

Council of Racial Equity & Justice (COREJ)
2020-2022 Report

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College of Education Council on Racial Equity and Justice Overview

The mission of the Council on Racial Equity and Justice (COREJ; pronounced ‘courage’) is to elevate research and amplify faculty, staff, and student voices on matters of structural and systemic racism, white supremacy, anti-Blackness, and interlocking systems of oppression and power within the College of Education (COE). Central to the mission of COREJ is having representation from all departments, faculty, staff, and students at all levels. Members serve as advisors, liaisons, and researchers to provide the Dean of the COE with recommendations on how to move forward with racial equity and justice initiatives, policies, and practices. In the Spring 2022 semester, COREJ had 11 student members, 3 staff members, 11 faculty members, and 2 postdoctoral fellows representing all three COE departments. The COE’s values of impact, excellence, diversity, inclusion, innovation, social justice, collaboration, and community undergird the work of the council. COREJ has the following goals:

- Develop and conduct a racial equity audit to research the status of racial equity and justice in the COE
- Design a comprehensive plan for the COE in addressing inequities, clearly identifying markers of progress, and accountability
- Draft a vision for COE to advance racial equity and justice efforts based on data gathered
- Partner with the COE Senate, COE Faculty of Color, Appointment, Promotion, and Tenure (APT) Committees, and other COE groups to advance racial equity and justice goals

Council Composition and Responsibilities

Students, staff and faculty from every department and unit within COE who have a demonstrated commitment to racial equity and justice were invited to apply to COREJ. Members attend bimonthly meetings, engage in continual self-reflection, learn about opportunities to promote equity and justice, and conduct research. COREJ members operate from a set of principles that are derived collaboratively, and are tasked with the following:

- Develop an assessment (e.g. equity audit) to research what is being done in each department around racial equity and justice
- Design a comprehensive plan for COE in addressing inequities, clearly identifying markers of progress, and accountability
- Draft a vision for COE to advance racial equity and justice efforts based on data gathered
- Partner with the COE Senate, COE Faculty of Color, APT Committees, and other COE groups to advance racial equity, and justice goals

Timeline of COREJ’s Work

- Fall 2020: Accepted and reviewed applications for participation, assembled group, established initial COREJ focus on Student Experience

- Spring 2021: Planned and implemented an equity audit of the Student Experience; evaluated extant data surrounding the experiences of Students of Color in the College of Education
- Summer 2021: Brought conclusions from extant data together and made initial recommendations for further research investigating the experiences of Students of Color in the College of Education
- Fall 2021: Used initial recommendations to design study for proposed research investigating the experiences of Students of Color in the College of Education
- Spring 2022: Collected data for the study investigating the experiences of Students of Color in the College of Education
- Summer 2022: Analyzing data for study investigating the experiences of Students of Color in the College of Education
- Fall 2022: Complete a preliminary report of student experiences, and begin inquiry cycle for the Faculty and Staff of Color experience
- Spring 2023: Data collection surrounding Faculty and Staff of Color experience, and finalize/present report for the student experience study

The COREJ Racial Equity Audit Procedure

The COE Racial Equity Audit was designed to uncover and address structural bias in policies and practices, and followed a 7-step process informed by (CITE SOURCE?):

Step 1: Reflect on perceptions of equity and potential areas of inquiry

Upon group reflection, COREJ chose “Student Experience” as an initial area of inquiry. The council divided “Student Experience” into three subdivisions—Academic Experience, Student Life, and Access to Entry— and created a subcommittee for each to complete steps 3-6 of the equity audit.

Step 2: Choose and refine the question and dimensions of identity or diversity to investigate.

As a council, COREJ decided to focus on racial equity with a secondary focus on the intersection of marginalized identities with race. In alignment with this decision, we chose to use equity mindedness (Felix et al., 2015) as a framework for all of our investigations. An overview of our framework is below. From there, each subcommittee chose their own inquiry questions for further work; these inquiry questions are named in each subcommittee’s individual section below.

