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VCU College of Humanities and Sciences Racial Equity Assessment

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VCU COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND SCIENCES RACIAL EQUITY ASSESSMENT

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PROJECT ABSTRACT

Racial equity is the process of ensuring that equal possible outcomes are available for every individual. At the College of Humanities and Sciences (CHS) an important goal is to ensure faculty and staff have access to the same opportunities, while accounting for those facing continued barriers. Following the establishment of the Inclusion, Diversity and Equity Committee, the current state of racial equity and the effectiveness of initiatives meant to correct for imbalance will be assessed.

RACIAL EQUITY

As the largest academic unit at Virginia Commonwealth University, the College of Humanities and Sciences' response to President Rao's charge to "make equity and inclusion accessible everywhere" is crucial to the VCU and Richmond community (*Team Projects*). CHS and its Inclusion, Diversity and Equity Committee have taken measures to address this topic through syllabi statements, new courses, speaker series and increased outreach to local community organizations and schools, among numerous other accomplishments. Assessing the perceptions and effectiveness of the college's racial equity initiatives among its faculty and staff will provide important data for recommended actions and goal advancement.

PROJECT GOALS

The College of Humanities and Sciences' Inclusion, Diversity and Equity Committee seeks to keep DEI at the forefront of college policies and practices. In addition, Goal IV.2 in VCU's Quest 2025 aims to "Build and sustain the infrastructure to enhance diversity, inclusion and equity at all levels of the university to support teaching, research, scholarship, creative expression and service." One of the strategies stated in this goal is to "use diversity, inclusion and equity-related assessment data to inform investments of resources in alignment with university priorities" (VCU Strategic Plan, 2019) To further those goals, this project developed and administered a survey that measures faculty and staff perceptions of racial equity within the College of Humanities and Sciences, with the intention to evaluate the collected data and make recommendations based on findings to leadership within the college.

BACKGROUND

A long history of racial discrimination followed by the civil rights movement led to the upsurge of race-based affirmative actions (Baker, 2019; Irwin, 2006). These actions progressed from correcting historical discrimination, to increasing minority representation in business, government and politics and to the promotion of diversity by a Supreme Court decision made in 1978 as a

result of the case of Regents of the University of California v. Bakke (Baker, 2019). Nevertheless, due to recent legal actions, concerns for a false notion of "race-neutrality" ignoring bigger systemic issues that worsen racial inequality became more apparent in areas such as the health system and higher education (Baker, 2019; Garces, 2020; Calvo, 2015; Renner, 2004) In order to properly practice race-consciousness in higher education, a university led effort that promotes understanding of diversity and diversity-related policies and practices at the structural, organizational and individual level are needed (Garces, 2020). This places professors in unique positions to advance racial equity across disciplinary fields bounded by epistemologies, theories and methods rooted in white, male and western norms (Bhopal, 2017). Scholars have highlighted as well, the role of practitioner inquiry, a form of action research, to encourage faculty to reflect on their conceptions of equity advocacy and bring about structural reforms in student admissions, assessment, faculty hiring and resource allocation (Bhopal, 2017; Liera, 2019; McNair, 2020; Bensimon, 2007) At the College of Humanities and Sciences an important goal is to ensure faculty and staff have access to the same opportunities, while accounting for those facing continued barriers. Following the establishment of the CHS Inclusion, Diversity and Equity Committee, the current state of racial equity at the college and the effectiveness of initiatives meant to correct for imbalance were assessed.

STRATEGIES

Following a review of best practices for survey implementation in higher education, an anonymized RedCap survey was created and administered to faculty and staff to assess perceptions related to the current state of racial equity within the College of Humanities and Sciences. During this process, climate surveys and tools utilized within other universities and VCU units to assess experiences related to diversity, equity and inclusion were reviewed for effectiveness and ease of use. In addition, surveys used by nonprofit organizations to reflect upon and assess racial equity practices were reviewed in order to benefit from perspectives beyond higher education. The results of the survey provide insight into areas of opportunity for improving racial equity, while establishing a baseline against which to measure future interventions.

