

# Racial Justice and Equitable Futures

## *An Educational Requirement for Faculty*

Working Group F  
Final Report to the Faculty Senate  
April 5, 2021

**Faculty must understand structural racism and the forces of systemic bias and privilege. A commitment to ensuring equity defines a framework for interacting with other faculty, with students, with members of the staff, and the broader community. The goal of the educational requirement is to support the faculty in this effort.**

### 1 The Working Group

President Pollack’s [statement](#) to the community on July 16, 2020 prompted the creation of the Faculty Senate’s [antiracism initiative](#). As part of that, [Working Group F](#) (WG-F) was charged with designing an educational requirement on racism, bias, and equity for Cornell faculty.

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### 2 Background

WG-F’s deliberations are guided by Cornell’s radically inclusive founding tradition of having the “most highly prized instruction ... be afforded to all – regardless of sex or color” (Bishop, 1962), and by our [core value](#) of being “A Community of Belonging,” which strives to make Cornell a welcoming place for all students, faculty, and staff. We are also guided by our commitment to the [fundamental principles of academic freedom](#) and to their application across the community. In accepting our responsibility to ensure that respect for diverse others is safeguarded, we recognize that we have much work to do. Our proposal for an educational requirement for faculty is rooted in these commitments.

As a faculty, we are central to university education. In the classroom, in laboratories, in the field, in residential halls, on campus, faculty are responsible for ensuring that all Cornell students are treated justly and equitably. The WG-F recommendation seeks to enhance faculty ability to meet these responsibilities effectively, and in a manner consistent with President Pollack’s call.

By “faculty” we mean all members of the University and RTE faculties. Job descriptions certainly vary across these populations, but dedication to an antiracist, just and equitable campus should not. Versions of these recommendations also apply to post-docs, GRAs, and TAs in instructional or supervisory roles.

### **3 The Goal of the Program**

The goal of the educational program is to support faculty in creating an antiracist, just and equitable climate for our campus community. Doing this effectively requires faculty to understand that structural racism, colonialism, and injustice, and their current manifestations have a historical and relational basis, even as it requires that faculty learn to communicate effectively across the differences that they will encounter as they go about their work. WG-F takes the position that ensuring an equitable climate is an essential part of the job and this proposal suggests a framework for interacting with faculty, students, members of the staff, and the broader community.

The goal for the faculty educational program parallels the goals for the student educational requirement, the details of which are available [here](#).

We also wish to note that Cornell staff are required to complete The *Office of Human Resources* ([OHR](#)) recently instituted [six-course DEI training program](#), which includes modules on “Understanding Ourselves and Our Ability to Create Change” and “Speaking Up and Responding.”

### **4 Ongoing Efforts at Achieving Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)**

A number of units sponsor DEI-related workshops that are available to faculty in various formats – from one-hour virtual sessions, to two-day institutes, to week-long courses in the summer to semester-long “fellow” programs that meet monthly.

*The Office of Faculty Development and Diversity (OFDD)*

[OFDD](#) focuses attention on issues of faculty recruitment and retention, compositional diversity and climate. It hosts multiple [workshops](#) and has partnered with the *Cornell Interactive Theatre Ensemble* ([CITE](#)) to produce sessions that address faculty recruiting (“It Depends on the Lens”), tenure and promotion, and race/gender issues in the classroom (“Hang in There and Be Tough”). It maintains an extensive list of [resources](#) relating to race and antiracism that facilitate learning within the colleges and departments. The OFDD also collaborates with IDP and with the *Graduate School’s Office of Inclusion and Student Engagement*, which has developed a host of its own [programs and initiatives](#).

*The Center for Teaching Innovation (CTI)*

The CTI offers a course entitled [Teaching & Learning in the Diverse Classroom](#) and a two-day [Faculty Institute on Community Engaged Learning](#), as well as a more schedule-friendly [online learning community](#) version of the latter.

### The *Intergroup Dialog Project* ([IDP](#))

The IDP is best known for offering a required DEI-orientation program for all entering undergraduate students, but it also partners with the OFDD to produce sessions for faculty on advising and communicating across differences.

### *Other*

Programs providing information affecting interactions with specific groups, the status-vulnerable for example, are also available though they tend to work with all three constituencies: students, faculty and staff. One example is the “UndocuAlly” training jointly created and run by The Associate Director for Student Empowerment and Undocumented/DACA Student Support, and the Cornell Law School 1L Immigration Law and Advocacy Clinic.

An essential feature of all these efforts is to assist participants in learning the skills needed to create an equitable climate for work, research, scholarship and teaching. The question that remains is whether such efforts should be required of all faculty, and how such a requirement may be designed and delivered.

## **5 The Educational Requirement**

All faculty are engaged in some combination of classroom teaching, mentoring or advising students, participating in faculty meetings, attending research seminars, speaking to the media, and serving on student admissions and/or student placement. Each of these activities require respectful engagement with diverse others. With that in mind, and after considerable deliberation, WG-F suggests that the proposed educational requirement should have these attributes:

### *Content Produced and Delivered Under the Auspices of the OFDD*

We anticipate that there will be concerns around the quality and delivery of the educational requirement. Our review of faculty focused training + discussion provided by OFDD, such as “It Depends on the Lens” required for participation in faculty recruitment (about 1200 faculty have taken this) indicates that with adequate support, Cornell can create high-quality programming that is accurate, thought-provoking, and effective in meeting defined institutional goals. The following concerns must, however, be addressed

1. The OFDD is at its limit with a very small staff currently servicing over ninety units. The involvement of OFDD in designing and delivering the faculty educational requirement will need resources, including an additional staff person to help implement and facilitate workshops.
2. OFDD staff must track participation of faculty in programs and deliver reports to department Chairs and college Deans each semester.
3. The Vice Provost for Academic Affairs (VPAA)/OFDD should regularly inform and receive feedback on their DEI efforts from the governance body of the proposed Center for Antiracist, Just, and Equitable Futures .

