

Excellence and Diversity: Prioritizing an Inclusive Academy for the Twenty-first Century

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I am thrilled to have the opportunity to write up remarks made at the Butler Center Roundtable III: Excellence and Diversity for the Butler Center Working Paper Series. The focus of this article as well as the remarks I made at the in-person session both reflects the commitment of the Butler Center to consider pressing issues facing institutions of higher education as well as how and in what way faculty can contribute to these dialogues. The Roundtable Series is an initiative that seeks to make space for diversity and inclusion discussions on campus and provide forums in which these discussions can develop. In this essay, I hope to contribute in a small way to these conversations by conveying some thoughts on topics raised in Roundtable III.

As Purdue University celebrates its 150th anniversary of excellence in learning, discovery, and engagement, focal points of the university's past and present loom large. Drawing upon multi-decadal histories of ground-breaking innovations in space exploration, health and longevity, artificial intelligence, and sustainable economy and planet, this is an apt moment to reflect. To place into sharp focus the wicked problems our world is facing, such as gender equity, the biodiversity crisis, climate change, and food insecurity, amongst others, the *Ideas Festival* is the core organizing event that brings in speakers from around the world to incite provocative conversation and synergistic dialogues across the university campus.

Yet, commemorative moments are not only important for their celebratory power that can reignite shared senses of belonging by curating histories and current scholarship to enliven the campus landscape—but also can be an invitation to initiate difficult dialogues. Purdue has a particular charge as one of the land grant institutions in the nation to continue to serve our local communities, state populations, *and* to create an inclusive and diverse academy which is nimble enough to respond to and seek solutions for the global grand challenges that we all face.

I suggest we should not only celebrate during this commemorative time but also take stock of the challenges our institution faces thereby exploring how recognition and responsiveness to challenges will enrich, rather than diminish, our future. In other words, I am advocating for dialogue that will make a place for narratives that continue to build awareness toward an inclusive academy, recognize the changing demographics of the state of Indiana and the nation, respond to the dynamic international and multicultural communities on campus, reconcile with histories of colonization, and go beyond our nondiscrimination policy to value diversity. Students, faculty, and administrators can all play a part in ensuring that Purdue is an institution

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that serves multiple communities and citizenry. In just one example, the Butler Center has been a leader in cultivating spaces of visibility. During 2017-18, the center organized conversations about inclusion that drew so many people to sessions that registration had to be limited. These initiatives point to both a need and desire among Purdue community members to respond to and address the visibility of these issues across campus and beyond.

This is not a Purdue-specific challenge nor is it a new one. Much scholarship on institutions of higher education point to steep barriers in place that preclude a more inclusive academy (Williams, Berger, and McClendon 2015). In this short piece, I'd like to reflect on three domains relevant to an inclusive academy: historical legacies, structural and institutional conditions, and lived experiences. By no means are these exhaustive, however, they are meant to reignite just one piece of a conversation that is already many decades in the making. I do so by drawing from anthropologist Eric Wolf's approaches to power alongside feminist intersectional theories as orienting frames. Eric Wolf (1990:587 cited in Levy 1999:62) notes there is a distinction between four kinds of power: "(1) power as an attribute of a person, emphasizing potency or capability; (2) power as the ability to impose on another in a social action and interpersonal relations; (3) power that controls the settings in which interactions may take place, this is tactical or organizational power; and (4) power that structures the overarching politics economy, which shapes the 'social field of action so as to render some kinds of behavior possible, while making others less possible.'" Wolf calls this structural power. It is the latter two which I will engage with in relation to historical legacies of colonization and racial discrimination that continue to impact our campus life as well as the normative institutional barriers in place that serve to limit our university community to flourish.