OUTCOMES

The survey invitation was distributed to all faculty and staff in the College of Humanities and Sciences by the project sponsor via email. Over a two-week period, a total of 216 survey responses were received, a 36% response rate. Of the 214 respondents that reported their job duties, 148 identified as faculty and 66 as staff, with further breakdown shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Survey respondent job classification ratios compared to 2019 CHS faculty ratios
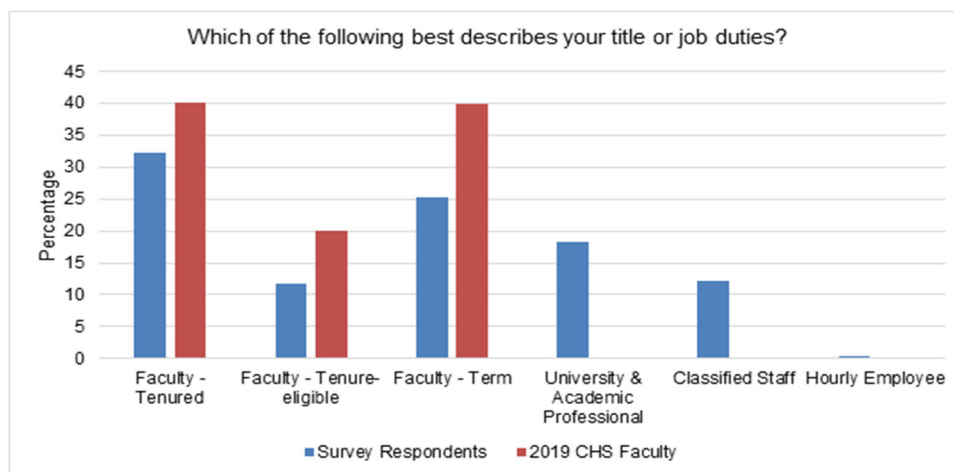
Compared to a 2019 report provided by the project sponsor (the most recent, available data set), the survey respondent sample included a larger proportion of tenured faculty and smaller proportions of tenure-eligible and term faculty than the target population.

In several of the survey questions that focus on themes of the individual contribution valuation, communication and training, responses differed significantly when race was factored as a demographic marker. There was a significant finding, indicating that race/ethnicity (white v. non-white) was related to the answer provided for the following items:

- I have to work harder than others of different racial/ethnic backgrounds to be valued equally in my school or department.
- Racial equity and cultural competency training is available and encouraged by leaders in my unit.
- I am familiar with VCU's policies that promote an ethical culture, civil and professional practice, working and learning environment and anti-retaliation for reporting concerns (the Code of Conduct).
- How often do individuals in your unit have important conversations about race, even when they might be uncomfortable?
- When there are major new events related to race, how often do individuals in your unit talk about them with each other?
- How strongly does your unit support staff members to speak out against racism?

Evaluation of the survey responses from faculty and staff separately revealed major differences in the perceptions of racial equity in each group. In general, perceptions of racial equity by staff were less favorable than for faculty, notably when responding to the prompts "My unit shows an explicit commitment to racial equity" and "Difficult conversations about race are encouraged and conducted in a safe, confidential, private space," among others. See Appendix C for a table detailing significant differences in response by race and employee category.

The survey also allowed for written feedback to the definition of racial equity and any additional recommendations for the College of Humanities and Sciences to achieve racial equity. All African Americans responding to the prompt "Racial equity (or racial justice) is the systematic fair treatment of all people, resulting in fair opportunities and outcomes for everyone and includes the presence of values and systems that ensure fairness and justice. The distribution of resources and opportunities is neither determined nor predicted by race, racial bias or racial ideology" agreed with the survey's definition. However several white respondents questioned this definition of racial equity, its application and relevance to higher education.

