

Diversity and Inclusivity Committee: Year End Report, 2013-14¹

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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 includes faculty and graduate students and facilitates the Department's collective efforts toward the following goals:

- 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.

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.

UW Geography's diversity work includes additional efforts beyond outreach and recruitment. The core focus of our work is on building an ever-more inclusive department. Rather than asking "why aren't under-represented people applying to our department?" our work begins by working to address how we might make our department as supportive and welcoming as possible to all people - those who join us as well as those already part of our community. 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.

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 of course means many things to different members of the department. Among other things, our work together has led us to think differently about 'diversity'. We understand clearly that diversity encompasses **a range of dimensions of difference** (gender, class, race, disability, religion, sexual 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

¹ The committee welcomes additions and revisions to this document.

valuation of different subdisciplines within geography, reflecting on our ethical challenges as educators, and much more.

2013-2014 Activities

This year, the committee implemented a number of recruitment/retention and inclusivity-related suggestions that emerged from the work of prior committees, expanded diversity / inclusivity resources for members of the department, and facilitated departmental events reflecting on how difference and privilege operate. 2012-13 committee events took an inductive approach to better understanding our community's diverse experiences of inclusion and exclusion. This year's events built on these efforts by deepening our engagement with specific themes emerging from that work – namely exploring specific sites of inclusion / exclusion (the classroom, teaching and learning) and specific axes of inclusion and exclusion, such as race. Finally, the committee (on behalf of the Department) began participating in quarterly meetings for Diversity committee chairs and members on campus, organized by Gino Aisenburg (Social Work & The Graduate School) and Cynthia Morales (GO-MAP). These gatherings provide an important ongoing opportunity to learn from other units around campus, and a chance to communicate to key actors on campus the kinds of support that will enhance our diversity and inclusivity efforts.

Recruitment, retention and inclusivity interventions

Prior years' discussion of recruitment, retention, and inclusivity identify financial precarity as a key issue, for under-represented graduate students but also many other students. This year, the committee worked with others in the department (chair, staff, GPC, Executive Committee) to implement several changes addressing these issues. Following approval in principle (at the Autumn Faculty Retreat) of a diversity fellowship for graduate student recruitment and retention, the Committee wrote and gained approval for fellowship description and guidelines. The first fellowships were awarded to graduate students for the coming academic year.

Addressing specific financial constraints experienced by many graduate students, the committee worked with department staff and chair to implement revisions to purchasing procedures that have previously required graduate students to prepay and await reimbursement or have access to credit cards. Specifically, department funded conference travel can now be arranged through the department's fiscal specialist in advance, rather than pre-paid by the student for later reimbursement. Department-funded meals/refreshments for grad student organized events (e.g. colloquium reception, GGSA lunch meetings) are now purchased via a prepaid debit card.

The committee also followed up inclusivity suggestions that emerged from the community in prior years. We invited undergraduate and staff participation in all Diversity and Inclusivity events and activities and recommend continuing this in future years. Further, we worked with the computing specialist to expand posting privileges to the Department's undergraduate listserv and encouraged faculty and graduate students to include this list when they announce Department activities and events. As well, in spring quarter, we invited graduate students wishing to serve on future Diversity/Inclusivity committees to submit their names (to be shared with in the committee chair for the coming year).

Expanding and sharing diversity and inclusivity resources

The committee continues to serve as a conduit and catalyst for sharing diversity and inclusivity resources, whether from within our departmental community or outside. This year's efforts included the following:

- Revising, updating and expanding the Geography Department website's Diversity and Inclusivity resources. Thanks to contributions from departmental faculty and grad students, this material now includes greatly expanded links to suggested readings on race, inclusion, and geography; resources for teaching; campus resources; and resources in the broader community.
- Writing a departmental mission/values statement on diversity for inclusion on the front page of the Geography website, with review and input from the Chair and Executive Committee.
- Continued serving as a conduit for communicating diversity and inclusivity related developments on campus to the department (e.g. GO-MAP events, Fall 2013 opening of a gender neutral restroom in Smith Hall).

Events

We organized and facilitated five events for faculty and graduate students around diversity and inclusivity.

