

Physical Science Department comments on Racial Equity Document

Prepared by Wade Ellis, one of the Physical Science Senate representatives

On Nov 14, 2020, the Physical Science Department had a meeting to discuss the Racial Equity Commitment submitted by the EODAC. The overall opinion of the department is in favor of the document. Below are listed some of the strengths and weaknesses discussed.

Strengths:

1. The document causes us to recognize and examine aspects of our teaching that could be changed to have a more positive impact on our students.
2. The document clearly condemns racism and discrimination in all its forms.
3. It recognizes that we are doing some things well even though there is room for improvement. Previous versions of the document gave the idea that we were just starting this work, but the one up for consideration makes it clearer that this is a work already in progress.
4. It supports the Faculty Internship Program and the ASPIRE program. Physical Science is currently participating in that program with a handful of graduate students teaching or helping with courses this semester.

Weaknesses:

1. Commitment #3 seems to communicate that white faculty are unable (or maybe unwilling) to adequately serve our students of other races and ethnicities. That cannot be unilaterally true. For example, we have white faculty that are married to people of other races and ethnicities. That does not give them the same lived experiences as their spouse, but certainly does give them greater insight into a different culture. A more diverse faculty is a good thing, but there is possibly more nuance to this issue than just skin color or looking like someone else.
2. The cost of sending 60 faculty to the USC Racial Equity Institute is \$120,000. Could we not send a smaller group and spend the rest of that money funding student organizations? The limited number that attend could then share their experience via FLEX week or opening day.
3. Version 14 of the document shows data on faculty demographics, including the fact that we currently appear to have a proportional amount of black faculty for our black students. This leaves out an important and encouraging piece of data.
4. The language is quite strong in places. The goal of this document should be to unite the campus rather than to exacerbate existing divides. Example words include insist, dismantle, and disrupt.

Overall, the document is good, but not perfect, and we cannot reasonably expect it to be perfect. EODAC is not Mount Sinai, and the co-chairs are not Moses. Most progress made in this world is incremental, so this might just represent the next iteration of progress as the campus moves towards the ideal of an equitable, equal place for all of its students and employees.

If you would like to discuss anything related to these comments, please email me at wade.ellis@bakersfieldcollege.edu.

I have a few personal comments to add, my own rather than that of the whole department.

I was hired for fall semester of 2017, so I have recently gone through the hiring process. I would like to suggest a few things relative to commitment 3 and diversifying our faculty.

First, of the many positions I applied to around the country, BC was one of the later ones to post their position online. Many colleges and universities post their positions starting in October or November. BC posted theirs in December or January. Applicants from diverse groups are in high demand across the country as post-secondary institutions try to do the same thing we are doing. They often will have applied for a position and been interviewed before we have even started accepting applications. Could we find a way to change our program review process to post listings earlier in the fall?

Second, once I had applied to BC and was beginning the interview process, I had several instances where I needed information from Human Resources. I was disappointed when repeatedly my emails were not responded to, my phone calls were not returned, and I had a hard time getting answers I needed. Once I had accepted this position, I arranged to visit campus to fill out paperwork. I was able to make contact with HR to arrange an appointment with someone to get everything taken care of. When I arrived on campus at the prearranged time, the person I should have met with was not in the office, and the person I spoke to had no idea who I was. My point here is that if I had this much of an issue getting on boarded at BC, others likely had a similarly difficult time. The interview process for me went fine. I never had any issues getting in touch with faculty or even with Sonya Christian herself when needed. HR seemed to be the rate-limiting step (as we call it in chemistry) for the hiring process. What changes to our HR department could be made to make sure that applicants have an easier time transitioning to BC?