108 of the 216 participants responded to the question "What recommendations do you have to address racial equity in your unit or the College of Humanities and Sciences workplace?" including significant percentages across most racial and ethnic categories:

Figure 2: Racial equity recommendations by race/ethnicity of respondents
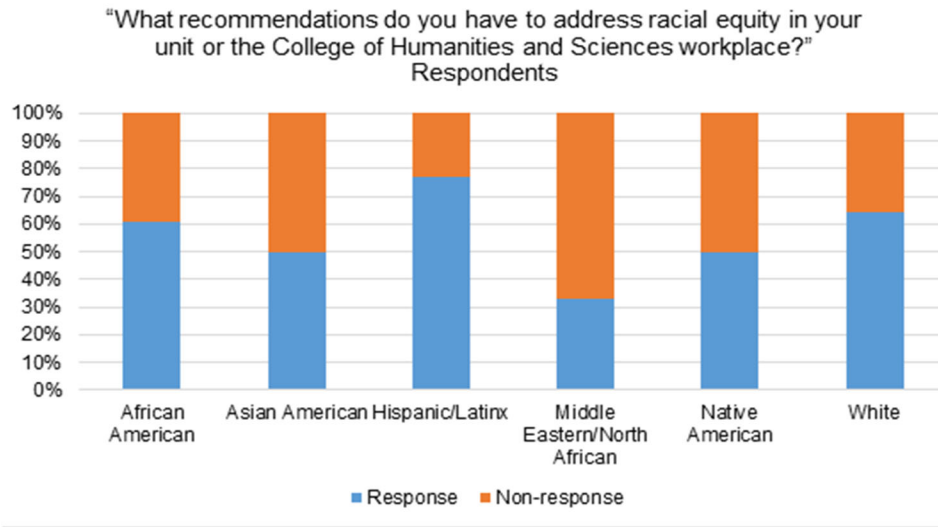
Key findings from this question suggest the need to:

- prepare faculty and staff, and create an equitable space in the college;
- include intersectional identities and create a safe and equitable community for everyone;
- create clear procedures and expectations for performance and evaluation;
- identify ways to hire and retain diverse faculty and staff and address the pay gaps; and
- provide more racial equity training.

RECOMMENDATIONS
Survey Tool
The use of this survey tool for an on-going measurement of continued efforts within CHS or for utilization in other colleges or departments within the University, should include:
- Evaluation of the survey tool for validity and reliability
- Deeper statistical analysis of survey data
- Administration during the academic year when 9 month faculty and staff are actively engaged on campus
- Emphasis of survey respondent anonymity
- Marketing campaigns to include: purpose with regard to racial equity promotion, benefits of completion, use of information and reporting of results

Racial Equity Action Items
Important themes that emerged through survey response anlaysis include: communication and transparency about DEI; trust in leadership; racial equity versus racial equality; perception of work/effort for non-white respondents regarding faculty affairs.

- Communication about race, racial events and racism are still challenging despite DEI initiatives. A cohort-based course development process involving faculty and staff that focuses on racial/cultural competence, generating productive dialogue concerning race and social justice would enhance DEI initiatives (Miller-Kleinhenz, 2021). Through the cohorted experiential learning process, faculty and staff will develop skill sets to discuss race in a safe space at work and perpetuate on-going conversations at multiple levels within the organization.

- Noted concerns regarding escalation of racial issues, respect in the workplace, lack of safe, confidential and private avenues for racial conversations point to trust issues within CHS. Actions to address trust should focus on building an antiracist environment. Consider the following actions for CHS people leaders:
    - Regular state of the college addresses by the Dean to address DEI initiatives and progress—present the findings of this survey.
    - Lead by example with regular discussions on race using scholarly peer reviewed articles written by underrepresented minorities; establish a Journal Club for individual leadership teams to discuss.
    - Leaders are "mandated" reporters when racial issues arise; they validate concerns and know how to involve Equity and Access Services at VCU
    - Annual evaluations for leaders with goals to create safe space for discussion of race to validate intentionality of practice.
    - Engage in research that is conducted by non-white faculty, related to racial equity and assist with grant proposals addressing racial equity issues.
- Solicit best practices from other colleges/schools that have scored higher than CHS on the VCU Climate report for diversity and inclusion indices.
- Continued conflation of racial equity and racial equality concepts were noted in respondent comments. Recommendation is to provide on-going educational offerings specific to the differences of these particular concepts and how they can be separately evaluated or assessed in the workplace.
- Overarching theme of perceived disproportionate work or effort by non-whites for the same outcomes when compared to white faculty and staff. Work of effort in the areas of pay, promotions, evaluations, access to research and grants, were specifically noted. Consider the following:
    - Create a Pay Equity Advisory Committee and conduct an annual pay equity study, to be published and transparent. For example, both the University of Denver and University of California, Irvine have published documents readily found via web search.
    - Evaluate mentoring programs, ensuring non-white faculty have mentors that assist with career pathways and professional development.
    - Evaluate racial equity programs for "minority tax" syndrome, which could add to the perception of working harder. As racial equity initiatives evolve and increase in efforts, non-whites are being asked to participate in problem solving activities, holding positions on committees, boards, and task forces. However, since there are fewer non-whites among CHS faculty and staff, this work is being tasked to a smaller group, often overburdening and taking away from other professional development activities, such as research (Carson, 2019).