As a feminist scholar, I also draw from intersectional approaches to identity and practice. Formulated by Crenshaw (1998 [1989]), these theories suggest that individuals experience interpersonal, institutional, and other relationships through the amplification or contraction of intersecting attributes, such as age, gender, class, ethnicity, race, sexuality and other hierarchies of difference. As Crenshaw (2019) explained in retrospective on her work, "Intersectionality is a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects. It's not simply that there's a race problem here, a gender problem here, and a class or LBGTQ problem there. Many times that framework erases what happens to people who are subject to all of these things." Important to working with intersectional theory is acknowledging and addressing your own positionality. To this end, I want to be forthcoming in this piece as a white, cisgender, able-bodied woman of European descent, my experience in the academy has been one of privilege (see Jayakumar et al. 2009). As a feminist scholar and a faculty committed to cultivating excellence at Purdue, I continue to struggle to and seek ways in which I can be an ally for staff, students, and faculty, as well as do the critical work to constantly deconstruct my own epistemologies and ontologies that I embody in order to dismantle the entrenched institutional norms that serve as barriers to diversity and inclusion.

Historical Legacies

Since 1994, land grant institutions' mandate to provide accessible higher education for all expanded to include tribal colleges and universities (TCUs). At the same time, non-TCU land grant institutions of higher education have struggled to create programs to expand and support indigenous students, faculty, and staff on university campuses as well as draw attention to the

histories of Native American, American Indian, and Alaska Native Peoples—especially how those histories intersect or collide with the academy. To that end, programs which seek to enliven indigenous histories, thoughtfully craft land acknowledgements, and create programming to support indigenous cultures and students have emerged.

Cultivating awareness about local and regional histories of American Indian and Native American Peoples requires institutional effort to make visible that which is often not accessible or widely known. This is an important area for intervention during anniversary years. At Purdue, the Native American Education and Cultural Center (NAECC) and Dr. Dawn Marsh in the Department of History have worked tirelessly to have Purdue's proximity to pivotal moments in Native American and American Peoples' history acknowledged on campus and in the region. These legacies have always been part of the place, perhaps without many knowing it. For example, the name of the Wabash River comes from the Miami-Illinois language *waapaahšiki*, translated as "it is a white-shining river" which refers to the striking geological properties of the dolomitic limestone found in certain areas (McCafferty 2000:227). Purdue also is just moments away from Prophetstown where Tecumseh and his brother Tenskwatawa made crucial diplomatic strides in uniting many Sovereign Nations, bringing communities together, and standing up for their livelihoods in the Battle of Tippecanoe. The prairies, riparian, and forested landscapes, many of which now serve as the lands of multi-generational farmer communities and Purdue's institutional home, were stewarded by many American Indian and Native American Sovereign Nations—these landscapes were centuries in the making.

Moreover, the NAECC is following other Big 10 universities, like the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and Northwestern University, by crafting a land acknowledgement. Although controversial, land acknowledgements serve a dual purpose of recognizing histories of Indigenous Peoples and prioritizing programs that welcome indigenous students, scholars, staff, and visitors. On the latter point, the NAECC offers ongoing initiatives such as the Sloan Foundation Indigenous Graduate Partnership and the Tecumseh Postdoctoral Fellows Program, amongst other programs, which continue to support new forms of inclusive campus life and scholarship that engages at once with reconciling historical legacies and supporting possible futures.¹

These are just a few of the institutional changes that can take place for recognition and reconciliation. Canadian institutions of higher education have led in this area, offering many resources and guidelines to working *with* and *for* First Nations Peoples. For example, Dr. Shauneen Pete (n.d.) has pulled together a document on *100 ways to indigenize an decolonize academic programs and courses* in an effort to specify multiple pathways for change. The American Indian College Fund (2019) also offers insights on how institutions can adopt policies and programs to support indigenous students. Reviewing some of these established documents and working with centers on campus that have already demonstrated leadership in these areas to working towards institutional change are just some of the transformation that can take place. On the administrative level, the Division of Diversity and Inclusion remains a stronghold in moving initiatives forward, and on the scholarly level, works like American Studies' student Jennifer Sdunzik's (2019) thesis, entitled *Mapping Whiteness: Uncovering the Legacy of All-White Towns*

¹ These observations are my own. I do not represent or speak for the NAECC community or the center leadership.

in Indiana, make critical contributions in addressing the racial politics and cultures of exclusion that have shaped and persist in Indiana.