Step 3: Review existing metrics, data, and reports. Identify and list missing (not collected) data and reports that would prove helpful.

This step was performed in subcommittees; the results are listed in each subcommittee’s individual section below.

Step 4: Identify clustering, emerging themes, any existing inequities (disproportionalities), and any existing patterns of inequity (disproportionality).

This step was performed in subcommittees; the results are listed in each subcommittee's individual section below.

Step 5: Reflect on findings.

This step was performed in subcommittees; the results are listed as recommendations in each subcommittee's individual section below.

Step 6: Acknowledge harm, trauma and violence that has emerged from the data.

This step was performed in subcommittees; the results are listed as recommendations in each subcommittee's individual section below.

Step 7: Create goals, action steps, accountability, and timelines to address identified inequity and trauma.

To decide next steps, the council pulled together the findings and recommendations from the three subcommittees, and decided that an important next step was to collect further explicit evidence about the experiences of Students of Color in the COE. To do this, we designed a research study to collect these data via surveys, focus groups, and interviews with students. An overview of this study is below.

Theoretical Framework

Equity-mindedness focuses on how institutions can alter their practices in order to create equitable spaces (Felix et al., 2015). In this equity audit, we use equity-mindedness to explore ways that the COE can promote racial equity for undergraduate and graduate Students of Color throughout its structure. Equity-mindedness is made up of the following components: (a) racial consciousness and affirmation; (b) recognition of structural and institutional racism; and (c) a focus on institutional practices (Felix et al., 2015). Racial consciousness and affirmation require an understanding of how race shapes lived experiences and placing value on different perspectives (Dowd & Bensimon, 2014). Structural and institutional racism are at the core of racial inequities and not individual deficiencies. An institution that embraces equity-mindedness holds their staff responsible for meeting racially equitable outcomes. Institutional responsibility includes critical reflection to interrogate how behavior facilitates racial inequity in and outside of the classroom (Felix et al., 2015). Equity-minded practices have the potential to create a welcoming and encouraging environment for all students in the COE.

Student Life Subcommittee

The COREJ Student Life subcommittee focused on the out-of-classroom experiences of Students of Color in the College of Education (COE), and centered its work around the question: How have

Students of Color in the College of Education (COE) experienced barriers and opportunities for racial equity outside of the classroom?

Findings

The Student Life subcommittee evaluated descriptive information on member demographics, recruitment strategies, and how leadership positions are appointed in the following COE student organizations: ED Terp Ambassadors, COE Graduate Student Association; the COREJ Student Group, and Teacher Education Association of Maryland Students (TEAMS). For all groups except the COREJ Student Group, white women were the dominant majority in leadership of the COE student groups.

ED Terp Ambassadors (formerly COE Student Ambassadors)

The ED Terp Ambassadors are undergraduates who serve as frontline representatives of COE to prospective students and their families, new incoming students and current UMD students. The program is run through the Office of Student Services and is a yearlong leadership internship offering undergraduate students the opportunity to become student leaders within the College and University. EdTerp Ambassadors recruits students who have completed at least one year at UMD and have at least a 2.75 cumulative GPA. A list of eligible students is pulled each year with the help of advisors, and students are sent a personalized recruitment email. In the 2020-2021 recruitment cycle, the email was sent to 208 students, and 18 students completed applications. The application did not ask for demographic information, but this information was obtained from the Office of Student Services. Students were selected based on diversity of majors, residency (in-state/out-of-state), availability to commit to at least two semesters of service, application responses to questions on leadership, and reason for desire to apply to the program. The application was followed-up by a 15-minute Zoom interview. Available demographic data for past cohorts is as follows:

- 2020-21 Cohort: 11 total members; all (11) identified as female; 7 identified as white, 2 as Latina, 1 as Asian, and 1 as two or more races
- 2019-2020 Cohort: 11 total members; all (11) identified as female; 6 members identified as white, 3 as Latina, 1 as Black, and 1 as Asian
- 2018-2019 Cohort: 7 total members; all (7) identified as female; 3 identified as white, 2 as Black, and 2 as Asian
- 2017-2018 Cohort: 7 total members; 6 identified as female and 1 as male; 5 identified as white, and 2 as Asian
- 2016-2017 Cohort: 7 total members; all identify as white women

COE Graduate Student Association

The COE Graduate Student Organization's (COE GSO) mission is to engage graduate students in the COE, the University, and the surrounding community in involvement in social, professional, and

educational activities at a College and University level. The COE GSO started during the 2012-2013 academic year. Each year a new GSO Executive Board is selected through a nomination and election process held in April, with members taking office May 1st and serving a one-year commitment. All graduate students in the COE have the opportunity to nominate themselves or their peers for one of nine GSO Executive Board positions. After nominations, all graduate students in the COE have the opportunity to vote on the nominees. Available demographic data for past cohorts is as follows:

- 2021-22: 7 total officers; 5 identified as female and 2 as male; 3 identified as white, 2 as Asian, 1 as Latina, and 1 as Black.
- 2020-21: 8 total officers; all (8) identified as female; 4 identified as white; 2 as Asian, 1 as Black, and 1 as Indian

COREJ Student Group

In Spring 2021, COREJ developed a student-led group to work collaboratively alongside the faculty and staff COREJ group. Potential members are recruited for COREJ via an email with an attached flier, and complete an application to participate. Any undergraduate or graduate student in the COE is eligible to participate. Available demographic data for past cohorts is as follows:

- 2021-22 Cohort: 16 total members; 15 identified as female and one as male; 4 identified as Black; 4 as Asian, 4 as white, 2 as Latina; 1 as multiracial; and 1 did not report their race

Teacher Education Association of Maryland Students (TEAMS)

The Teacher Education Association of Maryland Students (TEAMS) are undergraduates who offer professional development opportunities and provide a community statewide for students on their way to becoming teachers. Students are recruited through classroom announcements, listserv emails, and First Look and Second Look campus wide involvement fairs. Each semester includes a professional development conference with an expected 40 attendees. There are two types of membership, one that comes with a financial cost and one that is free. The UMD Chapter includes both types of members as full members of TEAMS. Leadership positions for TEAMS are elected annually in December, and elected officials hold their position for 12 months. Members run for office through a Google form disseminated through the listserv. Candidates are required to record a video introducing themselves. The election occurs in the final meeting of the fall semester. As of 2022, TEAMS had four leadership positions: President, Head of Advocacy committee, Head of Community Service committee, and Head of the Professional Development committee. Available demographic data for past cohorts is as follows:

- 2021-22 Cohort: 5-10 members regularly attended meetings. No demographic information was available
- 2020-21 Cohort: 5-10 members regularly attended meetings. No demographic information was available

- 2019-20 Cohort: About 15 members regularly attended meetings; membership was primarily white women and at least 2 members identified as male; 2-3 members identified as Black, 2-3 as Latine, and 2 as Asian
- 2018-19 Cohort: About 15 members regularly attended meetings; membership was primarily white women and at least 2 members identified as male; 2-3 members identified as Black, 2-3 as Latine, and 2 as Asian

Recommendations

Based on extant data, the student life subcommittee offered the following recommendations:

- More data need to be collected regarding where Students of Color find community and affinity spaces in the COE, where and why they do and do not choose to engage in out-of-class COE spaces, and what sorts of spaces (if any) they want
- Students of Color may benefit from a COE Student of Color Group, similar in structure to the COE Faculty of Color group.
- Greater recruitment of Students of Color into the ED Terp Ambassadors program, specifically, as well as other COE student groups
- It would be helpful if all COE groups list similar information on [the COE Student Group website](#) so students can compare groups as they make decisions about where and in what capacity they wish to get involved in the COE
- It would be helpful if there were a central place for student groups to annually upload participant/cohort information—such as BOX or Google Drive so it lives beyond individual cohorts' terms and can be archived for COE historical record