In Fall 2013, we organized an event on Safe Spaces for Teaching and Learning. This event asked participants to share (in small group format) their experiences of safe learning spaces, and together draw out shared ideas about what, for them, characterizes safe spaces for teaching and learning. In further discussion of these experiences and characteristics of safe space, the small groups developed tangible suggestions for how to foster these kinds of environments, sharing these with others at the event. At an open follow-up meeting a few weeks later, participants discussed options for how to share these safe space strategies and make them available as a permanent resource for members of the department. Based on this discussion, the Committee compiled and further anonymized output from the initial event. Our collectively-generated resource on fostering safe spaces in teaching and learning is available at:

http://depts.washington.edu/geog/wordpress/http://depts.washington.edu/geog/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/SafeSpaces_Strategies.pdf

In Winter 2014, we organized a visit to a Minnesota-based museum exhibit hosted by the Pacific Science Center, "RACE: Are We So Different." Staff, faculty, graduate and undergraduate students were invited to join members of the committee to experience this exhibit together. The organized visit was small but helped catalyze plans for the Spring Diversity/Inclusivity event and also mobilized several members of the department to attend on their own at other times.

In Spring 2014, we organized an event around themes of race, racism and white privilege. Together, participants viewed a series of video documentary clips from a DVD produced by the American Anthropological Association for "Race: Are We So Different." In these clips, individuals reflect on their own racial formation and identities, and personal experiences of white privilege or racism at different moments in their lives. We asked participants to engage this

content through their own experiences and emotions, not through scholarly analytic lenses, reflecting on what content from the videos felt compelling, surprising, uncomfortable, new, or emotionally affecting, and why? Initial written reflections served as the basis for open-ended small group discussion. At a follow-up event convened later, members of the Department were invited to view and discuss remaining video clips from this DVD.

Appendix A – Suggestions for future events and activities

These suggestions are summarized from feedback solicited after Diversity events and at the end of Spring Quarter:

- Following the spring event, several people expressed interest in a session in collaboration with Geography librarian Amanda Hornby on library resources for teaching race and diversity and, (together or separately) a session with someone from the Center for Teaching and Learning on anti-racist teaching practices.
- Others would like to work on pedagogical strategies for managing the distribution of "air time" sensitive to privilege in the classroom setting, and more broadly on anti-racist teaching practices.
- Others proposed that it would be useful for us to focus some of our collective time on developing ideas and language for responding to what they term 'shades of racism' – a wide range of statements that are not overtly hostile or directly discriminatory, the 'passing comment' that is anything but. (Note from the committee: recent work on 'micro-aggressions' might be a source of resources for such a conversation).
- Finally, throughout the year, the committee has heard that there is tremendous need for the department to create a series of informal spaces where people might share their work, particularly to develop stronger and more active intellectual sense of community with one another. Implementing the suggestions below would require much broader collaboration with others in the department (graduate students, GPC, chair), but the Diversity and Inclusivity committee may be able to catalyze some of these activities while also continuing other key aspects of its mission.
 - ✓ Create more informal opportunities to share scholarship
 - ✓ 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
 - ✓ Create a Department of Geography working paper series

Appendix B: Ongoing Efforts

Beyond the specific activities and events convened this year, the Committee remains a catalyst for a variety of efforts to foster diversity and inclusivity in our department life. Here, we summarize a number of issues articulated in prior reports that remain important foci for our continued work together:

1. Continue creating 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. Continue reflective 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. Continue addressing financial precariousness
 - ✓ 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. Graduate Program Improvements (GPC lead)
 - ✓ Encourage students to contribute to a binder of successful grant/funding applications, generals and prelim statements
 - ✓ Regular fall workshop on graduate school protocols and processes
 - ✓ Close communication between graduate representatives and GPC, Chair, and Diversity/Inclusivity committee
 - ✓ Graduate student social coordinator encouraged to consider ways to make socializing non-exclusionary (mindful of families, timing, substances, expense)
 - ✓ Teach grad students where institutional memory lives for TAs and courses is stored on departmental servers and how to access.
 - ✓ Reinstate the grad policy committee (or make it a function of the existing committee)
Have a grad student liason on the policy committee