

External Review Report

Prepared for

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By

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Introduction

This report summarizes the observations, findings, and recommendations of the External Review Team that was invited to the Washington State University (WSU) campus to participate in a review of the Multicultural Student Services. The charge to the External Review Team was to provide recommendations to Dr. Mary Jo Gonzales. The External Review Team was asked to meet with various faculty, staff and students to assess the Multicultural Support Services (MSS) and to make recommendations for improvements.

The two members of the External Review Team were:

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Prior to the site visit, the External Review Team members were sent a variety of materials related to MSS, the MSS professional staff, programs, and data. Also included were materials and websites related to diversity and inclusion efforts, organizational charts and information about future reporting units that will make up the Community, Equity, & Inclusive Excellence cluster. Other materials were provided as requested during the course of the visit. These resources assisted the Review Team in developing an understanding of the institutional culture and unique qualities of WSU and the options available to students who reside on campus.

The External Review Team conducted its site visit beginning the morning of Wednesday, November 29, 2017 and concluded the evening of Friday, December 1, 2017. During the visit, the Review Team met with various MSS representatives: student mentors, student staff, general students, student leaders outside of MSS, student affairs executive team, the Provost and academic affairs leadership, and professionals from academic and allied departments across the University. The Review Team also spent quality time on the fourth floor of the Compton Union Building (CUB) where MSS is located. A copy of the site visit schedule is appended at the end of this report. The recommendations contained in this report are the result of the collective observations, insights, and discussions of the External Review Team and are intended to support WSU's diversity and inclusion efforts. Based on a careful review of documents and notes, the Review Team has offered a number of findings and several recommendations below. Additional resources are also included for consideration.

Institutional Context

Washington State University (WSU) is a land-grant institution serving over 20,000 students with a strong commitment to in-state students, and an increasingly racially diverse student population. Statistics for 2016-2017 show that approximately 34% of the student body identifies as racially diverse, with Latinx students being the highest percentage at 14.8%. The Multicultural Student Services (MSS) has been serving as a beacon of academic and social support for students of color for over 25 years. MSS is the focal point to serve students of color with minimal integration of processes or campus-wide systems to support racially diverse students throughout the campus community.

It is important to mention the context and national social environment that was present during the time of the visit. WSU was experiencing a heightened level of racially motivated incidents of bias on campus, similar to many other campuses across the country. Students, faculty and staff all presented various levels of frustration with the response of institutional leadership to these incidents. Some of the frustrations came from the way that “leadership” was directly, and indirectly, engaging with students. This increased activism by some students who were not feeling safe on campus. Additionally, WSU was in a period of transition with a new University President, new VP for Student Affairs, and several new College Deans. Lastly, news had just come out that WSU would be experiencing some substantial budget cuts over the next three years. The budget cuts are being conflated with organizational restructuring that is simultaneously occurring on campus, particularly as it relates to the areas the team was requested to review.

General Observations

The institutional narrative presented to the external reviewers was that MSS is the place for students of color to find resources, academic and social support. There seemed to be little effort or actual programs that resided in other spaces throughout the institution to directly support students of color. Instead of an integrated model of shared responsibility and accountability to have multicultural competency throughout the institution, there is an unrealistic reliance and expectation that MSS is meeting the needs of all the students of color on campus. Considering some of the other stated diversity efforts on campus, there seems to be little to no collaboration or shared philosophy institutionally as to how to create a climate of inclusive excellence. We were hard pressed to hear a shared vision for what the institutional commitment and priorities are related to inclusive excellence or student success. One stark disconnect is the Equity and Diversity unit on campus, which seems to be completely disengaged from MSS. When asked about the functions of the unit, there was little to no discussion about working with MSS. When engaging with students actively involved in MSS, staff had little to no knowledge of the programs and resources coming out of the Equity and Diversity unit. Furthermore, the peer educators working in the Equity and Diversity unit had little to no contact with MSS. The impending reorganization presents great opportunities to create more continuity and an over-arching umbrella of support that brings together the role of Equity and Diversity, the programmatic efforts of MSS to create a seamless vision on campus.