Academic Experience Subcommittee

Research examining students' postsecondary academic experiences and persistence showed that experiencing discrimination directly impacts students' academic performance and decisions to leave school (de Brey et al., 2019; Stevens et al., 2018). As Students of Color disproportionately experience discrimination throughout their academic experiences (Stevens et al., 2018), it is important to understand more about what this discrimination looks like in order to effectively work to end it. The objective of the Student Academic Experience subcommittee was to examine the content of preexisting measures of student academic experience in our College of Education, and evaluate their significance as tools to help the COE truly understand the experiences of Students of Color. To achieve this objective, we asked three questions that directed our work:

- How does the COE understand barriers and/or supports that students face in the classroom, in their advising relationships, and in their department-specific professional experiences?

- How does the COE understand how and where Students of Color experience microaggressions in their classroom, advising, and professional relationships in the COE?
- How does the COE understand how Students of Color view the representation and respect of their identities in their coursework, advising, and professional relationships?

Findings

To address our questions, we first consulted the pre-existing methods of student evaluation to see what opportunities they offered for students to specifically evaluate aspects of their academic lives, such as identity representation in coursework and microaggressions in their relationships with peers, faculty/staff, and advisors. To begin, we examined the questions posed in the two most common evaluation opportunities given to all students: the end-of-semester course evaluations distributed by the university for each course that students take, and the optional mid-semester evaluations provided by the Teaching and Learning Transformation Center (TLTC) that faculty members can opt to administer. An analysis of these evaluations revealed:

- In the end-of-semester evaluations, two university-wide course items contained the potential to provide insight about experienced microaggressions and/or inclusive content; students are asked to evaluate the extent to which they agree that “the instructor treated students with respect” and “the instructor helped create an atmosphere that kept me engaged in course content.” Similarly, in the COE college-wide course items, students are asked to evaluate the extent to which they agree that “the instructor asked students to share ideas and experiences with others whose backgrounds and viewpoints differ from their own.” Each of these three evaluation items has the potential to help generate understandings about the experiences of Students of Color; however, as demographic information is not collected or shared with survey results, there is no way to tell whether and where there are racial discrepancies in experiences.
- The TLTC mid-semester evaluation asks whether students feel that their instructor “creates an in-person classroom that is supportive for learning” and “creates an inclusive learning environment where everyone is welcome,” but again, with no demographic data collected it is impossible to tell whether, for example, Students of Color are less likely to feel like their classrooms are inclusive and welcome.
- We found that the only time students are asked to evaluate their advising relationships or other professional roles is when doctoral students graduate. Unfortunately, we were unable to access these reports, or demographically disaggregated grade reports to see if they are revelatory but think that these data would be helpful in evaluating the current status of academic equity in our College.

- The new annual CHSE Feedback Survey is a climate survey distributed to all CHSE graduate students and consists of six short-response questions that ask students to describe things like the department's climate, positive feedback, and any concerns they have. The format of this survey has, in the past, revealed commentary about experiencing microaggressions and feelings of not belonging, making it a compelling model for future work.
- Finally, a doctoral student member of the Academic Experience research team conducted an informal focus group with six graduate students to talk about their academic experiences as Students of Color to see if such conversations would be revelatory. All six graduate students revealed that they had experienced microaggressions in their coursework, two had experienced challenges with their advisors, and two whose academic work centered around race and equity in education reported feeling like their work was undervalued or disrespected by a faculty member. One student also reported feeling uncomfortable and disrespected in a research assistantship and attributed the problem to racial differences between themselves and the faculty member with whom they were assigned to work. Finally, all six participants agreed that they had never considered reporting experienced microaggressions both because they did not realize there was a reporting hierarchy to do so, and also because they did not have faith that anything would come of the report, besides potential harm to themselves.
- Overall, we found that students are not currently afforded many formal opportunities to provide feedback on their academic experiences, or how their racial identities impact these experiences. We also found that – with the exception of the CHSE graduate student survey – the current methods of evaluation are structured in a way that makes obtaining this information difficult. With surveys administered at the course level, collecting demographic data could prove identity-revealing for students. However, being able to disaggregate student feedback by race/ethnicity has important implications for being able to address the needs and concerns of BIPOC students and the sources of academic discrepancies between groups of students. Further, course-level surveys by definition cannot collect information about academic outcomes like course dropping, seeking advising changes, and negative research experiences that are a potential result of microaggressions and/or harmful racial climates.

