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University Libraries Faculty Assembly - Racism Impact Statement & Dean's Response

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To: Ashley Rosener, Chair, ULFA

CC: Emily Frigo (Designated Unit Head), Matt Ruen (Incoming Chair, ULFA), Ed Aboufadel, Jeffrey Daniels (Ex Officio of ULPPC), and Patrick Roth (Chair of ULPPC)

From: Annie Bélanger, Dean of University Libraries

Subject: Dean's Response to ULFA Racism Impact Statement

Date: November 23, 2021

I received your racism impact statement. I greatly appreciate the work of the small group in crafting this statement as well as the engagement with the faculty in gaining unanimous support for the statement. The statement makes clear the wish to show care, leverage an equity lens, and uphold our commitment to all of our colleagues for healthy processes as we move forward with contract renewal and tenure personnel actions.

As acknowledged in the statement, this is a first and important step. The reflection needed to uphold it as part of personnel actions will be necessary. I support the expectation of leveraging an equity lens and decentering whiteness in the next review of our personnel guidelines. Additionally, as a Libraries faculty body, we may wish to consider how the other forms of oppression that have been build systemically over the last century into higher education may begin to be addressed in our locus of control.

I approve of the ULFA Racism Impact Statement. I would encourage us to consider its addition to our website so that others may be aware of our efforts as well as offer transparency to future faculty candidates.

I want to thank the faculty body on this moment of solidarity,



Annie Bélanger

University Libraries Faculty Assembly - Racism Impact Statement

Date Created: 9/29/21, Date Updated: 11/08/21
Approved by vote on: November, 17 2021
Approved by the Dean on: November 23, 2021

Introduction

Racism and white supremacy culture have a profound impact on nonwhite faculty in higher education and throughout the tenure and promotion process. This document is intended to acknowledge the impact of racism on the tenure and promotion process in general as well as in our specific context of Grand Valley State University (GVSU) Libraries. It is not intended to be comprehensive of everyone's lived experiences or of the effects of racism on all.

Background

During 2020, in addition to a pandemic, which was highly disruptive, there were highly visible compounding racial tensions. Since the beginning of the pandemic, there has been a rise in anti-AAPI racism and xenophobia from individuals and in political rhetoric stemming directly from the Covid-19 pandemic. In May of 2020, George Floyd was murdered by police officers. His murder sparked Black Lives Matter protests around the world, including in Grand Rapids, MI. The responses to the protests from counter protests, police, and civil officials (such as curfews) added to the stress and grief of Black communities and other historically excluded communities. The racial inequalities in our country were further highlighted by the pandemic itself, as communities of color were at a great risk of getting sick or dying of Covid-19. The lack of health equity and increased risk factors put additional stress on nonwhite faculty.

While it is important to highlight the current circumstances and the impact they may have had on people working during this time who are going up for personnel actions, it is equally important to acknowledge that white supremacy and racist structures have been integrated into higher education systems since their inception. The events described in this section have only aggravated those pre-existing inequities. GVSU is a predominantly white institution and the University Libraries have a predominantly white faculty. Nonwhite faculty do more emotional, and often invisible, labor in order to meet the same standards for tenure and promotion as their white colleagues.

Racism in the Tenure and Promotion Process

Provided below is a small list of how racism and white supremacy affect the tenure and promotion for nonwhite faculty; this is not designed to be a comprehensive list, but rather a representative sample. Nonwhite faculty experience:

- Higher expectation to support and mentor students and other faculty of color
- Ethno-racial microaggressions
- More emotional work interacting with their colleagues around research
- The feeling that they need to work harder than their colleagues to legitimize their scholarship, demonstrate their productivity, and achieve excellence
- Likely having fewer friends and family in academia who can advise and support them
- More pressure to take on antiracist and DEI service commitments

Accountabilities

In her statement on May 30, 2020, President Mantella called on the Grand Valley community to “continue to educate and act on our values of inclusion and equity.” In order to recognize the vast and varied impact of racism and white supremacy on nonwhite faculty as well as to continue to work toward building equitable processes that seek to mitigate bias, library faculty can hold themselves and one another accountable to reflect upon and apply the following practices:

- Be responsible for examining and mitigating the impact of one’s own internal bias. Attend trainings on how bias impacts the tenure and promotion process for nonwhite faculty.
- Don’t rely on nonwhite faculty to explain antiracist and DEI concepts. Take agency over your own education.
- Practice generous accountability for yourself and others by calling each other in and taking responsibility to acknowledge and learn from instances in which we cause harm.
- Be aware of the invisible labor nonwhite faculty perform in the tenure and promotion process.
- Offer support and mentorship for nonwhite faculty at all levels of promotion, not just for assistant professors.
- As white faculty, when processing emotions about racism, be aware of the harm you might be causing nonwhite faculty. Consider when it might be more appropriate to process with fellow white faculty.

Statement Review and Disclaimer

To be most effective, this statement should be reviewed and reflected upon by ULFA on a regular basis prior to the new cycle of personnel processes. It should also be updated along with the ULFA guidelines. This statement is not a replacement for systemic change, but is a placeholder for when more substantive systemic change occurs within the tenure and promotion process.

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