Within the MSS there are some long standing programs that support students at WSU, yet their sphere of influence is not as extensive as the institutional narrative portrays. Those students who take advantage of MSS resources welcome and embrace the support. The support provided to those students has made a difference in their success at WSU. The primary initiative is the MSS peer mentoring program which touts positive outcomes in the following areas: increased retention, higher grade point average, and greater persistence to graduation for students who participated in the programs. The challenge with these assertions is that the data is all internal, and is not bench-marked against students who don’t participate in the mentoring programs in MSS. There is a strong commitment to internally assessing programs, however, there needs to be a collaborative effort with the office of institutional research to measure the effectiveness of these programs in comparison to other students. The current model for the peer mentoring program places a disproportionate burden on students in ways that aren’t creating the level of impact as likely desired. The other tension point with the MSS system is that the student mentors

theoretically have a case load of 15+ students, yet of all the peer mentors we spoke to, none of them had more than four students that they were actively engaged with on a regular basis. Many of the staff were able to identify 1-2 intentional relationships that they have established on campus, however, it all was generated on individual relationships, not necessarily organizationally. We understand that financial services has built in funding to support paying the peer mentors, however, there might be alternative ways to still financially support students in need and consider a different model of support where peer mentors play a smaller more targeted role, while fulltime staff have a dedicated student load.

It was evident during the visit that staff and students were familiar with “the 4th floor of the CUB” as a place for students of color. This did not necessarily mean that they themselves had visited any of the MSS offices on the fourth floor, just that they were aware of the space. As we visited with a few students of color at the Chinook Student Center, they did not identify the 4th floor/MSS as a space they liked hanging out, although they were aware that the resources existed. When inquiring of faculty, staff and students where else on campus do students of color actively find support, we were continually met with mostly silence. The MSS staff are all very personally invested in the students that they directly serve and seem very dedicated to supporting those students. The challenge is finding ways to reach and support those that do not find the 4th floor as a “home away from home” or as a resource, while also considering what other locations on campus students of color do rely on for support.

MSS Staff and Programs

A broader theme that surfaced is the lack in leadership for MSS. The current director is viewed as someone who maintains, and is mostly supportive on an individual level. However, there seems to be a lack of vision, not maximizing staff talent or developing young professional staff beyond WSU and lacking institutional leadership on behalf of MSS. Most of the work is focused internally on MSS, versus externally to infuse the work on behalf of students of color institution wide. Over the three day period we asked, what would it look like and what would it take to make WSU a more welcoming and inclusive environment for students of color? Most of the responses, across the board, were to funnel resources into MSS, which does not address institutional change or create an inclusive community. There seems to be a prevailing mindset that is deficit oriented and insular in nature. Instead of building institutional multicultural capacity across the institution, MSS seems more invested in maintaining a model that harkens back to the 1980’s, when cultural centers had to be the epicenter of support for students of color because institutions as a whole were lacking in commitment, resources and representation. This is also reflected in a staff that is not up-to date on current language or how student success efforts are being discussed nationally.

The staff in MSS does use intrusive advising when working with students, however, much of that is performed in silos, including within centers on the 4th floor of the CUB. The principal theme throughout is a narrow vision for how to support students of color, and that very few faculty and staff outside of the MSS know what their role should be in supporting students of color. Absent of tangible examples that illustrate otherwise, WSU’s vision is that MSS will do everything for the students of color while other staff across campus take a hands’ off approach. We do not believe that is the intention, yet it is the way the system is currently playing out. Which again,

reflects that institutional efforts related to student success is happening in silos, and a comprehensive strategy is not being advanced.

Two programs coming out of MSS that seem to best model institutional commitment, support and shared responsibility for inclusive excellence, are the efforts supporting undocumented students, and Team Mentoring Program (TMP) with STEM related academic programs. Although the efforts for undocumented/DACA students appears to be quite effective and permeating the campus community, it seems to be driven by an individual, versus institutional leadership. As for the TMP program, what is striking is that the program is funded through corporate sponsorship, not state or other institutional funds. It would be interesting to know what possibilities there are to connect this initiative to NSF or NASA grants (or others) that are being pursued through some of the colleges. Additionally, the TMP may serve as a stronger blueprint for enhancing the student mentor program.

