

## **Campus Diversity Structures Committee Recommendation**

### **Introduction and Background**

On December 10, 2014, President Hill and Board of Trustees Chair Bill Plapinger responded to campus climates crises by issuing a public statement. They stated a willingness to redesign institutional diversity and inclusion structures. Further details can be found on the President's "Strengthening Vassar" website <[president.vassar.edu/strengthening-vassar](http://president.vassar.edu/strengthening-vassar)>. In that statement, they said the following:

“We are committed to adding a senior-officer-level position for institutional diversity and inclusion. The person in this role will be responsible for, and empowered to, coordinate the work of ensuring that our campus is inclusive and welcoming, and free of discrimination and harassment for everyone. There are many different models for such positions across higher education. We will be asking our community to think through the ideal goals for and structure of such a position at Vassar. We intend to develop a recommendation for the position early in the [2015] spring semester, and immediately commence the search to fill this position.”

In 2015, there was considerable exploration of the Chief Diversity Officer (CDO) model. For example, disciplinary literature has been made available on faculty moodle sites and informational sessions were held to introduce the CDO position to Vassar College. In the Spring of 2015, two diversity officers (Mr. Michael Reed and Dr. Crystal Williams) visited Vassar College and held information sessions for Vassar's senior officers, faculty, Campus Life & Diversity staff and administrators, department chairs and program directors, and all interested administrators. Vassar hosted Crystal Williams (Bates College) and Michael Reed (Dickinson College) for two days during which they met with these constituencies. After their visit, a survey was conducted to gain feedback from colleagues regarding their thoughts on the appropriateness of the CDO model for Vassar College. The survey feedback demonstrated a consensus for action. Respondents mostly agreed that Vassar needs to implement some changes, but reservations were expressed about the officer model.

During their visit, we learned that many of our peer institutions have some variation of a Chief Diversity Officer (i.e., Bates College, Bucknell, Connecticut College, Davidson College, Gettysburg College, Hamilton College, Hampshire, Middlebury College, Mt Holyoke College, Oberlin, Wesleyan University, etc.). All of the aforementioned belong to the Liberal Arts Diversity Officers (LADO) networking consortium, which has a sister organization in the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education (NADOHE).

After this information regarding CDOs was collected and analyzed, it was unclear that the CDO model was suitable for Vassar. To explore this model further, and to evaluate alternative models and approaches, President Hill convened the Campus Diversity Structures committee in the spring of 2016 to review and evaluate Vassar College's diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives and structures. The committee was asked to examine and consider the College's existing structures, policies, and practices for achieving equity and inclusion. The charge of the committee was to present President Hill, and the larger

community, with a set of recommendations regarding how Vassar should develop, evolve, and strengthen institutional practices to achieve heterogeneity, develop equity, and support the infrastructure for inclusivity. We envisioned what would be possible at Vassar with a CDO or the resources that would have been used to hire and institutionalize a CDO. Below are our recommendations toward this end.

Members of the committee met six times over the course of the semester, on February 5, February 19, March 4, April 15, April 29, and May 16th. Meetings were typically two hours in length. Committee members included: Professor Bert Lott (co-chair), Professor Mia Mask (co-chair), Associate Professor Carlos Alamo, Associate Professor David T. Bradley, Associate Professor Maria Hantzopoulos, Associate Professor Zachariah Mampilly, Associate Professor Molly McGlennen, Associate Dean of the College Ed Pittman, Dean Art Rodriguez, and student representatives Ramy Abbady '16 and Joshua Temprow '16. Subcommittees were formed to discuss particular parts of the recommendation as detailed below.

### **Summary of Recommendations**

As a result of the process described above, we recognized that the College needs to thoroughly connect, integrate, and rethink some aspects of the current administrative offices and roles that are currently devoted to diversity, equity, and inclusion issues to ensure better institutional support, communication, and collaboration across the campus. We recommend that Vassar College expand and strengthen its infrastructure for diversity, equity, and inclusion work by:

1. Replacing the current Committee on Inclusion and Excellence (CIE) with a new dual, collaborative structure composed of two groups, the *Committee on Diversity & Inclusion* and the *President's Council on Diversity & Inclusion*;
2. Creating a *Center for Decolonial Research and Practice*;
3. Increasing support and commitment to hiring and retaining a diverse faculty and supporting the related intellectual work and community engagement.

