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Diversity and Community Committee: Year End Report, 2012-13¹

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Introduction

The Geography Department at the University of Washington is committed to fostering an inclusive and reflexive community. The Diversity and Community Committee consists of two faculty members and three graduate students committed to facilitating the following goals within the UW Geography Department:

- To foster a reflexive practice of human geography by actively working against unintentional and intentional exclusionary practices related to race, gender, disability and other differences in our discipline
- To make visible unintentional and intentional exclusionary practices
- To catalyze strategies for a more inclusive and transformative discipline that honors different worldviews/knowledge.

During the 2012-2013 academic year, the committee organized and facilitated four events for faculty and graduate students around departmental climate and diversity. We recommend several actions for the future, which appear at the end of this report.

Background and approach

Geography as a discipline is slowly becoming more diverse on the national level, but there is still much work to do (Solis et.al. 2012). There have been a series of initiatives and projects coordinated by the AAG to advance this work (Diversity Task Force; AAG Diversity Committee; EDGE Project; Aligned Project). Much of this work has focused on bringing under-represented students and faculty into departments and so increasing the critical mass of under-represented groups overall.

Our committee in UW Geography has taken an additional approach to outreach and recruitment efforts. The core focus of our work is on building an ever-more inclusive department. In short, we decided that rather than ask “why aren’t under-represented people applying to our department?” we would begin by asking “how might we make our department yet more attractive to all people?” Our hope is that we can think together about what inclusivity and exclusivity looks like for each of us. Given the kind of work we as a department are committed to doing (on questions of social justice, community partnership, engaged and innovative approaches to teaching, and so on), we are an ideal group to think this through for ourselves and perhaps for geography more broadly.

Specifically, the goal of our committee is to create spaces where we can foster a reflexive practice of human geography which **values how we do our work as much as what work we do**. This can of course mean many things and department members are encouraged to share their own perspectives. Our work has led us to think differently about ‘diversity’. We understand clearly that diversity and climate encompass **a range of dimensions of difference** (gender, class, race, disability, religion, sexual

¹ The committee welcomes additions and revisions to this document.

orientation, and so on). And we understand that difference is intersectional rather than experienced singularly. For us, thinking about diversity includes race, gender, the relative valuation of different subdisciplines within geography, reflecting on our ethical challenges as educators, and much more.

2012-2013 Events

This year, we focused on outreach/recruitment and community events. First, the committee prepared a proposal for diversity recruitment fellowships for consideration at our fall retreat 2013 (please see Appendix A). Second, we designed our events to **move beyond “categorical diversity,”** (all too common in universities) which frames success by numbers of people enrolled or hired within pre-given, essentialized categories (race, ethnicity, gender, disability, and so on). Our events engage the **transformative potential of difference:** learning across difference in order to question what is often taken for granted (as normative) and its political content.

We see this work as having immediate benefit for our department as a community, but we also see it as part of our professional development. As practitioners both within and beyond this department, we benefit from reflecting on i) how difference and privilege operate and ii) each others’ wisdom about how to deal with challenging or difficult moments.

So, our events this year focused on everyday relationships and practices within the department. In the everyday performances of our identities and our professional selves there are many moments for learning from each other and that learning might facilitate our work and contribute to the cohesion of our community. Building reflexivity into our practice as researchers and educators also means appreciating our own positionalities and embodied experiences. It means valuing each other as whole people in and out of the classroom. It means valuing every exchange as an opportunity to affirm mutual respect, understanding, and care. Thus, it was important to expand beyond our roles as academics and theorists and engage with one another on a personal level.

Fall 2012 Event: SACNAS

The Geography department was one of only a few social science departments involved with the SACNAS visit. Suzanne Withers, Sara Gilbert and Sam Nowak (undergraduate) represented Geography at a reception for SACNAS students on campus. SACNAS is a society of scientists dedicated to fostering the success of Hispanic/Chicano and Native American scientists—from college students to professionals—to attain advanced degrees, careers, and positions of leadership in science. The SACNAS national meeting was held in Seattle in October and a field trip was organized to visit UW. The purpose of the field trip was to encourage students to pursue graduate education and obtain advanced degrees at the University of Washington. We took advantage of this important opportunity for outreach with potential diversity graduate outreach.