Two other programs that are housed on the 4th floor with MSS is the Smart Start Program for 1st generation college students and tutoring services. The Smart Start is a strategic effort to assist student's transition to college. As important as this program is, it unfortunately perpetuates a more insular way of supporting students. There is an over reliance on MSS staff to be the sole instructors and experts for topics covered in the course. The tutoring programs is not unlike many across the country that have resources integrated into cultural/affinity based centers. The model at WSU could be enhanced by developing a more intentional connection with campus-wide tutoring efforts. The symbolism of having a more integrated approach lets students know that the entire institution is committed to their success. Additionally, there is an important role for MSS staff to play in training tutors across campus about cultural awareness.

Cross Cultural and Intersectionality

The MSS staff uses the model of "Challenge and Support" to advise the students. While this is a good model to help students develop, the MSS staff focuses more on the need for support to students and less on challenging them. Support is wonderful and needed, yet without some strong challenges students will not grow and develop critical thinking and problem solving skills. The staff focuses on reinforcing students to stay in the comfort zone of their racial identity. The staff does not go beyond talking to students to challenge them to grow and experience beyond what they know. Examples would be the lack of interaction between the cultural centers and listening to multiple students talk about never interacting with white people beyond the surface level. Having empathy and understanding the students' feelings is most important, yet it is equally important to give the students the skills to engage across racial identities and to actively engage intersections of identity in holistic and meaningful ways. The MSS staff does not model that behavior to students. The cultural centers present a mono-racial environment, which is felt by students. Students who identify with one of the cultural affinity spaces rarely visits any of the other cultural spaces. Additionally, there is a lack of active engagement of intersectionality within cultural groups, and an absence of intentionality for students who identify as multiracial/multiethnic, they are challenged to feel a full sense of belonging in only one center.

We continued hearing outdated language used by the MSS staff. As we know, language is powerful in the reflection of one's self-identity and belonging. It was surprising to hear the term "minority" used by the MSS staff, and there was little to no awareness about the term Latinx,

which is intended to be more gender inclusive. Although the Gender Identity/Expression and Sexual Orientation Resource Center (GIESORC) resides on the fourth floor as well, there seems to be very limited cross over, and/or collaboration. Based upon conversations and materials provided, there appears to be the lack of a more intersectional view of who the students are and how they may fully identify. Another example is that the term “parent” is disproportionately used as the default, versus broadening out to families and guardians. The shift opens up the space for students from foster and homeless backgrounds, and for those raised by someone other than a biological parent. From the lens of the external review team, these are examples of a professional staff that is not keeping up with the current and shifting ways in which they can be more inclusive of how students identify. This also reflects a lack of leadership that encourages and steward’s professional development that is current and student centered.

During our visit, we would hear the MSS staff members talk about the students who were not prepared for college and “the 4th Floor” is the only place that can help them. Several students who spent more time up on the fourth floor also expressed that they do not belong at WSU except on the 4th floor in MSS. However, there is some contradiction as it relates to how many of these same students are actively involved in multicultural fraternity and sorority organizations, and assist with high school visit days, which are all coordinated out of the Office of Student Involvement. We will expand on this disconnect in more detail below.

