

Equity Action Plan Update

Updated: August 01, 2021

This report summarizes progress to date on the Equity Action Plan developed in AY 2016-2017 by Dr. Julia Aguirre and Dr. Christopher Knaus, which was part of a Professional Educators Standards Board (PESB) Special Projects Fund Grant. The plan was developed after conducting focus groups and interviews with 14 external partners representing a cross-section of leaders representing higher education, K-12 partner districts, and various community organizations supporting socioculturally diverse communities, families, and learners. The key focus was diversifying the PK-12 teacher workforce in Washington State with a focus on structural barriers at the institutional level, although other topics were discussed, including national trends and systemic issues that have perpetuated a majority-White teacher workforce. [The full report is included here.](#)

On July 01, 2017, Dr. Rachel Endo was hired as Founding Dean of the School of Education at UWT. At the autumn 2017 faculty-staff retreat, she facilitated a rigorous planning process to operationalize the plan. pp. 23-31 of the plan listed a set of specific requirements. While the focus of this plan is on the Teacher Certification Programs, it also discusses other relevant School-wide efforts to support equity and inclusion.

Below is a summary of actions taken and progress since 2017, and next steps as we look forward to the next five (5) years of elevating our commitment to anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Recommendation 1: Develop Multiple and Flexible Pathways for Teacher Certification

The School's community/district partners, faculty, staff, and students have made several collaborative efforts to improve access to all of our academic programs by analyzing the entire arch of the student experience of closing equity gaps from pre-admissions to post-completion.

In AY 2017-2018, Dean Endo tasked the Teacher Certification Program (TCP) and other programs' faculty and staff to audit admissions policies to identify potential barriers for admitting a representationally diverse pool of students. The audit revealed some challenges, including potential bias in how applicants were assessed through group interview panels and how faculty evaluated the content of letters of recommendations. After a robust discussion about access gaps and barriers, faculty modified some of the admissions process and rubric to better support applicants with diverse communication preferences and varied academic preparation.

Dr. Julia Aguirre and Dean Endo also collaborated with other unit heads of education across the state to remove cut-off scores of basic-skills tests as an admissions requirement, as certain demographic groups such as BIPOC and English learners scored lower on certain subtests of the exam.

In AY 2017-2018, faculty and staff developed a final plan to launch a BA in Education, grounded in Ethnic Studies and Psychology, as part of UWT's Academic Plan 2017-2023. Dr. Julia Aguirre has been the primary lead for program development. The APCC prioritized the BA in Education program in a highest-demand category due to the teacher shortage and our desire to recruit, retain, and support

a more diverse teacher workforce. Due to financial constraints since AY 2017-2018, and because Chancellor Pagano and his leadership team prioritized the launch of new STEM programs, the BA program was pushed back to launch in AY 2022-2023. Currently, under the leadership of Dr. Julia Aguirre and the Joint Committee for Undergraduate Educational Studies, the BA program is in its final stages of approval, and we are on target to launch the program in AY 2022-2023. The BA program offers multiple pathways for qualified incoming freshmen, undeclared majors, and transfer students to earn dual-track certification in high-needs areas. Additional community conversations are occurring about creating potential Indigenous-focused pathways that would involve, for example, creating transfer-articulation agreements with community tribal colleges and providing tribal community members with a place-based option to earn the BA with teacher certification (with field placements at tribal schools).

Recommendation 2: Develop Racial Equity Taskforce

Based on faculty, staff, and student feedback, and under the leadership of Dr. Julia Aguirre, Dean Endo revamped the School's existing Recruitment & Retention of Diverse Candidates Committee to the Race, Equity, and Justice Committee in AY 2017-2018 with a new charge to audit DEI growth areas for the School more explicitly. Dr. Julia Aguirre led the committee to develop new by-laws and also chaired the committee.

Associate Professor Dr. Robin Zape-tah-hol-ah Minthorn has chaired the committee since AY 2019-2020 to the present. The committee's charge is included in the School's by-laws. A key aspect of the committee's scope of work is offering professional development opportunities and resources to faculty and staff on anti-racist practices. For example, since AY 2019-2020, the School has integrated anti-racism professional development as part of its standing monthly committee meetings to encourage School-wide participation. The committee is also developing a resource bank for faculty, staff, and students to ensure they have access to current DEI terminology, along with culturally appropriate materials that they could use in their own workplace settings.

