



Associated Students of
Western Washington University
Viking Union 530 – MS 9106
516 High Street, Bellingham, WA 98225
360-650-4648
as.wwu.edu

President Randhawa,

We are writing you on behalf of the Associated Students (ASWWU) leadership, representing our constituency of all students at Western Washington University to express support for the creation of a Chief Diversity Officer (CDO) as part of the President's Cabinet. We would like to begin by thanking your administration for the partnership we have developed in accomplishing important diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) work over the past year. Within the ASWWU, some of this important work has included the creation of WWU's inaugural Black Student Coalition and active planning for a Black Student Cultural Space; both initiatives being direct requests made in June 2020 by WWU's Black Student Organizations (BSOs). Additionally, we have been dedicated to a robust collaboration between ASWWU and WWU lobbying efforts to establish a traditional, Coast Salish Longhouse on our Bellingham campus; this initiative stems from demands made by WWU's Native American Student Union (NASU). We look forward to the continued partnership with your executive team on this important work.

As we have eagerly supported DEI initiatives on campus, we have recognized the cyclical pattern of student groups, commonly comprised of a majority BIPOC students, having to assemble demands from the university to move the needle on campus-wide DEI work. In our opinion, this process is an unsustainable path for change and one that has exhausted generations of students. As a result, we have explored the methods of peer-institutions to accomplish structural, anti-racist change. From this, we have noted that all other public universities in Washington include an individual at the Vice Presidential or executive level to oversee DEI work at their respective institution. [Similarly, it appears appointment of CDOs and senior administrators who focus on university DEI work has been adopted by several institutions of higher education.](#) We believe that creating a similar position at WWU is critical to creating a community that "...sees equity, justice, inclusion, and diversity as fundamental principles for authentic engagement" ([WWU Strategic Plan, Goal #4](#)). A CDO would be an active contributor to our co-creation of DEI initiatives and expedite the historically siloed approach we have observed at the executive level.

We understand that all university community stakeholders must be active in the work to advance DEI; however, a coordinated and centralized approach to the change ahead will be pivotal in shifting the burden away from student groups to approach our institutions and reveal their interconnected traumas. Without a CDO, the responsibilities of advancing DEI initiatives often becomes additional work for our BIPOC colleagues. This work is often uncompensated, can be traumatizing, and leads to racial fatigue. Instead, we hope to work with you to equip a CDO and their team to proactively identify and address institutional shortcomings and build effective partnerships to provide inter-divisional solutions.



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We are aware of current financial constraints of the university as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and changes in student enrollment. We are also aware that the creation of this position and team would require dedicated revenue. However, if our community is committed to advancing anti-racist work and addressing systemic inequities, we must find creative solutions to resource this position and acknowledge the role it will assume in advancing commitments laid out in our strategic plan. We are also confident the contributions of a CDO will intentionally invite prospective BIPOC students to choose WWU as a place to pursue their degree, valuing their safety alongside their academic and personal success.

We hope this letter can serve as a starting point for continued dialogue and discussion. We are committed to working with you, in good faith, to provide all WWU students with a transformative and equitable college experience. In the interest of demonstrating stakeholder interest, we have also included some testimonials provided by current WWU students and alumni on why they believe having this position would support their academic and personal success. Please feel free to reach out to us to discuss this matter further.

Sincerely,

Abdul Malik Ford
ASWWU President
ASWWU Executive Board, Chair

Sargun Handa
ASWWU Senate Pro Tempore
ASWWU Student Senate, Chair

Ranulfo Molina
ASWWU Vice President for Diversity
Ethnic Student Center Executive Board, Chair

cc: John Meyer, Chair, Board of Trustees
Melynda Huskey, Vice President for Enrollment and Student Services
Brent Carbajal, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs
Rich Van Den Hul, Vice President for Business and Financial Affairs
Stephanie Bowers, Vice President for University Advancement
Donna Gibbs, Vice President for University Relations and Marketing
Paul Dunn, Chief of Staff and Secretary to the Board of Trustees