The recommendations represent a general consensus of the group rather than the unanimous agreement of everyone on each point. This is not surprising, given the difficulty of issues raised by the topic at hand and the diverse perspectives of committee members. Nevertheless, our recommendations are a fair representation of our work and discussions.

We recommend that the current administration seriously consider this report, evaluate its feasibility, and implement all or some parts of the recommendations as soon as possible. These recommendations should not be postponed until the new President has been hired. Since the initial statement by President Hill and Bill Plapinger was made in 2014 this report is time-sensitive and should be considered and acted upon with urgency.

### **Detailed Recommendations**

#### **Recommendation 1: Restructuring Diversity Leadership and Collaboration**

We considered the overall organization of the various offices and administrators that initiate, support, and oversee diversity and inclusion related initiatives. Although the committee decided against recommending the creation of a Chief Diversity Officer position, we do recommend the creation of two new campus structures: a Committee on Diversity & Inclusion (hereafter “Committee”)<sup>1</sup> and a new President’s Council on Diversity & Inclusion (hereafter “Council”). These two groups will replace the current Committee on Inclusion and Excellence (CIE).

Currently, administrators and offices responsible for supporting diversity and inclusion related work are organized into the broader administrative structures of the College across the various divisions (e.g. Dean of the College, Dean of the Faculty, Dean of Strategic Planning and Academic Resources). On the one hand, this distributed structure allows work related to diversity and inclusion to be integrated into the overall work and mission of the College rather than having it exist as a stand-alone enterprise. On the other hand, this distribution and integration into the broader administrative work of the College hinders what could be valuable coordination, communication, and sharing among the various administrators and offices. While we do not recommend the creation of a new senior officer with a portfolio dedicated solely to matters of diversity and inclusion, we do believe that better coordination and awareness of ongoing work across the College is necessary.

We envision the new dual-structure as providing an opportunity to create greater awareness and collaboration across offices and prevent the “silo-ization” that can undermine the impact of diversity work on campus. The Council and Committee are meant to be complementary and collaborative structures with distinct roles to play in ensuring that Vassar moves to the forefront of confronting and transforming issues of equity and inclusion on campus and beyond.

#### *Committee on Diversity & Inclusion (“the Committee”)*

The Committee will bring together leaders from administrative offices concerned with diversity issues and elected and appointed faculty members and students (see Table 1 for a full list of membership). The Committee will be tasked with monitoring and evaluating campus climate, proposing timely remedies to specific issues, advocating broad policy changes, and ensuring implementation of diversity and inclusion related recommendations.

The new Committee should be included among the Faculty Governance Committees. This will position it as an integrated part of the College’s policy and decision making process rather than an ad hoc or extra. The Committee should have a modest budget (approximately \$10,000 per year) to be used for committee work, campus events related to diversity and inclusion work, and other events designed to publicize the work of the committee and gather feedback from the campus community. In addition, the Committee will monitor and advocate for existing administrative offices to be adequately funded to implement key priorities.

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<sup>1</sup> We do not have consensus as to the name of this committee, although we agree on its function and purpose. Some of us felt strongly that the name “Committee on Inclusion and Excellence” should be maintained. Another possibility was “Committee on Inclusion and Equity.” We refer to it as “the Committee” throughout this document.

Two faculty co-chairs of the Committee will be selected by the President in consultation with the outgoing co-chairs with preference given to faculty who have previously served on the Committee. Each will receive a course release per year for their service. Two additional faculty members will be elected for two year terms, one from the tenured faculty ranks and the other a non-tenured faculty member (Assistant or Lecturer) on a staggered basis. Two student members will be selected in accordance with the internal procedures of the Vassar Students Association. The remaining Committee members will be drawn from the various campus offices related to diversity work. Participation on the Committee should be included in the job descriptions and understood as part of the core duties of these members.

Additional, ad-hoc members may be appointed for specific terms at the discretion of the Committee co-chairs. Such ad-hoc members might include representatives from Campus Security, Computing and Information Services, the Library, the Writing Center, the Quantitative Reasoning Center, Campus Dining, and faculty and/or students that have particular expertise or represent particular issues of concern. The full list of recommended Committee members is given in Table 1.