Recommendation 3: Increase Supports for Students of Color

The Dean has partnered with the UWT Office of Advancement to provide select tuition scholarships for BIPOC teacher candidates. Funding has also been provided to offer financial support and vouchers for a select of current students who need support to pay for mandatory certification examinations. In autumn 2021, Dean Endo revived a partnership with the Technology Access Fund to resurrect the Martinez Fellows Program, a dynamic cross-institutional collaborative that seeks to diversify the teacher workforce. In partnership with the UWT Office of Advancement, the School of Education will host Martinez Fellows for the incoming 2022 cohort.

Several faculty directors have facilitated affinity group discussions with BIPOC students to provide an affirming space to be in community and share their experiences. The School also regularly shares external networking opportunities to students, largely based on affinity groupings, in the event they are seeking specific support by, for example, career goals and content area.

Recommendation 4: Increase Supports for Educators of Color

The School is now a member of TAF's Network for Edwork's (NWEW), a specific statewide organization that seeks to develop and support the next generation of critically conscious BIPOC teachers. Dean Endo was invited to community sessions in AY 2020-2021 and signed an MOU in autumn 2021 to formalize the School's partnership with the network. The coalition model has

enabled UWT and other IHEs to collaborate on ways to transform teacher education to close equity gaps. Dean Endo has been invited to facilitate professional development focusing on BIPOC teachers and supporting culturally sustaining identities.

Dean Endo has also collaborated with other deans, educators, and school leaders to provide community dialogues or drop-in mentoring clinics for BIPOC educators to have a supportive space to check in or seek guidance on a challenging equity-focused problem of practice.

Finally, Dean Endo, in collaboration with Dr. Julia Aguirre, has participated on the annual Day on the Hill for the Washington Association for Colleges of Teacher Education to advocate for grants, loan forgiveness, scholarships, and other support to recruit and retain a more diverse educator workforce. They have also collaborated with district leaders and hiring managers better support qualified BIPOC applicants for job interviews to reduce bias in the evaluation and selection/hiring practice.

Recommendation 5: Strengthen District Partnerships

In AY 2018-2019, Dean Endo reorganized the School based on stakeholder feedback that there needed a more coordinated and equity-focused approach to partnership engagement. In autumn 2018, she created a restructured Director of Field Placements & Partnerships position, a full-time administrative staff role. Keshia Korman was hired as the Inaugural Director in July 2019. After Korman's unexpected passing in spring 2019, a national search was launched, and Carey Kirkwood was hired into this role in summer 2019. Kirkwood brings robust experience as a classroom teacher, coach, and district leader.

In her role, Kirkwood has been tasked by the Dean to strengthen our district partnerships, including:

1. Regularly eliciting feedback from school partners about our growth areas and strengths in the areas of equity and inclusion through an annual survey. The findings are regularly shared with our Professional Educators Standards Board, as well as other faculty, staff, and students.
2. Curating resources for field supervisors and mentor teachers to support diverse teacher candidates.
3. Partnering with WACTE colleagues to implement BEST Mentoring as part of mentor teacher professional development.
4. Working with the Dean to ensure the School's partnerships are reciprocal and respectful, including shared efforts for anti-racist professional development and shared goals around supporting diverse teacher candidates/interns.

The Office of the Dean has revised MOU language to include expectations around equity and inclusion in supporting BIPOC candidates. However, not all districts have been willing to modify MOUs for various reasons, including because their central offices require standard language across all partner universities to constraints that might involve conflicting language in collective-bargaining agreements. Dean Endo continues to engage in conversations with district leaders about the urgency of centering equity and inclusion in partnership frameworks at all levels.

