There will need to be a communication plan that informs the University community about creation of SEBRT, its role, its relationship to investigative and disciplinary processes at the University, and how to report a bias incident. Given that new students and colleagues are entering the University every quarter, this information will need to be shared on an ongoing basis. A website describing the SEBRT's functions will be a helpful element of communication. It may be appropriate for this communication to be organized by the implementation team in collaboration with University Communications and Marketing.