Recommendations

Based on our initial findings, we have identified the following two specific recommendations:

- The Academic Life subcommittee strongly believes that a College-wide academic racial climate survey and focus groups should be administered to students to collect data on the experiences of Students of Color in academic spaces in the COE. None of the current forms of student feedback/input that the COE collects seeks such data, and hearing about student experiences and

stories first hand would play an invaluable role in creating actionable steps to make our College more equitable for Students of Color. In addition to administering this survey, we think that it would be beneficial to, if possible, collect a report of student grades that can be disaggregated by factors like race and gender in order to look for meaningful trends in student academic performance.

- We recommend that a reporting hierarchy with actionable steps be created and widely advertised in the College to give students an outlet to report microaggressions experienced during their coursework, advising, and other professional relationship interactions.

Access to Entry Subcommittee

More students are aspiring to attend college, but race, ethnicity, and income often impact a student's ability to access and attend university (Venezia & Kirst, 2005). The Access to Entry subcommittee's objective was to identify persisting barriers and inequities that affect Students of Color with respect to applications, admissions, and enrollments in the College of Education. They focused on the umbrella inquiry question of: What can we do in our admissions process to mitigate racial barriers to applications, admissions, and enrollments? Within this research question, there were several sub-questions that directed the inquiry:

- What is the representation of COE undergraduate and graduate students from different racial and ethnic groups in terms of applicants, admits, and enrolled students?
- With respect to applicants, how are the different programs sharing the college commitment to racial diversity and equity? Can we create a template of language to use on program pages that remedy this for prospective students?
- With respect to enrollment, how did students' race/ethnicity and intersecting marginalized identities come into play with their decision or impact the decision-making process to attend COE?

Findings

The Access to Entry subcommittee used a variety of methods to address the research questions. First, to examine evidence of barriers to access, data on student applicants, admits, and enrollment by race were collected and compared the distribution across all racial categories. For the graduate admissions process, data were examined by department because each department sets its own admissions guidelines and criteria. For undergraduate admissions, data for first year students and transfer students were examined separately to account for the different pre-application experiences of the two groups. The results were generally similar across the COE, and we found that:

- White students were the largest racial group applying to, accepted to and enrolling in COE programs

- The proportion of white students differs from the racial demographics of Prince George’s County (the county that houses UMD’s main campus), but mirrors the demographics of the larger state of Maryland population
- In particular, HDQM had relatively few Students of Color applying to their programs
- Indigenous students are consistently not applying to or enrolling in the COE
- Black students are less likely to be accepted into the COE than other racial groups, but are more likely to enroll
- Representation of Latine students in the application process varied by department and across years without consistent findings, but Latine students are less likely to be admitted as first-year students and more likely to be admitted as transfer students.

To understand how the different programs share the College's commitment to racial diversity and equity, the Access to Entry subcommittee also conducted an in-depth content analysis of the College of Education’s website by examining the webpages of each degree within each program within each department. We found that most programs in the CHSE department tried to be inclusive by making the GRE optional for graduate admissions, mentioning DEI in their descriptions, and hiring multiple faculty whose research focuses on DEI issues. Programs in TLPL often include language around DEI, but their admissions practices are not always equity-minded. For example, admission to the undergraduate teacher education programs requires prior experience in the field of education, which is restrictive to students who have not had these opportunities pre-college but might otherwise be excellent candidates. In HDQM, the EDMS program was by far the least accessible and DEI-oriented program in the College of Education. They require GRE scores, do not have any information or statements pertaining to social justice/equity, and had only one faculty member who listed related DEI topics in their biography.