Outcomes:

- ✓ Learned about the unique challenges of fostering success with Hispanic/Chicano/Native American scientists and also the unique/culturally specific approaches to science from these groups
- ✓ Exposure and outreach to roughly 100 aspiring scientists from underrepresented groups
- ✓ Learned of the ‘names database’ from Anthony Salazar (Graduate Diversity Program Specialist). It is a database of the names of ‘diversity’ students, their contact information, and their field of interest.
- ✓ Shared this information with our GPC, who subsequently utilized it for recruiting this academic year.

Winter 2013 Event: Intersectionality Mixer

This event focused on welcoming new members of the graduate program into our discussions about inclusion and exclusion in the department. The event began with an exercise to build a 'community contract', a shared agreement on how we will engage with each other throughout the 2 hour event. We then asked participants to respond to a prompt: 'At the scale of the university, or in relation to some sort of practice or policy in the university or in our department, what makes you feel included or excluded? And/or how are you situated as included or excluded in the university's policies?' We worked in small and large group formats to reflect and discuss people's experiences and thoughts. Our goals included: re-energizing our understanding of our community's diversity and focusing on discussion and understanding issues in their complexity rather than rushing to actions/ recommendations. The committee designed this event to prompt ongoing work and to generate continued thinking and learning beyond these moments. We met at the UW club with light refreshments and we worked together in the round.

Outcomes:

- ✓ Welcomed new graduate students into our diversity process
- ✓ Continued to build a practice of reflexivity and community building across the graduate student and faculty communities
- ✓ Learned about the daily practices and policies in the Department and University that create or limit inclusion
- ✓ Learned graduate students and faculty want to focus more on building dialogue around inclusionary and exclusionary practices within the University and department, which informed our spring event.

Early Spring 2013 Event: Continuing the Conversation about Inclusion and Exclusion

This event was also held at the UW Club to continue to develop ideas from last meeting with goals of building greater understanding and developing recommendations for change in the department/university. We have made a deliberate practice of beginning each of our events with an exercise to build a 'community contract'; a shared agreement on how we will engage with each other throughout the two hour event. These events are designed to re-energize our ongoing process of understanding our community's diversity. We see this as ongoing work, as in process, and we hope these events are generative of continued thinking and learning that goes on beyond these events. To end the day we asked everyone to respond to the prompt "What is one thing you learned today?" and "will you share one take away that emerged from this afternoon?"

Outcomes:

- ✓ Continued to build a practice of reflexivity and community building across the graduate student and faculty communities.
- ✓ Generated initial suggestions about action items for the department (Appendix B)

Late Spring 2013 Event:

We held our final event of the year in the Chicano/Native Room at the UW Ethnic and Cultural Center. This event built on the previous two with a focus on developing a set of action items for the department leadership, faculty and graduate students.

The event began with an exercise to build a 'community contract' that built a shared agreement on how we would engage with each other throughout the two hour event. We then discussed a draft list of 'action items' that was created by the committee based on everyone's work at the previous events (see Appendix B). Each participant was given a notecard with which to convey voluntarily a personal message to the committee or incoming chair.

We then moved back into the process of learning, listening and sharing. Knowing that the work is not complete we explored visual art as a way to create dialogue across difference -- a common language if you will. We tapped into a new form of expression - painting - to understand how our varied experiences are interrelated and for us to engage in a different form of community building. Everyone was invited to contribute to a mural with the following prompt: "what is it you value about your identity or your experience that you bring to our community"?

Outcomes:

- ✓ People valued greatly the time together, both in the formal and informal activities. Everyone felt that this was a very valuable community building effort.
- ✓ See Appendix B for the action items list.
- ✓ This year focused on faculty and graduate students and many expressed a desire to include undergraduates in our work and events.
- ✓ Some wish to work on bathroom access in Smith Hall.
- ✓ Our mural will be hung in the department lounge space
- ✓ More than a dozen notes of ideas and suggestions were shared with the committee

Appendix A: Diversity Fellowships Proposal

The Diversity and Climate Committee submits this proposal to the faculty recommending that we dedicate part of the new monies from PMP to support underrepresented graduate students. This proposal is part of our larger commitments and efforts towards diversifying our department and the discipline of geography. Our work on diversity has taught us that building an inclusive department includes many aspects: from initial recruitment to retention, completion and professional 'development or cultivation'.

Our current graduate funding environment here at the University of Washington makes it exceedingly difficult for our department to compete in recruiting graduate students in general and under-represented students in particular. For example, our top recruits often have multi-year (often 5 years) funded offers, fellowships and other 'sweetener' incentives from our peer departments (e.g. UC Berkeley, UCLA, UBC and others). That said, many students express a strong desire to come to UW to be part of our intellectual community. With some investments, we could be yet more successful in bringing underrepresented students here.

