

## Physical Science Department Concerns over BC's Racial Equity Commitment Statements

Faculty in the Physical Science department held a department meeting on 9/26/20 where BC's Racial Equity Commitment Statement was discussed. Physical Science faculty also received an email communication requesting feedback on BC's Racial Equity Commitment. The resulting document summarizes those concerns and is meant as a starting point for further discussion, we recognize that this is a very complex and delicate issue.

BC's Racial Equity Commitment Statement will be referred to as "the Document" herein.

- 1. The Document fails to define key terms such as racial equity, diversity, students of color, systemic issues, environmental microaggressions, implicit bias, racism, collective consciousness raising, inclusive learning environment, cultural competence, culturally-informed, and race-conscious. Systemic racism should also be defined as it is being used by inference as part of "systemic issues".*

Lacking these definitions, the goals become moving targets and thus become unmeasurable as well as unattainable. A problem cannot be solved without first defining what it is.

### Specific comments from faculty:

--I worry that such language will grant a "blank check" to whatever bureaucracy is put in charge of this vague, ambiguous goal to do and enact regulations as they see fit. Without a clear goal or defined means to that goal, I fear such a bureaucracy would be unaccountable.

- 2. The Document is lacking any supporting evidence for the claims of systemic racism, inequity, and the need to disrupt certain policies and practices, or even the existence of institutional barriers. There are several assumptions of causality while providing no supporting evidence.*

The existence of an achievement gap between races does not mean that the cause lies with any type of racism. There could be other factors in play (such as socioeconomic background and education) and there is no evidence provided that the cause has been specifically identified as racism, systemic or otherwise. Likewise, there is no evidence for the existence of any institutional barriers and no evidence establishing causality.

### Specific comments from faculty:

--While well-intentioned, the commitment does not specify what these institutional barriers are nor on how to dismantle them.

Regarding the "disrupt policies and practices that disproportionately affect students of color"

--Firstly, if there are such policies and practices, where and what are they? Show me!

Convince me, and I would oppose them with all my ability! Secondly, this is nakedly political.

--We are claiming, as an institution, that we have policies and practices in place that disproportionately affect students of color. This would make us a racist institution and Princeton University is being investigated by the Department of Education for their acknowledgement of racism within their institution. Are we opening ourselves up for such an investigation as well? Also, that means that we have utterly failed in our past assurances of being an equal opportunity institution and employer. Why should students and the public trust us now if we have allowed such practices to be applied so far? Shouldn't we have some pretty strong evidence before calling ourselves racists?

-- If we apply a definition of systemic racism as a type of racism that is inherent to a system or an integral part of that system, then that requires a whole re-structuring of the system or even a new system put in place to remove it. First, there should be a significant amount of evidence supporting the existence of systemic racism before taking the quite radical step of replacing a system. Second, there needs to be ample discussion and a clear plan on what the system will be replaced with.

3. *Lack of clarity on the "accountability measures if the institution does not meet published equity targets" statement and an inability to meet that goal. Furthermore, if forcibly applied, such a goal could lead to discrimination or a forced lowering of standards.*

The equity targets and accountability measures need to be clearly defined. In addition, this statement crosses the line from a promise of equal opportunity into guaranteeing an equality of outcome. One concern is that this could lead to pressure for faculty to pass students of certain races in order to meet the "racial equity targets" which constitutes discrimination against all other students that are not part of those targets and devalues the mission of the college.

Specific comments from faculty:

--I question the prudence of such a goal as "achieving racial equity." This goal implies two assumptions:

1. That the **college is responsible** to ensure that all students, regardless of race, have the same outcomes.
2. That the college **has the ability** to ensure that all students, regardless of race, have the same outcomes.

Neither of these assumptions seem to be realistic on their face, since the college has no control over the environment the student grew up in or the willingness of a student to apply themselves.

--The language regarding "**targets for completion**" is troubling, again because it seems to assume the institution is, at the very least, primarily responsible for student outcomes. As a faculty member, I am limited in the extent I can motivate my students to apply themselves.

-- First, as I see it so far, there is talk (and already statewide policy) that mandates certain outcomes for minority students. I think that it is important to recognize that we do not have the sole power as a college to fulfill mandated equal outcomes for all students who take

classes at our campus. We do, however, have the power to fulfill mandates that we provide equal opportunities for all students. To use the analogy, you can evaluate me based on my ability to bring all the horses to the water, but you can't judge my job performance based on whether they drink or not. There is no reason for us not to try and get great outcomes, but we have to realize that we are one piece in a complex puzzle that leads to a student passing or failing.

--I worry that this assurance of outcomes will do to higher education what "no child left behind" did to K-12.

4. *That "collective consciousness raising" will lead to indoctrination, stifle viewpoint diversity, as well as infringe on academic freedom and freedom of speech.*

Part of BC's mission states that "Our rigorous and supportive learning environment promotes equity and fosters students' abilities to think critically". Indoctrination of the faculty does not promote a supportive learning environment and is not conducive to teaching critical thinking.

Specific comments from faculty:

--This sounds like Orwellian euphemism for indoctrination. And the language that follows does not inspire confidence to the contrary.