Recommendations

These initial findings suggested a need for further research and analysis specifically focused on three important areas impacting access to entry: applicant perceptions, program admissions policies, and decisions around enrollment.

- The applicant component should focus on continuing the content analysis of our program language related to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI). We recommend creating a template of language to use on program pages that create a welcoming and inclusive environment for prospective students.
- The program admission policies component should focus on each program examining the validity and equity of program specific admission guidelines. We recommend that programs establish a rubric with criteria based on equitable and data driven information.

- The decisions around enrollment components should focus on student’s perceptions of access to entry that informed their decision to attend UMD College of Education. We recommend administering a student survey to all incoming graduate students, designing an analogous survey for undergraduate students, and conducting follow-up focus group sessions or interviews with students.

Inter-Subcommittee Conclusions: the COREJ Student Experience Study

The common recommendations from all three subcommittees was to collect more data that specifically seeks to better understand the experiences of Students of Color in the COE in order to propose specific, meaningful, and relevant recommendations for how to move forward with racial equity and justice initiatives, policies, and practice. As of Spring 2022, this data collection is underway via an IRB-approved study.

Study Purpose/Questions

The purpose of the current COREJ research project is to examine the policies, practices, and environmental factors that contribute to racial equity and justice for students within the University of Maryland’s College of Education (COE). The study is meant to explore and amplify student voices on matters of structural and systemic racism, white supremacy, anti-Blackness and the intersecting issues of oppression and power within the COE. Findings for the study will include recommendations for practice, policy, and future research, and will be considered for presentations and/or publications beyond UMD. The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How have the racial and/or cultural identities of Students of Color intersected with their ability to succeed in our COE?
2. Where in COE do Students of Color experience supports and/or barriers to their academic success?
3. What has the in and out of classroom experience been like for Students of Color in the COE?
4. What is the experience of COE undergraduate and graduate Students of Color in terms of application, admission, and enrollment?
5. How did Students' of Color’s race/ethnicity and intersecting marginalized identities play a role in their decision-making process to attend COE?

Data Collection

Data for this study include:

- A racial climate survey open to all Students of Color in the COE
- Focus group interviews open to all Students of Color who have been in the COE for at least two (2) semesters

- Individual interviews open to all Students of Color who have been in the COE for at least two (2) semesters
- 2 access to entry surveys (one graduate and one undergraduate) open to all new Students of Color in the COE

Timeline

- Fall 2021: Designed study, prepared application for IRB
- Spring 2022: Received IRB approval, began data collection (climate surveys, focus groups, and interviews)
- Summer 2022: Complete data collection, data analysis (climate surveys, focus groups, and interviews)
- Fall 2022: Finalize data analysis, write initial report of findings (climate surveys, focus groups, and interviews), implement access to entry surveys, analyze access to entry surveys, add access to entry findings to report of findings
- Spring 2023: Finalize and present report of findings; make recommendations; plan next steps

COREJ's Next Steps and Requests

As noted in both the general COREJ timeline and the specific Student Experience study timeline above, COREJ members are volunteering to stay involved with the project over the summer for data analysis and begin a report of study findings. To that end, a financial stipend to support this work is needed. Further, COREJ has benefitted from having a dedicated graduate assistant (GA) to support the project, and continuing to allow for a GA to be on this project is instrumental in ensuring COREJ's progress and continuity.

Finally, a commitment of support from the dean, faculty, and staff in implementing the recommendations for policy, practice, and research that result from COREJ's efforts and research is the most important request that we have, and the request that is most crucial to our progress towards being a more equitable, anti-racist, and inclusive College.

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