Structural and Institutional Conditions

Institutional and scholarly practices of forgetting and invisibility are not just limited to historical legacies, but also are embedded in current university life. Recent high impact articles have highlighted the stark problem with representation and structural issues of exclusion. For example, Fenelon (2003) questions the normative dimensions of objectivity in the academy and hones in on the experiences of faculty who engage in racialized research. Specifically, Fenelon (2003:89) emphasizes symbolic representation—or the structures, environment, mascots, and other symbols—as one area that perpetuates oppressive systems. In this way, Fenelon (2003) expands on how, “structural issues of racism ... are linked to symbolic representations ... that extend from individual imagery to societally sanctioned iconography, ... constituting historically based and currently practiced racial systems.” Faculty can reinforce and reproduce these if they are unable or unwilling to make a change in visual communicative forms.

At Purdue, some institutional-level initiatives are in place to address symbolic homogeneity. For example, one of the recommendations of Purdue’s ADVANCE-(Purdue and Center for Faculty Success) program is to increase the representation of women and faculty of color within and across the signature spaces on Purdue’s campus. Landmark buildings such as the Purdue Memorial Student Union and Stewart Center are just two examples of places that have made some changes—more are needed. As a campus that has been recognized for its international student body—in 2015 Purdue ranked top in enrolling international students (Neubert 2015)—as well as one that draws from the a diverse national and state-based student body, Purdue has a range of alumni and leaders across Purdue’s campus to honor. Fenelon (2003:92) suggests an attentiveness to alumni donor groups and administration so to support change in symbolic representations as well as research which examines race and racialization as well as other intersectional identities in the academy.

While fixating on symbolic representation might be seen as a “soft approach” to structural change, much research has shown that the environments and conditions in which university faculty, student, and staff find themselves can either reinforce feelings of isolation and in- or out-group membership or encourage notions of belonging (Fenelon 2003). To be sure, however, symbolic representation is only one piece of a more complex landscape. For example, Jayakumar et al. (2009:538-539) have shown that the increase in faculty of color across college campuses continue to be “significantly underrepresented,” and faculty of color in tenure-track positions have “lower satisfaction” than their White counterparts. At Purdue, the 2018 COACHE (Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education) survey show similar results on climate and satisfaction for women and faculty of color (see also Peterson 2019). What is more concerning, Jayakumar et al. (2009:540) shows that while faculty of color might be intellectually satisfied with their work, ongoing “racist ideologies and racially discriminatory behaviors” persist.

We have much work ahead to meet the necessary conditions to be a responsive and competitive R1 institution in the 21st century. Continuing to address symbolic representations and campus climate head on will assist in making the transformations needed. As Wolf reminds us, faculty

and administration across the university can contribute to this organizational and structural change, shifting the normative dimensions of practice to shape both the settings of work (symbolic representation) and “the social field of action.”

Lived Experiences

Social science and humanities disciplines prioritize qualitative work that illuminates the lived experience and rhythms of daily life. This type of robust and systematic data at the individual and community scale provides contextual and nuanced information about interpersonal experiences, realities of institutional practices, and the attitudes and perceptions that accompany a diverse array of behavioral and decision-making conditions. Recent research on understanding the affective dimensions of faculty lives show that many institutional practices reinforce, rather than erode, inequity and injustice in institutions of higher education. For example, Fenelon’s (2003) research also finds that research cultures and academic cultures can struggle to come to terms with discriminatory practices or do not recognize them altogether:

“As constitutionally stated, most academics follow the general public and historical scholarship in either denying or downplaying systems of racial exploitation and oppression such as race-based slavery or indigenous genocide.” (2003:88)

“Thus, research, appearing to be neutral and scholarly, has important political manifestations, including the justification for racial inequalities that are replicated within the student and alumni bodies of institutions that may formally state that they value diversity even as all of their internal mechanisms reproduce exclusionary dominance.” (2003:91)

“Academic culture actually fosters these approaches by downplaying face-to-face encounters, exaggerating backroom committee work, and allowing external forces and multiple entry points.” (2003:96)

Other pieces highlight the outcomes and effects of institutional and faculty practices that intensify experiences of exclusion and racism. For example, in Pittman’s (2012) study on the lives of 14 African-American faculty, research findings show:

“...African-American faculty felt invisible, as through their credentials were challenge and that they received inadequate mentoring...they also expressed believing that they were assigned race-based service assignments, an ambiguity about if microaggression were due to race or gender, and feeling self-consciousness about self-presentation.” (ibid.:84)

Interpersonal interactions, institutional mentoring practices, and microaggressions remain challenges and experienced forms of racial oppression. On an institutional level, Pittman’s findings illustrate the ongoing need to provide the environments in which faculty, staff, and students can be made aware of microaggressions and to be vigilant about mentoring structures for faculty. Again, Purdue has made steps in this regard in developing mandatory sessions for faculty on search committees to complete a workshop that covers, amongst other topics bias, assumptions, ethics, compliance, and diversity. Similarly, both the ADVANCE-Purdue and Center for Faculty Success program and Purdue’s membership with the National Center for

Faculty Diversity and Inclusion have been some of the pathways chosen to create mentorship structures for faculty experiences. The Butler Center is the lead of a new initiative on campus entitled the Coaching and Resource Network (CRN) to provide additional coaching and mentoring to faculty. This initiative reflects the Center's dedication to the promotion of women and women of color, particularly associate to full, such as the inaugural conference for associate professors, held in spring 2019, attests to.

Continuing to support these programs and working at multiple scales at once to innovate in this area – at the department/unit/program, college, faculty working groups, faculty senate, Office of Diversity and Inclusion, Office of The Vice President for Research, and with external organizations and actors, for example, can provide plural and overlapping options for faculty who experience forms of oppression while at the same time attempting to craft programs that tackle these challenges head on. This requires the entire campus community to engage in dialogues or training, regardless of rank or identity, to move toward this goal.

On the other hand, Pittman also observed:

“Faculty of color take on greater teaching, mentoring, service, and administrative/committee responsibilities than do White faculty. .. faculty of color are more likely to use active pedagogical techniques known to improve student learning. Faculty of color also more frequently encourage students to interact with peers from different backgrounds, engage in service-related activities and produce scholarship that addresses issues of race, ethnicity, and gender” (2012:539).

In this way, Pittman also shows that attentiveness to microaggressions is not enough; faculty of color experience scholarly life different than their White colleagues. This finding is also particularly concerning. As promotion and tenure at R1 universities rely upon demonstrated excellence in learning, discovery, or engagement, spreading faculty efforts across these three domains stresses their ability to achieve the needed goal of excellence in one during time-sensitive pre-tenure moments. Moreover, at the associate rank, this can delay time to full, and can also impact full professors' ability to manage their scholarly activity. On the other hand, lack of recognition of the work required for active pedagogical innovation that potentially improves student educational experience and outcomes is also problematic.

Purdue has sought to address some of these tensions and inconsistencies through making sure guidelines for promotion and tenure across the domains are accessible and clear. Faculty are required and encouraged to document their mentoring activities, such as mentoring undergraduate research assistants as well as their supportive activities, such as writing recommendation letters, in their annual review documents. Continuing to make responsibilities detectible in annual review documents, which are submitted to heads, deans, and other review committees, can have the dual purpose of acknowledging and recognizing this type of work while have multiple levels of comparative oversight on the different ways faculty are or are not overburdened in teaching, mentoring, service, and administrative duties.

This oversight is critical. 2018 COACHE results revealed that Purdue is lagging behind in promoting faculty of color and women, and programs need to be in place in order to mitigate

this. Making sure that deans and chairs have oversight over overburdening faculty of color and others with multiple teaching, mentoring, and administrative duties is critical and providing them the tools to intervene when there is a demonstrated need is critical. Yet, Pittman (2003) emphasizes that while institutional practices such as these are important, the interpersonal work that is required is also equally relevant to address racial oppression and emotional and mental health burdens and stresses that are ongoing.

Conclusion

Public and land grant universities have a mandate to serve their states, their diverse citizenship as well as the diverse staff, faculty, and student bodies that make up their communities and cultures. Ongoing work on excellence and diversity in the academy continues to highlight the multiple scales, affective and symbolic dimensions, and interpersonal levels at which institutions of higher education are falling short of formulating inclusive academies in order to maintain their excellence. In this piece, drawing from theories of power and intersectionality, I have highlighted three critical domains that remain acute: historical legacies, institutional constraints, and lived experiences.