Appendix I: Student testimonials in support of a CDO position at WWU



Name:	What experiences led you to support the creation of a CDO position at WWU? Are there any other experiences you would like to add?
Anonymous	<p>“The things all of my friends, who are POC, tell me about their experiences at the school.”</p> <p>“Throughout my 4 years here I have heard so many times that more needs to be done. Bellingham in general as an extremely white space and I have read letters in classes about how uncomfortable POC feel here. Anything we can do to make this a better and safer space with them is a good thing.”</p>
Anonymous	<p>“Education is white in general. There aren't many places POC feel comfortable studying at besides the ESC and at home, but that isn't much of an option. In addition, it would be nice to have a chief to advocate more space and promote inclusivity within WWU. Overall, someone that's willing to be there for you.”</p>
Anonymous	<p>“Diversity work is usually thrown at committed students of color. We need a position to properly pay these students for their commitment.”</p>
Jude Ahmed	<p>“It is unacceptable that students have to do the work and make changes so that future students have a better experience at Western. We told you what WWU can do to support us, and now there needs to be a Chief Diversity Officer because students asked for one. And that does not mean hiring a privileged person of color to complete WWU's "DEI timeline". It means hiring someone who is able to identify the ways in which higher education policies and procedures harm students, and who is then able to remedy those policies and procedures.”</p> <p>“The money exists, it just needs to be reallocated :)”</p>
Kassidy Haluska	<p>“My friends/colleagues of color often talk about their frustrations with the University. They have told me about how they feel unheard, like they don't really belong, like they're not always supported. Western does some good work on this front but I believe a Chief Diversity Officer would be an improvement. This position could make WWU a safer and more welcoming place for people of all kinds.”</p>
Anonymous	<p>I have been involved with creating a voice for our diverse community the past couple of years. I believe WWU needs a Chief Diversity Officer because the BIPOC community needs this change in order to make real change happen that will benefit BIPOC students.</p> <p>“As a WWU student, I can vouch that we do not have enough BIPOC in leadership positions. We need more diversity in these positions if we want all students' voices heard. Creating a CDO position will make a big impact in the change we need for our students.”</p>
Anonymous	<p>“Attending Ijeoma Oluo's event for MLK day reaffirmed what I have heard or experienced as a student. Too many classes have white led "traditional" narratives, microaggressions happen to my POC, disabled, woman/ enby peers and coworkers, POC are ignored, and the university continues to make empty promises. Furthermore, the students who try to enact change at the institution are told to "trust the system" because the institution just</p>

"moves on a different timeline than students expect". However, the university knows that they can back out of their promises or fail at fulfilling them because those students filter out after 4 years. We need people in PERMANENT positions at the University that will be dedicated to making sure the university keeps their promises. This Diversity Officer position is a great start, but it should not stop here. We need MANY different positions, groups, etc that will all be dedicated to helping this Diversity Officer so that the responsibility isn't just pinned on one POC individual. I would even suggest an advisory group or set of new jobs that are meant to echo this Diversity Officer's job description and objectives. We need to hire multiple POC in prominent positions at every college, as advisors, as counselors, etc. Its hard enough as it is for people to ensure that progress is being made. Some faculty and admin are too trusting of the systems that POC Know not to trust, so they just let processes go by slowly because they're more occupied by "more important things" than ensuring marginalized students have the resources and representation in the courses we need or they trust the process and as student interest changes with the 4 year rotation of students, they forget or drop the issue. We NEED more permanent positions at this university that ensure the responsibility of diversifying and decolonizing our university doesn't fall on already overwhelmed students."

Western has the reputation of being a "progressive university". However, based on what I have heard from my student worker predecessors and POC, disabled, LGBT+ colleagues, it's the students and some faculty that build this representation, and not the systems, curriculum, and policies we have in place. When one looks at the resources, systems, curriculum, etc that are in place, they are actually in desperate need of improvement. Western needs to do extra work (especially because Bellingham is home to a significant White Supremacist group) to ensure marginalized students have the support they need and that our institution is TRULY antiracist. As Ijeoma mentioned, an education that is NOT anti-racist is an incomplete education. I am receiving an incomplete education at my university. Actions, policies, etc are either anti-racist or racist. There is no such thing as non racist. In order for Western to claim to be an antiracist university, they must actively fight against and dismantle every racist system in place, change all curriculum, enact the proper resources for POC, etc. Becoming an entirely anti racist institution may even be impossible. This is because the process requires constant reflection and improvement with a complete makeover of the systems in place and even then, the terms racist and antiracist are like removable badges that change based on the action or law in question. On top of that, systemic racism is a centuries old creation. This doesn't mean WWU should give up, but instead recognize their historical failures, current failures and make CLEAR plans to improve. Becoming an "antiracist university" is a huge undertaking that I believe our institution currently underestimates and cannot be done without the creation of jobs like these but again, this should not be the ONLY job creation because the university will need to depend on an immense amount of support from permanent positions to carry out this process. Efforts need to be exhaustive and need to be divided among many permanent positions. This is an excellent start, though, because it is the bare minimum



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	and should have already existed. I believe Western has the ability to do better, but they need more pressure from positions (emphasis on the plural) like this.
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