

Dear Friends,

After our SACSCOC visit, we have turned our fuller attention to the important work of analyzing the campus climate survey findings and the work of establishing criteria for the new Diversity, Equity & Inclusion officer's position.

First, my thanks to Dianne Raubenheimer who oversaw the data collection for the SACSCOC report and visit before taking on the results of the campus climate survey, a nationally normed survey from the Higher Education Data Sharing Consortium. She has presented an informal draft of initial findings, which we have shared with ELT and with co-chairs Tomecca Sloane and Karthik Aghoram of the DEI position exploratory committee. They are using the findings to identify priorities for this position.

As I said to them, the results of our campus climate survey are painfully sobering as additional evidence that our community is hurting from all sorts of racial injustices. We also acknowledge that the timing and context of surveys may influence the results. For that reason, we are asking that the national comparisons, which in this report extend from 2017 – 2020, be pared down to 2020 only. Note, however, that 72% of those respondents who experienced discrimination or harassment said it happened within the last year. **It is clearly time to act.**

Dianne and I are working through the survey's findings, with a special focus on the comments offered, and she and I will co-present that information at PIE, our professional development workshop series at the end of the semester. Meanwhile, I'd like to share a few initial highlights.

To our community's credit, we begin with a valuable context here. Although almost all items point to significant agreements regarding disparities in treatment (language, experiences, support, interactions, levels of comfort, etc.), one key positive is that 98% of respondents agree that diversity enhances interactions and 68% feel comfortable sharing their views, compared to the national figures of 88% and 68%.

If we start with that fundamental grounding that, yes, our diversity makes us stronger, we are better prepared to address the importance of findings that show respondents overall believe community members feel they and/or others experience a widely varying sense of belonging; they report feelings of tension regarding differences; see inequitable support for recruiting and retaining minorities; and question the demonstrated commitment to equity. Other findings point to the frequency of respondents' hearing insensitive or disparaging remarks and negative comments about political views or affiliations. Of those hearing disparaging remarks, the source of those remarks was primarily students at a rate comparable to the national average); however, respondents saying the source was faculty members garnered a rate 10% higher than the national rate. Undergraduate and graduate students were uncertain about mechanisms for reporting incidents of discrimination or harassment.

The remaining results, which will be reported when finalized, give us more details, but we do not need to wait as the work of the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion exploratory committee is researching position descriptions and qualifications to shape the establishment of a new DEI position at Meredith. In order to ensure that all campus constituents will have an opportunity to help shape this work, the DEI Exploratory Committee will seek your input via a brief campus-wide survey. You are all requested to actively participate in this critical conversation. The DEI exploratory committee will also participate in focus group training before initiating conversations with specific constituent groups and individuals (faculty, staff, and students) from across the campus for additional input. Because of the urgency of this work, we will continue throughout the summer with notice of opportunities to participate.

Beyond the DEI committee, of course, faculty and staff are involved on multiple fronts with the work of anti-racism, from the School of Arts & Humanities year-long attention to “Belonging at Meredith College” to collaborations with the University of Virginia’s Universities Studying Slavery to the Council on Independent College’s selection of Meredith as a regional hub for studying racism’s history and ongoing impacts. Many have already participated in Racial Equity and Inclusion workshops, and Stir Fry will provide a new offering next Friday. Numerous student organizations are coordinating efforts to represent anti-racism initiatives, and convocations and guest lecturers and curricular revisions are calling more attention to the ways that race and other forms of diversity have impacted disciplines, history, and higher education. Finally, we are working on a statement in support of diversity and inclusion that will serve multiple purposes for grounding our commitments.

As we continue this important work to address the systemic racism that continues to impact our BIPOC faculty, staff, and students, we encourage all to make specific efforts to listen, learn, denounce, and eliminate racism and discrimination at Meredith College.