FINAL PITCH

As a national urban public research institution, Virginia Commonwealth University has a duty to champion equity and inclusion. As the university's largest academic unit, the College of Humanities and Sciences has a responsibility to be at the forefront of those efforts. The students, patients and communities that VCU serves are entitled to a safe and supportive environment to explore, create, learn and serve; this type of environment can only be established and nurtured through equitable practices that begin with faculty and staff.

Racial equity is a component of the DEI journey. Implementation of the recommendations and considerations for future change will ensure forward movement. The frequent, highly-publicized murders of black men and women in recent years have shaken our nation and our city. That collective cry for justice and momentum cannot stall out or be overshadowed by a protracted

pandemic. Failure to implement visible, measurable changes will reduce the CHS racial equity assessment to just another exercise, a box checked for completion. The comments and frustrations from survey respondents are clear, there is more work to be done regarding racial equity. CHS leadership must take these next bold steps to continue this journey forward.

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College of Humanities and Sciences Racial Equity Survey

College of Humanities and Sciences Racial Equity Survey Demographic Information

How long have you been employed by VCU?	○ Less than 1 year ○ 1-5 years ○ 6-10 years ○ More than 10 years
Age	○ 18-24 years old ○ 25-34 years old ○ 35-44 years old ○ 45-54 years old ○ 55-64 years old ○ 65-74 years old ○ 75 years or older
Gender	○ Female ○ Male ○ Transgender Female ○ Transgender Male ○ Gender Variant/Non-Conforming ○ A gender not listed here ○ Prefer not to answer
Please indicate the racial or ethnic groups with which you identify. (Check all that apply.)	☐ African American/Black ☐ Asian American/Asian ☐ Hispanic/Latinx ☐ Middle Eastern/North African ☐ Native American/Alaskan Native ☐ Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander ☐ White ☐ Other
Please specify other racial or ethnic groups with which you identify:	_____
Which of the following best describes your title or job duties?	○ Faculty - Tenured ○ Faculty - Tenure-eligible ○ Faculty - Term ○ University & Academic Professional ○ Classified Staff ○ Hourly Employee

College of Humanities and Sciences Climate Survey

Please select the response options that best represent your opinion:

My unit shows an explicit commitment to racial equity.	○ Strongly Disagree ○ Disagree ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree ○ Agree ○ Strongly Agree