Table 1: Proposed Membership for New Diversity Structures

President's Council	Committee	Center
President	Faculty Co-Chairs (2)	Faculty Director
Dean of Faculty	Dean of Students	Associate Director
Dean of College	Dean of Admissions	Institutional Research
Associate Dean of Campus Life	Dean of Studies	Postdoctoral Fellow
Committee Co-Chairs	Associate Dean of Campus Life	Postbaccalaureate Fellow
VSA President	Director of Human Resources	Student Intern(s)
	Equal Opportunity Officer	Administrative Assistant
	Resident Life	
	ALANA Director	
	LGBTQ/Women's Center	
	Director	
	Religious & Spiritual Life	
	Director	
	International Students Director	
	Alumni Relations	
	Faculty Director of Center	
	Affirmative Action Faculty	
	Director	
	Faculty (Tenured)	
	Faculty (Untenured)	
	VSA Chair of Equity and	
	Inclusion	
	VSA Elected	

### *President's Council on Diversity & Inclusion*

The Council will work to ensure and enable coordination of diversity and inclusion efforts across different areas of the College. The President, Dean of the Faculty, Dean of the College, Associate Dean of the College for Campus Life and Diversity, the Co-Chairs of the Committee, and the VSA President comprise the Council, which will meet regularly (~four times a year) to discuss the work of the Committee and other issues of diversity, equity and inclusion. The Council will create a strong link between the work of Committee, the proposed Center, and campus leaders, including the senior officers, so that diversity and inclusion work is an integral part of the College. The Committee will focus on guiding the direction of campus diversity work while the Council will focus on linking that work to the rest of campus. The Council will also consider and advise proposals from the Committee that require additional financial outlays beyond those already allocated to the Committee specifically and to the offices represented on the Committee generally.

### *General Administrative Structures*

We recognize that adapting to the new structure will take adjustment and that old challenges will continue to evolve and new ones emerge. Hence we recommend that Committee and the Council meet regularly to consider and review the College's processes and structures to identify organizational changes that could enhance the work in this area.

In addition to these new structures, some of us also thought that serious reform of the administrative offices dealing with diversity and inclusion will be required to adequately address campus climate concerns. However, without additional information, time, and resources, we could not develop a sufficient reform model. Therefore, these members recommend that the College's senior officers evaluate these administrative offices and reform as necessary and possible.

### **Recommendation 2: Center for Decolonial Research and Practice**

We recommend that the College devote resources to support collaborative research and programming on issues of racial and social justice, including institutional research to engage in self-study of the campus climate specific to these issues. Around the world and across institutions, students are rightfully demanding that their colleges and universities rethink curricular offerings, transform their broader campus cultures, and wrestle more explicitly with the enduring legacies produced by racialized and settler colonial logics. In particular, the liberal multicultural projects taken up by institutions, including Vassar, to address changing demographic shifts in the student and faculty population have failed to address the fraught underlying principles that govern them. While initiatives framed solely by concepts like diversity, inclusion, and equity are certainly worthwhile, we believe that these types of projects cannot be decoupled from the colonial origins that undergird our institution and our society. We feel it is incumbent on Vassar College to take the lead among institutions of higher education in developing new approaches rooted in decolonial research and practice.

Currently, Vassar College does not have the capacity to research and develop new pedagogical and research approaches for reckoning with these needs. In addition, the College has not gone far enough to grapple with the varying forms of cultural, social, economic, and political privileges and exclusions, rooted in settler colonial logics, that define the institution. We therefore propose that the College establish a *Center for Decolonial Research and Practice* (hereafter, Center).

We envision the Center as serving four main purposes.

1. Support for applied research
2. Support for applied pedagogical projects
3. Programming including public lectures, performances, workshops and symposia
4. Community engagement with Poughkeepsie and the broader Hudson Valley region

These four purposes will be centered on a pressing social theme established annually or bi-annually on a rotating basis around which the Center will gear its various activities. The goal will be to identify themes that allow novel collaboration across the College (e.g., climate change, environmental justice, food justice and security, global migration, political and social violence, popular protest, technology and media, etc.).

### ***Why Decolonial Research and Practice?***

Decolonial frameworks have emerged worldwide to question the colonial origins of knowledge production and the role of institutions in sustaining them. These movements depart from liberal and reformist models by demanding a fundamental rethinking of every aspect of the institution. Any meaningful attempt to do this requires substantive and sustained interrogation of the production and dissemination of knowledge, the lived experiences of all community members, and the structural and cultural forces that produce the social position of the institution, as well as its role in reproducing these dynamics at the local, national and international levels.