Beyond the recruitment moment, our committee events and discussions have clarified the hardships faced by underrepresented and first-generation students. We propose that some of a diversity graduate budget could be spent on other supports while resident in our graduate program.

There are a variety of options for how to structure the proposed graduate student diversity awards. These could include:

- Offering a quarter of PMP fellowship followed by two quarters of TA (~ \$11,000 in 2013-14)ⁱ

- A three-quarter PMP fellowship in the first year in our program (approx. \$33,000/student). Full cost of quarterly appointment is \$11,000 (including tuition + 4% minimum tuition raise) in 2013-14 (with 8-10% for next three years beyond).
- A write-up quarter/year at the end of the doctoral program (same costs as above)
- An incentive package that tops up our still relatively low graduate student salaries with a monthly top-up during the first 9 month appointment for x years, or give a lump sum of \$\$ at the beginning that can offset moving costs or the period before first paycheck. These can be paid without accruing benefits charges or tuition. This payment would be ahead of first paycheck
- We could offer summer support to attract students so that they have 12 months of support in one or more years
- Funds for less-fundable research topics
- Professional development funds (travel to meetings, workshops, etc)

Appendix B: Action Items List

1. Create community around learning & teaching each other how to create safe spaces for learning:
 - ✓ Learning to be aware of invisible injuries.
 - ✓ Develop a set of skills for hearing and validating people's feelings when they make themselves vulnerable by sharing.
 - ✓ Learning how to be comfortable with discomfort and how to handle moments of emotion and dissent
 - ✓ Engage faculty and grad students as we strive to create safer spaces in seminars, labs and classes
 - ✓ Learn how to generate trust in fields of uneven power relations
 - ✓ Struggles for being a 1st generation graduate student
 - ✓ Mindful of tensions between competition and compassion.
 - ✓ Do not require/oblige everyone to share their personal story
 - ✓ Acknowledge that 'performance anxiety' is okay.

2. Develop workshops on specific 'nodes of privilege'
 - ✓ Such as, but not only, white privilege
 - ✓ Building the knowledge and skill to discuss gender pronouns
 - ✓ Understanding 'nodes of privilege' are experienced intersectionally
 - ✓ We each bring our own issues to the fore: animals, transgender, gender violence, sexuality, international, etc.
 - ✓ As we create space for these issues it is vital to not compete for space & attention

3. Address financial precariousness
 - ✓ Create a department credit card or petty cash system
 - ✓ Hold a workshop on how grad funding works and on strategies for summer support
 - ✓ Be clear about availability of short-term loans and other resources
 - ✓ Being particularly mindful of stress at the beginning of the program
 - ✓ Sharing coping strategies with new cohorts

4. Create a series of informal spaces to share our work
 - ✓ Need for more informal opportunities to share scholarship
 - ✓ Embracing the multiple roles that we each have as academics, researchers, people, community members, etc.
 - ✓ Resurrect Brown Bag meetings – various informal times and locations (demands on time are a challenge)
 - ✓ Reinstate 700 and 800 groups for peer mentoring and reviewing
 - ✓ Scholarship can be an very individual process
 - ✓ Create a Department of Geography working paper series

5. Graduate Program Improvements (GPC lead)
 - ✓ More department support for alternative modes of funding (see financial precariousness notes above)
 - ✓ Develop a binder of successful grant/funding applications, generals and prelim statements
 - ✓ Regular fall workshop on graduate school protocols and processes
 - ✓ Graduate representative to interact regularly with GPC and committee
 - ✓ Graduate student social coordinator encouraged to consider ways to make socializing non-exclusionary (mindful of families, timing, substances, expense)
 - ✓ Teach grad students about the O drive where institutional memory lives for TAs and courses
 - ✓ Reinstate the grad policy committee (or make it a function of the existing committee)
Have a grad student liason on the policy committee

6. Vitally important that our next hire to be a faculty of color (for many reasons including mentorship)

7. Add values and mission to the website

8. Have various committees in the department (pedagogy, u/g, grad, diversity etc.) communicate and coordinate their work much more closely

9. Undergrads should be invited into the events and work of the committee. Tap into resources and ideas at ECC where many u/g groups are very active and involved

10. Next fall have a reception event at the Wing Luke Museum during the 'Under my Skin' exhibit which runs until Nov 17th 2013

ⁱ These values must increase by at least 4% over the 14-15, 15-16 and possibly 16-17 academic years.