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Difficult conversations about race are encouraged and conducted in a safe, confidential, private space.	◯ Strongly Disagree ◯ Disagree ◯ Neither Agree nor Disagree ◯ Agree ◯ Strongly Agree
Racial justice knowledge, skills and practices are incorporated into performance objectives (such as job descriptions and work plans) and evaluations.	◯ Strongly Disagree ◯ Disagree ◯ Neither Agree nor Disagree ◯ Agree ◯ Strongly Agree
There is a lack of racial equity in my workplace.	◯ Strongly Disagree ◯ Disagree ◯ Neither Agree nor Disagree ◯ Agree ◯ Strongly Agree
I am treated with respect by others in my school or department.	◯ Strongly Disagree ◯ Disagree ◯ Neither Agree nor Disagree ◯ Agree ◯ Strongly Agree
I feel comfortable escalating my concerns through my chain of command.	◯ Strongly Disagree ◯ Disagree ◯ Neither Agree nor Disagree ◯ Agree ◯ Strongly Agree
I receive meaningful feedback from my supervisor on my job performance.	◯ Strongly Disagree ◯ Disagree ◯ Neither Agree nor Disagree ◯ Agree ◯ Strongly Agree
I have to work harder than others of different racial/ethnic backgrounds to be valued equally in my school or department.	◯ Strongly Disagree ◯ Disagree ◯ Neither Agree nor Disagree ◯ Agree ◯ Strongly Agree
Confidential formal and informal complaint procedures are available for staff and faculty for race-related complaints.	◯ Strongly Disagree ◯ Disagree ◯ Neither Agree nor Disagree ◯ Agree ◯ Strongly Agree
Racial equity and cultural competency training is available and encouraged by leaders in my unit.	◯ Strongly Disagree ◯ Disagree ◯ Neither Agree nor Disagree ◯ Agree ◯ Strongly Agree
I am familiar with VCU's policies that promote an ethical culture, civil and professional practice, working and learning environment and anti-retaliation for reporting concerns (the Code of Conduct).	◯ Strongly Disagree ◯ Disagree ◯ Neither Agree nor Disagree ◯ Agree ◯ Strongly Agree

How confident are you interacting with students and co-workers at the university who are from a different racial background than your own?	○ Unconfident ○ Somewhat Unconfident ○ Neutral ○ Somewhat Confident ○ Very Confident
How often do you receive professional development opportunities to help you explore new ways to promote equity in your job?	○ Weekly ○ Monthly ○ Quarterly ○ Semi-annually ○ Annually
Overall, how effective has your department leadership been in helping you advance student equity?	○ Highly Ineffective/unvalued ○ Ineffective/unvalued ○ Neutral ○ Effective/valuable ○ Highly effective/valuable
How often do you think about what colleagues of different races, ethnicities, or cultures experience?	○ Never ○ Rarely ○ Sometimes ○ Frequently ○ Very Frequently
How often do individuals in your unit have important conversations about race, even when they might be uncomfortable?	○ Never ○ Rarely ○ Sometimes ○ Frequently ○ Very Frequently
When there are major news events related to race, how often do individuals in your unit talk about them with each other?	○ Never ○ Rarely ○ Sometimes ○ Frequently ○ Very Frequently
How strongly does your unit support staff members to speak out against racism?	○ Weakly ○ Somewhat weakly ○ Neutral ○ Somewhat Strongly ○ Very Strongly
How confident are you incorporating material about people from different racial backgrounds into your curriculum?	○ Unconfident ○ Somewhat Unconfident ○ Neutral ○ Somewhat Confident ○ Very Confident
How confident would you be having conversations about race with your students in response to events that might be occurring in the world?	○ Unconfident ○ Somewhat Unconfident ○ Neutral ○ Somewhat Confident ○ Very Confident

Racial equity (or racial justice) is the systematic fair treatment of all people, resulting in fair opportunities and outcomes for everyone and includes the presence of values and systems that ensure fairness and justice. The distribution of resources and opportunities is neither determined nor predicted by race, racial bias or racial ideology. Does this definition of racial equity apply to you? If not, what does racial equity mean to you?

What recommendations do you have to address racial equity in your unit or the College of Humanities and Sciences workplace?

VCU College of Humanities and Sciences Racial Equity Assessment

Transformative Equity at CHS

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Acknowledgement

The VCU College of Humanities & Sciences Racial Equity Assessment Team would like to thank the following individuals and offices for their assistance in the completion of this project:

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- Dr. Jan Altman
- The VCU College of Humanities & Sciences faculty and staff
- The VCU Division for Inclusive Excellence
- The Grace E. Harris Leadership Institute

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FOCUS ON INSTITUTIONAL RACIAL EQUITY

23,382
VCU and VCU Health System Employees
H&S:562 Full-time Faculty/Staff

10,047
University Employees
H&S:132 Staff (Class or UAP)