Decolonial approaches have been said to be rooted in the “social liberation from all power organized as inequality, discrimination, exploitation, and domination” (Quijano 2007).<sup>2</sup> As such, they go beyond questioning the power structures associated with colonialism, because they provide rich frameworks through which a variety of research, pedagogical, and program activities can be established. Decolonial frameworks bring to light totalizing master discourses that have insulated disciplinary scholarship and practice as protected and pure. In this way, the work of the Center will allow faculty and students to break open these “vaults of authority” that have historically obfuscated Indigenous, women's, and people of color's knowledges.

The Center will serve as an integral component of the broader effort to transform Vassar into an accountable, responsive, and progressive institution. The Center will inform and support the intellectual work across the five divisions of the College as well as the types of experiential and community based learning the College encourages. Because decolonial analytics address, challenge, and nurture a broad

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<sup>2</sup> Quijano, Aníbal 2007: Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality. *Cultural Studies* 21(2-3): 168-178.

range of research interests, the intellectual and experiential work of the Center will be attentive to and benefit the Sciences, Social Sciences, Humanities and the Arts, Languages, and Multidisciplinary Studies.

Among other benefits, we expect the Center to enhance academic and campus life in the following ways:

First, decolonial approaches are attentive to the local and the global; they contend with the unique nature of specific lived experiences and issues, yet acknowledge the interplay of these phenomena with the larger macro-forces that often frame and shape them. Moreover, as decolonial frameworks are informed by local, regional, hemispheric, and global metrics, the Center is poised to support work that relates across space, context, and time.

Second, decolonial frameworks inform and support a critical ethnic studies that link the Multidisciplinary Programs and several Departments across campus in crucial ways, and in particular, encourage the types of interdisciplinary work that many faculty and students are already engaging. In addition, traditionally under-supported but quickly growing correlates and fields like Queer and Transgender Studies, Native American Studies, Prison Studies, and Science, Technology and Society will benefit from their engagement with the Center.

Third, the Center will keep us vigilant about the College's stance on diversity and inclusion as it requires reckoning with past injustices. Additionally, our specific history in Poughkeepsie includes the settler occupation of Wappingers and other Indigenous peoples' lands, as well as the legacy of the enslavement and disenfranchisement of Black people in the Americas. Decolonial research and practice recognizes Vassar's implicit ties to and direct benefits from inheriting these colonial privileges.

### ***Structure and Funding of the Center***

To create and run the Center, the College will need to seed the project with funding. We recommend that a start-up fund (similar to how the Dean of the Faculty supported the Media Studies Development Project) be made available for a development project and planning. In general, we believe the Center and its work will be an attractive funding opportunity to donors and grantmakers; thus, the Center's leadership will also focus on seeking external grants to support research and pedagogical projects as well as other related programming. As the College continues to develop its Campus Master Plan, this will be a good opportunity to find an appropriate physical space for the Center. The forthcoming reconfiguration of Blodgett Hall as a hub for the social sciences possibly provides an ideal home for the Center. In the meantime, temporary office space for the Center could be found.

While exact structures for the Center would be developed by a dedicated planning group, the Center could be structured as follows, and we believe the overall level of staffing and support we suggest is appropriate.

The Center will be headed by a **Faculty Director**. The director sets overall priorities and represents the Center publically, working with the offices of Communications and Donor Relations. They will be

appointed to a two-year term with the possibility of a single renewal. The faculty member who fills the position should receive 3 course releases annually plus summer pay.

The Faculty Director will report to the **Faculty Advisory Committee** and the Dean of the Faculty. The Advisory Committee sets the overall direction of the Center and advises the Director on annual themes. It is premature to specify the exact size and function of the Advisory Committee; however, faculty from all five academic divisions must be represented on the Advisory Committee and members will be selected in a manner consistent with existing faculty governance principles. The Faculty Director will also consult regularly with a **Student Advisory Committee**.

Similarly, the Faculty Director will consult regularly with the Committee on Diversity & Inclusion and the various offices concerned with student life at the College to explore possibilities for collaboration and support. We recognize that substantive efforts to institutionalize programs targeting historically underrepresented students made by different offices on campus such as the College's Transitions program are already underway. We believe the Center can support and deepen existing efforts to institutionalize such initiatives and it will be the Faculty Director's responsibility to work with other groups and offices to ensure that this is happening.

**The Associate Director** is a twelve-month full-time non-faculty position that supports the Faculty Director and the work of the Center in the following ways: 1. Oversee the day to day functioning of the Center including programming and community outreach; 2. Oversee budgetary and personnel management; 3. Support for the Faculty Director in all fundraising initiatives; 4. Liaise to other offices, programs, and organizations on campus.