Recommendation 6: Transform UWT's Approach to Educator Preparation

In AY 2019-2020, after eliciting feedback from faculty, staff, and students about organizational challenges and opportunities, Dean Endo appointed Dr. Julia Aguirre, a nationally recognized scholar

of equity in mathematics education, as Inaugural Director of the TCPs. Dr. Aguirre's expertise and knowledge have been vital in addressing several equity-specific challenges as we have revolutionized our programs to support anti-racism, equity, and inclusion in both practice and theory. Below are some examples:

1. In spring 2018, Dean Endo asked faculty to revise their application rubrics to address biased language that appeared to disproportionately impact BIPOC and ELL applicants, as well as prospective students who may not have had experiences with group-panel interviews. Faculty completed these revisions in spring 2018.
2. In AY 2019-2020, Dean Endo appointed Dr. Kathy Beaudoin as Faculty Coordinator of the Special Education Program and charged her to collaborate with Dr. Aguirre and faculty to revise the curriculum to ensure alignment with updated Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) standards that explicitly focused on equity and inclusion, including ensuring that teacher candidates were able to describe race-based and other inequities in the field, including the disproportionate representation of BIPOC children in special education.
3. In AY 2020-2021, Dean Endo appointed Dr. Robin Zape-ta-ho-lah Minthorn as Inaugural Director of Indigenous Educational Partnerships. Dr. Minthorn supports all academic programs with Indigenous partnerships, as well as offers guidance and resources on Indigenous-focused pedagogy.
4. In AY 2019-2020, the School secured funding to implement the OSPI-approved Since Time Immemorial Curriculum into its TCPs. Dr. Aguirre led STI workgroups in collaboration with UWT American Indian Studies faculty, Dr. Danica Sterud Miller and Dr. Michelle Montgomery. Dr. Minthorn regularly offers guidance and support to ensure STI is not just an add on.
5. Dr. Aguirre has explicitly elicited student representation and voice for various decision-making bodies, including the Professional Educators Standards Board.
6. Dr. Aguirre has collaborated with Dean Endo on elevating the School's reciprocal engagement with BIPOC communities.

Recommendation 7: Hire and Support Faculty of Color

At the autumn 2017 School-wide retreat, Dean Endo shared how her own historic hire at UWT as the first Woman of Color to serve at the decanal level, and her other experiences as the lone or one of a few BIPOC faculty members at predominantly White education programs and universities, created a range of challenges around belonging and workload that could have been remedied through institutional investment in diversifying the faculty. At the autumn 2017 retreat, she stated that one of her priorities was to substantially improve faculty and staff hiring practices to ensure the School was attentive to community and student concerns that a majority-White faculty could not credibly lead equity and inclusion efforts. Dean Endo set an initial goal of at least 50% of all new hires would be BIPOC.

Over a 5-year period from 2017-2022, over 90% of all new faculty and staff hires in the School have been BIPOC individuals from underrepresented backgrounds. The School has an explicit set of equity-focused guidelines for all searches to ensure that recruitment practices yield acceptable outcomes that the rest of the campus is seeking to adopt.

To support new colleagues, Dean Endo hosts an opt-in multi-leveled mentoring-partnership model that she instituted in other settings over a decade ago. The model involves 1:1 matches (new colleague with a tenured colleague), 1:1s with the Dean, and quarterly whole-group check-ins. Each mentor-partner pair receives funding from the Office of the Dean to connect regularly over meals

and to engage in shared professional development efforts. The Dean has facilitated conversations with tenured mentors to ensure that they are aware of the unique sociocultural and sociopolitical contexts that BIPOC faculty tend to encounter. Significantly, this model has gained national attention, including in K-12 schools and colleges/schools of education with teacher-preparation programs.

Recommendation 8: Flexible Justice-Oriented Curriculum

This is an area that has been an ongoing point of discussion among faculty. While many students prefer evening/weekend, hybrid, or online courses, most TCP faculty prefer to teach during the weekday over business hours and some evenings. Dr. Aguirre continues to lead critical conversations with faculty about how our curriculum and program must respond to current demands, especially in the post-2020 world.

Dr. Aguirre has elevated the program's focus on anti-racism and equity through curriculum mapping, ensuring there are signature assessments and assignments for teacher candidates to demonstrate a readiness to engage as compassionate and culturally relevant future teachers.