Campus Partnerships

Engaging in a more deliberate, institutional response and investment for students of color seems desired by many on campus. It would be ideal to more intentionally connect the efforts out of MSS to institutional strategic plan and student success initiatives. Although the external reviewers noticed that there was a visual lack of representation of faculty of color at WSU and echoed by many individuals that we interviewed, the commitment to student success by those at WSU is not lacking. It was clear that faculty and staff at WSU are committed and seeking ways to support student success and seeking ways to support racially diverse students. There is a gap in flow of communication campus-wide to coordinate resources with MSS. For example, there is a robust presence of African American, Latinx and multicultural fraternity and sorority life on campus, yet very little intentional connection between the Office of Student Involvement and the efforts in MSS. The cultural retreats hosted by WSU students for high school students are coordinated through the Office of Student Involvement, yet the perception that the external reviewers initially had is that these efforts were all coordinated out of MSS. There is a disconnect between the Office of Student Involvement and MSS that is confusing and seems to be a disservice to overall efforts that support inclusive excellence. The related question is where does enrollment and access fit into these leadership retreats that are geared towards high school students? It’s difficult to know if this is rooted in complacency of this “is just the way we’ve always done things”, or if there is resistance from various units to work together that is reflective of being territorial. This might reflect a prevailing mentality, by the MSS staff, of viewing their work and their role from a place of a scarcity of resources. There is often more of a desire to focus inwards to preserve what you already have, which we observed from the MSS staff. This also reflects a mindset, they are more focused on maintaining what they have built and reinforcing the perception that MSS is “the” primary and only resource that serves students of color. MSS needs to think about ways to expand and to build its capacity by sharing the load and responsibility to cultivate an institution of support, versus an institution with one or two support

areas on campus. The institution needs to develop connectors and resource structures that do not leave MSS carrying the entire responsibility for the success of students of color. There is ample opportunity to maximize efforts, increase students sense of belonging intentionally beyond the 4th floor if staff and institutional leadership are open to the possibilities.

Recommendations

When taking into consideration the materials, interviews and personal observations and bearing in mind “best practices” across the country, here are some recommendations that we would encourage you to consider:

- Institutional messaging around student success, students learning, and/or becoming a student ready campus community.
- Institutional Research and data needs to be more available and accessible to allow for accurate assessment of effectiveness of mentor programs for retention and persistence
- It would be valuable for the Student Success initiatives out of the Provost Office to come together with Equity and Diversity and MSS to identify what inclusive excellence means at WSU and ideally scaffold a strategic plan that engages academic and student affairs.
- WSU is an EAB institution, more intentional effort could be made to share and cultivate this data campus-wide.
 - It could be very beneficial to bring Dr. Nina Lyon Bennett with EAB to offer guide on how to maximize student success efforts to expand on the work in MSS.
 - Who is given access to create an account on the EAB website to access resources?
- MSS needs to be one branch of support within a larger institutional effort supporting student success, not the sole bearer for students of color. Equity and Diversity could serve as the over-arching umbrella with MSS, peer educators, faculty/staff training, Smart Start, etc. as units within.
- Intentional training that enhances student mentors’ skills/competency, diversity awareness across identities, intersections of identities beyond race/ethnicity and a sense of belonging to the institution.
 - Accessing scholarly work by Laura Rendón, Tara Yosso, Michelle Espino, Susana Muñoz, Daniel Solórzano, Sam Museus, Johnathan Quaye, Kris Renn, Z Niccolazzo, Laura Perna, Sara Goldrick-Rab, Kevin Kumisharo
- Courses need to be rooted in current literature and best practices.
 - Attached is a document, Six Pathways to Success
 - Joining the NASPA Center for First-Generation Student Success
 - *Critical Mentoring: A Practical Guide*, Torie Weiston-Serdan
ISBN-13: 978-1620365526
ISBN-10: 1620365529
- Clearly identified student learning outcomes, versus objectives for courses taught by MSS staff
- Stronger collaboration between the “3rd floor” and the “4th floor” of the CUB
 - Invite Rudy Trejo to teach a mentoring section
 - Invite others outside of MSS and SAS to engage in mentoring sections / training
 - How do the mentors encourage involvement in leadership opportunities
 - What’s the relationship between the cultural Greek organizations

- Organizational structure that has Diversity Education as the umbrella with the cultural centers, GI/ESORC, WRC (and possibly the Access Center) underneath
 - We are not convinced that the identities of the cultural centers should be centered on mentoring (not is its current state)
 - Need to develop mentoring and mentee learning outcomes
 - There should be a centralized mentoring effort, and student success should be more reliant on students meeting with fulltime staff for support
- BART should be led by the Assoc. VP for SA (Community, Equity, & Inclusive Excellence)
- Investment in professional development and leadership that provides a unified direction to its staff, including students