Finally, a full-time **Administrative Assistant** will report to the Associate Director. The AA will function in a manner consistent with how this position is usually deployed at Vassar.

The Center will house a **Post-Doctoral Fellow** chosen through an annual competitive process overseen by the Faculty Advisory Committee. A **Post-Baccalaureate** fellow, preferably a recent Vassar graduate, will help staff the Center along with at least one current student intern. The candidates who fill the post-doc and the post-bac positions will both have the possibility of renewal, per the discretion of the Center Faculty Director.

The Center will designate Affiliated Faculty who will receive support for related research or pedagogical projects. The exact terms for appointing Affiliated Faculty will be determined at a later point by the Faculty Director in consultation with the Faculty Advisory Committee.

### **Recommendation 3: Faculty Hiring and Support**

We recommend that the College continue to focus on its commitment to diversity in faculty hiring and also on hiring faculty whose work relates directly to decolonial research and practice. Such faculty help the College critically study, reckon with, and respond to the persisting legacies of injustice on campus and work towards building a more positive campus climate. Having a critical number of faculty focused on

this work is key to creating a vibrant and supportive intellectual community. There are several ways to pursue the recruitment and retention of a heterogeneous faculty, as well as commit to hiring faculty that would enhance the Center. These are not mutually exclusive and we recommend considering them all.

First, we recommend that the College begin using the practice of cluster hiring. Many colleges and universities, including peer institutions, grappling with the systemic issues articulated in earlier sections of this report have made cluster hires of several faculty in and across different disciplines, but with related scholarly interests, at one time. There is emerging agreement about best practices for successful cluster hiring that suggests it can promote more robust interdisciplinary research initiatives and enhance teaching and community engagement on campuses and contribute to faculty diversity and a healthier institutional climate. Cluster hires may also ultimately bring additional revenue to the institution by encouraging the engaging collaborations. Finally, cluster hires are most successful when they have a shared academic space, which, in this case, could be the proposed *Center for Decolonial Research and Practice*.<sup>3</sup>

There are several ways to pursue thematic cluster hires. For example, a group of departments and programs could work together to describe in their tenure track proposals how their proposed positions relate to each other. The scholars brought in by this approach could then form a core group around that related intellectual theme (e.g., climate change, environmental justice, food justice and security, global migration, political and social violence, popular protest, technology and media, etc.). While we cannot foresee exactly the shape such a cohort would take, the faculty involved could together provide stronger mentorship and support for each other and for those students who can be the most marginalized on campus.

Second, we recommend the use of “opportunity hiring” to proactively identify and recruit faculty from underrepresented groups in order to increase overall faculty diversity. This approach could be undertaken as part of, or separately from, the regular tenure track proposal process. Existing programs such as the Consortium for Faculty Diversity are one way to identify potential recruits, but other options should be explored as well, such as establishing a cross-disciplinary hiring group to work with individual departments or programs to identify and recruit candidates. We acknowledge that this could require a substantial commitment of resources. We note that many schools are currently dedicating large sums specifically to diversifying their faculty (for example, Yale recently launched a five-year, \$50 million initiative to increase faculty diversity). Without appropriate funding, we worry that Vassar will be at a distinct disadvantage in recruiting and maintaining a diverse faculty.

Third, we recommend adopting the proposed modifications to the faculty hiring procedure that were recommended by the 2015-2016 Acting Faculty Director of Affirmative Action, developed in consultation

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<sup>3</sup> Recent reporting on cluster hiring to support our recommendation includes:

- <https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2013/09/30/essay-how-colleges-can-engage-cluster-hiring>
- <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2015/05/01/new-report-says-cluster-hiring-can-lead-increase-d-faculty-diversity>
- <https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2013/09/30/essay-how-colleges-can-engage-cluster-hiring>
- [http://usucoalition.org/images/Faculty\\_Cluster\\_Hiring\\_Report.pdf](http://usucoalition.org/images/Faculty_Cluster_Hiring_Report.pdf)

with the Dean of Faculty (a summary of these recommendations can be found in the 2016 end-of-year report of the Committee on Inclusion and Excellence). In general, we want to acknowledge and support the current work being done by the Dean of the Faculty to improve our regular faculty hiring processes, so that we become better at the vital task of hiring and retaining a heterogeneous faculty. We also note the institution's commitment to continually offering training for faculty across all disciplines and divisions in inclusive pedagogy. None of our recommendations should be taken to lessen the importance of this work to ensure that we work to recruit and retain a diverse faculty through all our hiring practices.