### *Time Commitment*

We recognize that faculty are busy and may find it difficult to accommodate additional time commitments. For that reason **we recommend that the core educational requirement take between 1.5-2.0 hours per semester, not including some parts that could be delivered during regular departmental meetings.** We also recommend that some aspects of the core requirement be included in new faculty orientation that is

currently run by the VPAA/OFDD. Faculty interested in additional inputs are free to participate in the range of trainings and workshops offered by OFDD and other relevant units on campus as noted above.

### *Content*

We suggest creating a library of modules/workshops following the structure of “It Depends on the Lens.” Topics should be focused on particular dimensions of faculty work, and could include modules on

- Why diversity & inclusion?
- Creating a bias free classroom or Teaching to Diverse Groups
- Creating bias free small group interactions (in labs, in research groups)
- Avoiding bias in the handling of academic integrity cases
- Understanding the challenges of working with international students & colleagues (and vice versa: The Challenges of Studying and Working in the U.S)
- Hiring and Retention (we have: *It Depends on the Lens*)
- Understanding the hidden challenges faced by BIPOC students and faculty (we have: *My voice, My Story* created for graduate students and is not confined to race)
- Learning to Mentor BIPOC Students

Departments would cycle through these topics in a way that respects faculty time (1.5-2 hr/semester) but keeps the faculty abreast of the DEI issues associated with each topic.

Faculty also need to have an understanding of structural racism, systemic bias, indigeneity, colonialism and related topics. For that they can draw upon the materials produced in conjunction with the “literacy” component of the student educational requirement. That content will be prepared by a cross disciplinary group of Cornell faculty colleagues, whose scholarship and expertise are focused on these questions. Videos and other materials, including discussion frameworks to help facilitate post-viewing, in-person discussions could be reshaped for use by faculty in other disciplines and fields.

## **6 Enhancing Participation and Accountability**

All faculty should see the need to participate in the educational requirement, regardless of their research expertise, scholarship, or personal positions. However, incentives need to be put in place to ensure full participation. One effective example is the policy currently in place that requires participation in a workshop for faculty who wish to serve on any search committee. We recommend that a similar requirement be applied if faculty wish to (a) hire students or staff for research in their labs and field offices (b) teach (c) supervise Teaching Assistants (d) advise and mentor students, post docs, and younger colleagues (e) advise or be involved in co- or extra-curricular activities, including student clubs or (f) be involved in student residential life as Faculty-in-Residence or House Deans.

In considering how to ensure participation and track impact of a faculty educational requirement, it is important to keep in mind that chairs are overloaded and should not be forced to monitor and track department faculty. We make three recommendations so the burden of enforcing compliance or tracking impact is not just on the chair.

### *Include a DEI-related question in course evaluations*

Course evaluations are a venue where individual instructors are held accountable. Evaluations are generally designed by the colleges, but there is a move to have a small set of university-wide questions show up in all evaluations. One example of a recently instituted college level DEI question in Engineering is

To what extent have the professors and teaching staff fostered an inclusive environment such that the class is welcoming to all, everyone is encouraged to participate, none are made to feel different, and all are treated fairly?

Understanding that course evaluations are imperfect, we recommend that steps be taken so that the results are professionally interpreted and useful to the instructor. This is particularly important with regards to BIPOC and women faculty, who are likely to receive harsher evaluations shaped by forces of bias, racism and sexism within our student body. Departments should also be encouraged to review student feedback (CTI staff offer useful advice in this regard) and discuss steps to improve classroom climate with faculty.

*All application packages, renewal and promotion dossiers must include a DEI statement by the candidate*

DEI-related statements are currently required from all faculty candidates at the time of application. **We suggest extending this requirement to candidates for tenure and promotion** and establishing guidelines on the candidate's efforts and contributions in this area. Making this a requirement reinforces faculty commitment to Cornell's core principles around inclusivity, equity, and belonging.

*Require DEI climate statements to be part of a department chair's annual report to the Dean*

These reports should include a specific section on the department's climate (which may include information provided by students on the course evaluations, as described above, and reports from OFDD on faculty participation in the educational requirement). It should also include what steps are being taken to address any shortcomings and realize continuous improvement. These annual reports should be part of the department's "dossier" whenever it is reviewed (approximately every seven years). **We recommend that the [Faculty Committee on Program Review](#) and the VPAA work together to implement this requirement.** It should be noted that Deans are already asked to include a section on DEI efforts associated with their Colleges in their annual report to the Provost.

## 7 Conclusion

Concerns that the proposed educational requirement for faculty infringes on academic freedom are important to address. The Working Group's stance on this is based on this text taken from the University's recently approved statement on Academic Freedom:

Academic freedom is valued very highly at Cornell, and the University Faculty defends it tenaciously; nevertheless, the same University Faculty is disinclined to see the concept abused. Academic freedom does not imply immunity from prosecution for illegal acts of wrongdoing, *nor does it provide license for faculty members to do whatever they choose.* (italics ours)

The education requirement does not impinge in any way on what faculty choose to teach, write, or think about. It is focused instead on workplace education to ensure and safeguard the entire community's rights to free expression and academic freedom.