One area of potential interest is the creation of teacher-residency programs that allow teacher candidates paid opportunities to gain real-life teaching experience through an integrated district-university partnership where most courses would be offered on a school site. Classroom teachers and university faculty would closely collaborate on curricular and instructional decisions. The residency model would be attractive to BIPOC candidates, as it would address several funding and logistics barriers to program completion.

Recommendation 9: Test-Preparation Support

Under Dr. Aguirre's leadership, the School has partnered with the UWT Teaching and Learning Center to offer free test preparation to candidates who have experienced challenges with passing standardized tests, including sessions on content overview (in mathematics, reading, and writing) and test-preparation skills.

Dr. Aguirre and Dean Endo have also partnered with other colleges and schools of education in the South Sound to address ongoing concerns about the passage of 2s-HB 1028 and the WEST-B requirement. 2s-HB 1028 was passed. However, at this time, the WEST-B is still required for program admissions as a diagnostic tool but is no longer consequential with certain cut-off scores. The School's stance continues to be that the state should not require candidates to pay for and take a test that is not consequential for certification (in terms of a cut-off score). The exam also does not correlate with their future performance as classroom teachers and may demonstrate disproportionate bias in assessing the needs of BIPOC and ELL candidates.

Recommendation 10: Transformative Pedagogies

During monthly School-wide meetings since AY 2019-2020, the School's Race, Equity, & Justice Committee has facilitated anti-racism professional development for all faculty and staff that focuses on equitable and inclusive practices. Common readings allow a baseline for participants to engage in meaningful dialogue about connections to their own context and practice. The School has also partnered with the Office of Equity & Inclusion to host equity-focused professional development and workshops that benefit faculty across campus.

Program directors also facilitate regular meetings, where they discuss promising practices in transformative pedagogies with program-area faculty, where they regularly review student feedback connected to multiple dimensions of equity pedagogy. Program faculty, in collaboration with colleagues, make modifications as appropriate based on student feedback.

Next Steps:

The recent UWT Campus Climate Implementation Team efforts also connect with the School's broader work around creating and sustaining a climate of inclusive excellence, continuous improvement, and shared leadership. Dean Endo was the sole academic dean to serve on the 23-member UWT Campus Climate Implementation team. Other representatives of the School included Dr. Star Berry (student team), Dr. Gordon Brobbey (faculty team), and Ashley Walker (staff team).

Dean Endo asked the School's faculty and staff to review the content of the UWT Campus Climate Implementation Team reports for our autumn 2021 retreat on September 21, 2021. It led to rich discussions about connections to our context and priorities, including our equity-action plan. Below is a summary of some of our plans for AY 2021-2022:

1. In AY 2018-2019, The Dean created a blueprint for a school-wide strategic enrollment-management plan (SEM) that centers DEI in all aspects in terms of recruiting, retaining, and supporting diverse students, especially those from historically underrepresented backgrounds. This is a 3-phased plan that involves recruitment, retention/support, and alumni relations.
2. Over the past few years, the Dean has asked the School's Faculty Council to analyze faculty workloads to address potential gendered, racialized, and other imbalances. We are in the process of developing a merit-review rubric that honors and rewards authentic and culturally humble DEI efforts.
3. This AY 2021-2022, we will continue to focus on Indigenous partnerships and expanding our knowledge of Native American education under the leadership of Dr. Robin Zape-ta-ho-lah Minthorn.

In terms of next steps, the School's Assessment Committee, Faculty Council, and Race, Equity, and Justice Committee, under the leadership of Dr. Julia Aguirre, Dr. Laura Feuerborn, and Dr. Robin Zape-ta-ho-lah Minthorn, are facilitating work on equity assessment and mapping for the AY 2021-2022. The work is tiered by stakeholder group and quarter: (a) autumn 2021: students, (b) winter 2022: faculty and staff, and (c) spring 2022: community partners. Based on those findings and recommendations, we will revisit our conceptual framework, mission, and values, and then, collaboratively author a new equity-action plan in AY 2022-2023.