

## **Changing the DEI Climate: Recommendations for Improving The J-School Environment**

*The recently released report on diversity, equity and inclusion at Columbia Journalism School made the following recommendations across various areas, including faculty and staff, classroom settings, student experience, and community involvement.*

1. Define what diversity, equity and inclusion mean specifically for the journalism school. These words are used almost generically nationwide, but according to interviews with and research by experts on the subject, an organization can only begin to change if it acknowledges its problems first and defines its own vision of a more diverse and inclusive future. Display this prominently on the school's home page.
2. Create a dean level administrator of diversity, equity and inclusion who would oversee and lead the school's future efforts in DEI to ensure a community that welcomes and respects all. This person's responsibilities would include running workshops, training sessions and events, conducting surveys and research and problem solving.
3. Create a code of ethics on DEI that would be adhered to by faculty, staff, and current students and that requires and sets penalties specific to community roles. Deans and department heads would be responsible for enforcement.
4. Devise a secure online "suggestion box" for all members of the community to anonymously report incidents of disrespect, microaggressions, discriminatory actions and comments. The DEI dean/executive would be responsible for tracking submissions and acting when appropriate.
5. Maintain the DEI commission of alumni, staff, current students, and faculty, put together for this study, to continue the valuable cross-current communication on issues of DEI. The commission would report each year to the dean and faculty. Its membership would be voluntary and its meetings public.
6. Initiate an annual year-end climate survey of graduating students, full-time faculty, adjuncts, and staff. This would be administered by the new DEI dean/executive to monitor the school's DEI performance over time.
7. Initiate a study of the school's physical environment to ensure that all community members feel more welcome, more secure, more comfortable. The immovable

architecture—steep stone steps, statues, columns — can be imposing. The study can determine ways to make the school more welcoming in decorum, for example lining halls with student photographic work, illustrating alumni accomplishments, and making space for students, staff, and teachers for personal needs, like breastfeeding and places for prayer.

## **Faculty and Staff**

8. The journalism school should implement a policy of not offering a teaching position until an exhaustive search for a diverse candidate has been executed, a variation on the National Football League’s “Rooney Rule” for coaching positions, but hopefully working much more effectively. This would extend to the hiring of visiting professors, program directors and teaching fellowships.

The number of full-time employees, staff and faculty has hovered around 100-105 for the past 10 years and the demographics have remained consistent. For the current staff of 70, the raw numbers show considerable diversity--about 18 percent Black, 11 percent Latinx and 6 percent Asian.

The full-time faculty has been consistent as well. Over the years, the numbers show four or less full-time Black professors, one or two Latinx and one or two professors each of Asian and Native descent.

9. Include discussions and workshops on DEI in the new faculty and staff orientations. This would include a review of the school’s policies and expectations on DEI, possible sessions on defusing volatile classroom situations, discussions of DEI in the news, anti-racism lectures and workshops, a review of best practices on DEI in the profession and required readings.

10. For full-time and adjunct faculty, institute a seminar, class and/or ongoing discussion of DEI issues that covers defusing tensions in classes, presenting sensitive material and avoiding triggering language.

11. Make diversity, equity, and inclusion a prime factor for review and assessment of faculty and staff. List the consequences of non-compliance.

12. Deans and department heads should undertake a self-study of their actions and observations related to DEI. The results should be shared with tenured faculty. The format of the self-study would be a guided questionnaire that gauges the individual’s performance and approach to DEI.

## **The Classroom**

13. Revise the History of Journalism curriculum to present an inclusive history that reviews contributions of women, journalists of color and the institutions they have created.

14. Establish a course or series of workshops on covering racism, religious intolerance, and ethnically sensitive issues, including reporting in hostile environments like the massive demonstrations in 2020 protesting police killings of Black men and women.

15. Review the awarding of post-graduation prizes and fellowships based on classroom performance and the pass-fail system. These selections are often subjective and students of color view it as a disadvantage. Consider creating new awards for stories on equality, criminal justice, or coverage of the surrounding neighborhood.

### **Student Experience**

16. Increase recruitment and financial aid for historically disadvantaged students of color. Existing faculty and staff should be canvassed for connections to journalism organizations representing minorities. The admissions staff maintains connections with these groups, which could be amplified by making the advancement of such connections a high priority for all school employees.

17. Conduct further study of financial aid policy and commitment to more direct aid to ensure racial and economic diversity among the student body.

18. Set up a volunteer mentoring program, particularly for international and BIPOC students, matching current students with recent alums.

19. Establish and maintain internships and after-graduation programs with Black, Latinx and other ethnic news organizations.

### **Community Involvement**

20. Establish a summer program in which New York City (particularly neighboring Harlem) high school students can learn more about journalism and news literacy.

21. Establish and maintain relationships with historic Black universities and universities with high percentages of Spanish-speaking students and faculty for teacher exchanges, combined journalism projects and classes, summer training and recruitment.