First, I focused on historical legacies of Purdue presence/s in its state, and thereby highlighted the work the NAECC at Purdue to support recognition of past and present Indigenous Peoples. Land acknowledgements already published and crafted by peer-institutions, and curriculum changes proposed by Canadian Universities indicate that Purdue is behind the curve in thinking about ways in which to move forward, although the NAECC has been a frontrunner in creating programs and initiatives on campus. I hope that we can learn from these models and continue to address decolonizing principles so as to recognize, rather than forget, the histories of the Peoples who stewarded the landscapes which we have built this institution on and with.

Research reviewed also revealed the structural and institutional constraints that prevents building or sustaining a more inclusive environment at institutions of higher education. Symbolic representation is one, often overlooked, area that institutions of higher education should prioritize. Improving representation of the diversity of faculty, staff, and alumni experiences in different mediums across campus provides important contextual information and visual cues that create more inclusive environments. Purdue's long history of international exchange, retention of international students from all walks of life on campus, as well as diverse faculty can and should be celebrated, as appropriate. The ADVANCE-Purdue and Center for Faculty Success program and other initiatives are already in place to address some of these disparities, and continual funding for these programs and vigilance for improving and creating new programs and supporting varied mediums (including song, dance) – especially in high-profile areas and events on campus should be in place.

As a collection, the articles reviewed for this roundtable also illuminate how and in what way lived experience is played out at the individual, interpersonal, and community level (Fenelon 2003; Jayakumar et al. 2009; Pittman 2012). These are often hard to record forms of oppression on campus but just as relevant as those that are most visible. Microaggressions, demands on faculty time, mentoring, service, and administrative loads disproportionately burden faculty of color and cultivate climates of oppression and exclusion. There are points to several possible responses to this. The first is to make sure that promotion and tenure documents reflect the

different kinds of discovery, engagement, and learning work that faculty want to achieve excellence in (for example, pedagogical innovations). The second is to have both top-down and bottom-up mechanisms where faculty careers can be discussed. For example, those in leadership positions should be able to comparatively review faculty service and administrative requirements with an eye towards overburdens— as well as be able to take action when disparities are apparent. Faculty also should have mechanisms and opportunities to voice their concerns as well as have allies and advocates who can assist, if needed. In this way, there should be regular check-ins to see how to better distribute service and teaching loads and working with them to create discovery, learning, and engagement plan that is tailored to their professional goals. The third is to potentially create trainings, similar to the mandatory trainings for search committees, for all faculty and staff on microaggressions. A fourth strategy might be to provide the tools and administrative assistance to cultivate spaces where staff, faculty, and students direct the changes and create the programs that they want to see supported across campus. This would not solve, but draw attention to and raise consciousness about interactions that negatively affect interpersonal relationships and institutional climate.

Some of the most challenging facets of institutions of higher education today is taking a critical look at normative structures and practices that perpetuate inequity and injustice across institutional campuses. There are many scholars and staff who are well-versed in these issues and who have dedicated their careers to a more inclusive academy to continue to achieve desired excellence. While this brief reflection piece predominantly focused on faculty affairs, multiple different facets of institutional culture and structural, institutional, and intersectional arenas are ripe for intervention; for example faculty-student interactions, student experiences, and the state climate and cultures in which universities sit. Over the past 150 years, Purdue has demonstrated innovation and engagement, cultivating students and scholars who not only dream of the impossible but provide the world with the tools to make it happen. To extend this energy to build a more inclusive academy will reinvest in a challenge we are already committed to in order to continue to dynamically respond to the obstacles that are presented before us and make the changes necessary to do so.

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Resources

University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign Land Acknowledgement

https://chancellor.illinois.edu/land_acknowledgement.html

Northwestern Land Acknowledgement

<https://www.northwestern.edu/native-american-and-indigenous-peoples/about/Land%20Acknowledgement.html>