2,501
Full-time Faculty
H&S: 430 Faculty (Term, Tenured-Eligible, Tenured)

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RACE/ETHNICITY FACULTY BREAKDOWN
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND SCIENCES

- Asian 8%
- Black/African American 9%
- Hispanic/Latinx 6%
- International 5%
- Two or more races 1%
- unknown 1%
- white 70%

PROJECT GOALS

Goal IV.2 in VCU's Quest 2025 aims to: *"Build and sustain the infrastructure to enhance diversity, inclusion and equity at all levels of the university to support teaching, research, scholarship, creative expression and service."*

One of the strategies stated in this goal is to "*use diversity, inclusion and equity-related assessment data to inform investments of resources in alignment with university priorities.*"

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BACKGROUND

- Racial discrimination
  - Civil Rights movement
    - Race-based Affirmative
- "Race Neutrality" ignoring bigger systemic issues
  - Health system and Higher Education
- Race Consciousness
  - University led effort:
    - Understanding of Diversity
    - Diversity related policies
    - Practices at the structural, organizational and individual level

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STRATEGIES

- Literature search

- Regular team meetings

- RedCap anonymous survey (22 Questions)
  - Faculty and staff at College of Humanities and Sciences

- Trial of survey with team before dissemination (disseminated in July)

- Provide insight into areas of opportunity:
  - Improve racial equity
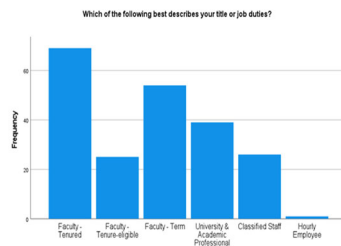 - Establish a baseline to measure future interventions

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SURVEY

OUTCOMES

Survey was distributed to all faculty and staff in CHS by project sponsor via email.
- Two-week period
- 216 survey responses, 36%
- 214 respondents that reported their job duties
  - 148 identified as faculty
  - 66 identified as staff.

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OUTCOMES: Work Hard

I have to work harder than others of different racial/ethnic backgrounds to be valued equally in my school or department.
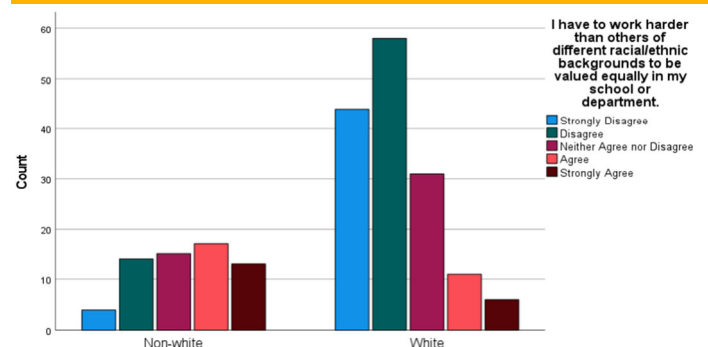

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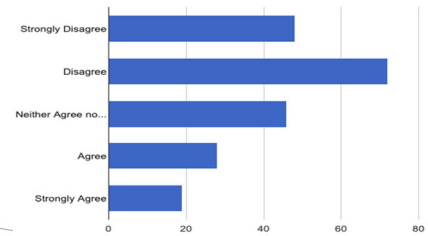
OUTCOMES

In several of the survey questions, responses differed significantly when race was factored as a demographic marker. On the following items, there was a significant difference in responses to the survey questions based on racial identification:

- I have to work harder than others of different racial/ethnic backgrounds to be valued equally in my school or department.
- Racial equity and cultural competency training is available and encouraged by leaders in my unit.
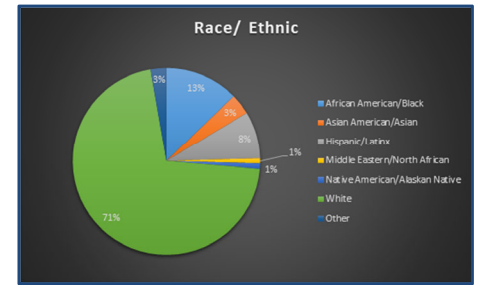- I am familiar with VCU's policies...

