

A Proposed Center for Racial Justice and Equitable Futures

Summary of the WG-C [Final Report](#) to the Faculty Senate (3/21/2021)

[Working Group C](#) (WG-C), a diverse group of eleven faculty and ten students across the disciplines, was charged with developing plans for an “Antiracism Center” as part of the larger [antiracism initiative](#). Centers on a university campus focus scholarly and public attention on issues and research topics in ways that a department, school, or college cannot. They foster collaboration through programs, infrastructure, and space. Successful centers become trusted authorities that reflect institutional commitment to an area of study.

WG-C envisions a permanent, institutionally supported unit (“the Center”) that seeks to understand through interdisciplinary research and external engagement the many interlocking forms of racism and bias that are directed at Black American, Indigenous, LatinX, Asian American, and other marginalized and targeted peoples. We imagine impactful research and engagement that promotes change through the undoing of settler colonialism, white privilege, and other forces that perpetuate systemic racism and bias. The Center must advocate for racial equality and healing and be able to redouble its efforts in those directions when challenged by current events. Altogether, it must be a Center of Antiracist, Just, and Equitable Futures.

Cornell’s institutional structure and foundational commitments to equity present an opportunity to create a unique center compared to similar units that exist at [peer institutions](#). We also recognize that who participates in the life of the Center defines its success within our community, and its stature in the world. Themed years would be an effective mechanism for attracting outside scholars and Cornell faculty and students to spend a semester at the Center advancing their research and teaching through collaboration. An “A.D. White level” Professor-of-the-Practice Program would be used to attract highly accomplished individuals from the public, civic, and nonprofit sectors to spend time on campus interacting with students, faculty, and programs. Engagement of BIPOC students and post-docs through a “pipeline to the academy” program would enhance the long-term impact of the Center by contributing to faculty diversification across higher education.

Faculty participation from Cornell’s ethnic studies fields and programs is essential. Equally important would be the engagement of faculty across the colleges and disciplines who work in areas where issues of justice and equity are critical: the impact of global warming, the use of information technologies, the design of the built environment, public policy outcomes and more.

The Center would serve as a central node that connects and amplifies scholarship on racism, indigeneity, ethnicity, and bias currently distributed across a university-wide network of [25+ related units](#) and beyond. Envisioned collaborations with the Botanic Gardens, the Johnson Art Museum, as well as the emerging School of Public Policy, other policy-focused programs and with the Office of Engaged Initiatives, speak to the Center’s advocacy and activist role, which is to effect change off-campus through research and teaching on campus.

A rich connection between the Center and Cornell University Library (CUL) is anticipated. The Center can be regarded as a laboratory, a place of interrogation that advances our understanding of race and privilege, colonization, and all forms of othering and oppression. Digital collections relevant to these inquiries are archived in the CUL. The physical housing of the Center within the CUL has significant potential. The importance of the Center as a *place on campus* that is both central and connected to the colleges (like the Library) cannot be overstated.

The governance structure of the Center must reflect its mission, and it must itself be a model for an antiracist, just, and equitable future. We propose an inclusive self-reflective framework, including selecting a director who reports to the Provost, an Internal Governance Council that helps frame scholarly ambitions and ongoing programming around building a supportive community of scholars and learners, and an External Advisory Board that would share outside perspectives and enhance the visibility of the Center.