--The language described under collective consciousness raising bullet points, in particular "Community engagement in dialogue and action for racial equity." I question this language because it suggests that the college should act politically. If the college acts politically, it is, by extension, a political institution. I question political action as a primary purpose of a college or institute of higher learning, especially when the political action is aligned with values contrary to the beliefs of many staff, faculty, and administration personnel inside the college.

-- "Equity-minded, culturally-competent professional development" is stated as part of the collective consciousness raising idea. Whose culture will this apply to and how many of the world cultures will be included? How does one establish cultural competence? Isn't it better to promote viewpoint diversity and an atmosphere of tolerance so as to be inclusive of all cultures?

--There is already fear of speaking up among faculty, I worry that this "collective consciousness raising" would add to the "cancel-culture" already permeating our campus. Adding the phrase "curation of resources on race and cultural competence" sounds like cancel culture as well.

5. *The idea that it is "imperative our students of color see in our faculty ranks people who look like them and share their lived experiences" is segregationist, racist, and discriminatory.*

This is another area that needs solid supporting evidence, why is this imperative? Does this mean that students can only learn from faculty that look like them? There is concern that placing more importance on what our faculty members look like versus their qualifications,

ability, and competence will not only decrease the quality of instruction, but that it is also discriminatory as we can no longer claim to be an equal-opportunity employer.

Specific comments from faculty:

-- First, I will not be party to unlawful, racially-biased hiring practices. Second, we do not have control over who applies to positions nor their level of expertise. As a college whose primary goal is to provide the best education to students possible, it is more important that students be given access to the best teaching faculty the college can hire than it is to give them teaching faculty that look like them.

--I find the idea that students need faculty that look like them discriminatory and segregationist. Also, it devalues the effort that faculty make every day in their classrooms to be better educators and to promote an inclusive learning environment while also challenging students to think critically. The idea is segregationist because, if so, then why not just segregate educational institutions by race? If what matters most is what the faculty look like, then it follows that colleges (etc) should be segregated by race, the very opposite of the country that Martin Luther King, Jr dreamed of. It is discriminatory because it implies that we should be hiring based on race/looks, a currently unlawful practice.

**6. *There is concern about the lack of transparency and a lack to follow due process in the creating of this and other documents with the same ideology.***

It is concerning that this document made it to FCDC where there was pressure to adopt it without first giving faculty the opportunity to discuss it. This document has not gone through Academic Senate and was, therefore, not passed along to the academic departments by the respective Senate representatives. The document was supposedly authored by EODAC but there were two separate versions and the version at FCDC was different from the one that EODAC authored. Furthermore, a second document has now been created as a potential Academic Senate Resolution expressing similar viewpoints and was distributed among select faculty in an effort to collect signatures. Why did this document not go directly to the Academic Senate first for the Senate representatives to distribute to all faculty?

Specific comments from faculty:

-- I have issues with how these policies seem to be coming forth. It seems like there is an effort to restrict input, but to make it seem like there was consensus. I hear things about FCDC meetings where they are told that the time for talk and research is past and that immediate drastic action is needed. I also read in the minutes of the most recent EODAC meeting (Aug 31) the comment that some conversations in that committee were necessarily going to stay in the committee and not be made public. I feel like this showcases the need for more transparency, calls for input, and more of a community feeling to this.

7. *That promoting a “systemic racism” message to the college and broader community will increase, instead of decrease, racial tensions and hurt the very group of people it is meant to help.*

Specific comments from faculty:

--Students are now being told that the cause of any failure to achieve their goals lies not within themselves but with the system itself. This is a truly appalling message to give to a generation as it makes them powerless in their own destiny. Also, how long before those of us who teach courses with high failure rates start to be accused of being racist (or any other label) by failing students? Many students lack the maturity level not to grab at an opportunity to blame anyone other than themselves and this ideology will give them a convenient scapegoat. While there are certainly external barriers to success that a student might not have control over, there are also certainly many internal ones as well that the student does have control over.

--The idea of “systemic racism” places a pre-assumption of guilt because the system being racist implies that the individuals implementing the system are therefore also racist. This general attribution of guilt crosses the line from “innocent until proven guilty” into “guilty until proven innocent.”

8. *That the section about Police and First Responder training pins this document as reactionary to current events that are not directly related to higher education.*

Specific comments from faculty:

--One could argue that all programs of study within a College should be of value to society, otherwise why have them at all? Unless this document is reactionary to the George Floyd event, why the focus on this specific program? Shouldn't nursing also be included as a program of focus as well, given the current pandemic? Furthermore, why does one specific event call for the need to restructure all of higher education? Where is the evidence that this is the norm and not an exception? This portion of the document looks like virtue signaling. If there is a need for changes to this program of study and to its curriculum, shouldn't that come from the faculty involved in that program study?

9. *That the language about equipping faculty, staff, students and our partners to “disrupt policies and practices” goes against the mission of the College.*

BC's mission states that “Bakersfield College provides opportunities for students from diverse economic, cultural, and educational backgrounds to attain Associate and Baccalaureate degrees and certificates, workplace skills, and preparation for transfer.” So is our mission to give students the skills that they will need to either enter the workforce or transfer, or is it to create activists?