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OUTCOMES

OUTCOMES

In several of the survey questions, responses differed significantly when race was factored as a demographic marker. On the following items, there was a significant difference in responses to the survey questions based on racial identification (**continued**):

- How often do individuals in your unit have important conversations about race, even when they might be uncomfortable?
- When there are major new events related to race, how often do individuals in your unit talk about them with each other?
- How strongly does your unit support staff members to speak out against racism?

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OUTCOMES

Race/ Ethnic

- African American/Black — 13%
- Asian American/Asian — 3%
- Hispanic/Latinx — 8%
- Middle Eastern/North African — 1%
- Native American/Alaskan Native — 1%
- White — 71%
- Other — 3%

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OUTCOMES

SURVEY QUESTION: Racial equity (or racial justice) is the systematic fair treatment of all people, resulting in fair opportunities and outcomes for everyone and includes the presence of values and systems that ensure fairness and justice. The distribution of resources and opportunities is neither determined nor predicted by race, racial bias or racial ideology. Does this definition of racial equity apply to you? If not, what does racial equity mean to you?

All African Americans responding to the former question agreed with the survey definition. However several white respondents questioned the survey definition of racial equity, how it is applied and its relevance to higher education content.

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OUTCOMES

SURVEY QUESTION: What recommendations do you have to address racial equity in your unit or the College of Humanities and Sciences workplace?


Walk the Talk!
Better Process
More Training and Resource
Don't Apply

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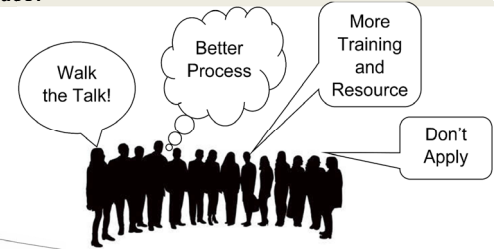
RECOMMENDATIONS

Survey Considerations

- **Statistical Analysis**
- **Timing**
- **Marketing**
- **Anynominity**
- **Purpose, use and release of data**

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RECOMMENDATIONS

Communication and Transparency of DEI Discussions

- **Development of coursework on how to discuss race in a safe space at work**

- **Intentionality of discussion with cohorted groups to develop content** (Miller-Kleinhenz, 2021)

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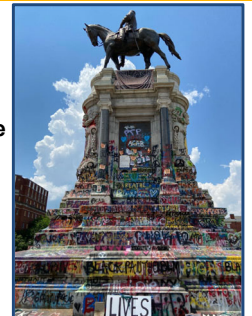
RECOMMENDATIONS

Trust Issues-- *Build an Antiracist Environment*

- **State of the College address by Dean**
- **Planned discussions using peer reviewed article written by URM, Journal Club for leadership teams**
- **Mandated reporters when racial issues are brought forth, validate concerns, know how to involved Equity and Access Services**

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RECOMMENDATIONS

Trust Issues-- *Build an Antiracist Environment*

- **Leader evaluations to include goals of creating Antiracist Environment-validation of intentionality**
- **Engage in research that is conducted by non-white faculty regarding racial equity**
- **Assistance with grant proposals for non-white faculty**

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RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Examine best practices in College/ Schools that scored higher on Diversity and Inclusion indices than CHS**

- **Confusion of terms racial equity and racial equality**
  - ○ **Continued educational opportunities**
  - ○ **Concrete examples of what both look like in CHS**

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RECOMMENDATIONS

Perceived Work of Effort-- *Acknowledge the Issue*

- **Share the findings of the survey with CHS body**
- **Pay Equity Advisory Committee**
- **Annual Pay Equity Analysis**
- **Professional Development and Investment in Growth- Evaluate Mentoring Programs for Effectiveness, Unintended Bias**

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RECOMMENDATIONS

Perceived Work of Effort-- *Investment in Team Members*

- **Professional Development and Growth- Evaluate Mentoring Programs for Effectiveness, Unintended Bias**
- **Evaluate the promotion and evaluation plans through Racial Equity Lens**

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The Journey --