

# **2024 Public Description of Work for Action Collaborative on Preventing Sexual Harassment in Higher Education**

## **University of Washington**

### **Well-Being as an Adaptive and Justice-Oriented Practice**

#### **Relevant Rubric Area(s):**

1. Prevention - Identifying and Reinforcing Community Values.
2. Evaluation – Evaluating Prevention Programs
3. Organizational Change - Leveraging the strengths of distinct stakeholder groups and creating partnerships between them

#### **Description of Work:**

In 2023-24, the University of Washington's (UW) NASEM representatives partnered with the UW Resilience Lab to guide a process of identifying, promoting, and applying shared community values and practices that support organizational resilience and well-being across academic environments – from individual classrooms to schools and colleges writ large. This ties directly to the NASEM Rubric area of prevention; identifying and reinforcing community values. Based on demonstrated success in leading large-scale initiatives to promote a culture of well-being on campus, the Resilience Lab was poised to convene campus partners to discuss what it takes to shift and adapt culture towards values alignment.

UW is committed to shaping the institution as a responsive learning community prepared to address harmful power dynamics and trauma compassionately. However, until this point, the relationship between community values, power dynamics, and organizational resilience had yet to be explicitly addressed. The School of Social Work (SSW) volunteered as an incubation site for this process. SSW recently launched a new mission, vision, and values campaign to build a foundation for a culture shift towards Anti-Racist praxis in the department while also beginning a strategic planning process; thus, identifying community anti-racist values and practices that promote well-being was warranted. The process allowed staff, instructors, and the dean to reflect, discuss, listen, and build a shared understanding of the academic culture they aspire to co-create and support within the school and model to students. The process provided space to reflect on the experiences and challenges that surface while doing this work and imparting tangible practices for executing values-based actions for academic professionals at varying department levels, including instruction and administration.

#### **Process:**

Resilience Lab director Megan Kennedy partnered with social work professor Ariana Cantu to design the process. Aligned in perspective, values, and practice, Cantu and Kennedy maintain a social-ecological lens and are trained in Adaptive Leadership skills and practices. Their co-leadership utilized a cross-racial facilitation model that intentionally taught frameworks for becoming an anti-racist, multicultural organization whose actions align with their values. Throughout the design, any theory or practice skill offered was centered on the overarching values of the SSW's commitment to anti-racism and a growing need to resist anti-blackness institutionally. With this foundation, Cantu and Kennedy engaged

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participants in real-time feedback through data collection that allowed future sessions to be designed in collaboration with the expressed needs of the group to model power sharing amongst the participants.

Between January 2024 and May 2024, six community practice sessions alternated between in-person and online formats. Each session focused on frameworks, practices, and processes to address collective well-being and anti-racist practice across varying institutional roles and striving towards an adaptive, justice-oriented culture. Each session focused on a particular value: teaching for equity and access, nurturing connection and belongingness, building resilience coping skills, and connecting to the natural environment. The fifth session addressed power dynamics more broadly by interrogating the hierarchical practices of academia that contribute to sub-cultures that allow harassment, violence, and harm to thrive. The sixth and final session was formatted for the 17 participants to share critical takeaways with leadership.

### Timeline and details:

**November 7, 2023:** Invitation to all SSW faculty to participate in community of practice. Theme: *Inclusion*. Format: Hybrid.

- Invited all SSW faculty to participate in a six-week community of practice during an all staff/faculty meeting.

**January 22, 2024:** Community of Practice Session 1. Theme: *Equity and Access*. Format: In-person.

- Introduced the “Continuum on Becoming an Anti-Racist Organization” and asked participants to assess the SSW in relation to the continuum.

**February 5, 2024:** Community of Practice Session 2. Theme: *Building Resilience Coping Strategies*. Format: Online.

- Centered Nap Bishop Tricia Hersey's book, "Rest is Resistance." Discussed Hersey's concept of resisting "grind culture" and offered tools to incorporate her framework into classroom and faculty/staff meeting settings.

**February 20, 2024:** Community of Practice Session 3. Theme: *Nurturing Connection*. Format: In-person.

- Discussed how connection is nurtured within the SSW institutionally, on teams, and in the classroom. Introduced the adaptive leadership tactic of building effective containers to address complex issues.

**March 4, 2024:** Community of Practice Session 4. Theme: *Connecting to the Natural Environment*. Format: Online.

- Presented concrete teaching practices related to environmental justice and connecting to the natural world. Identified gaps in current course offerings related to theme - and discussed including more of an environmental justice focus within the core curriculum.

**April 1, 2024:** Community of Practice Session 5. Theme: *Power*. Format: In-person.

- Discussed the relationship of power and well-being. Introduced four models of power: power over, power with, power to, and power within. Discussed how leaders at all levels of the organization are crucial to co-creating long-term, systemic change.

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**April 19, 2024:** Community of Practice: Session 6. Theme: *Reflection and Strategy*. Format: In-person.

- Shared key learnings and takeaways with school leadership and the dean with the aim to inform the strategic plan.

**May 7, 2024:** Report Back at SSW All Faculty/Staff Mtg. Theme: *Transparency*. Format: Hybrid.

- Presented work and findings to the entire SSW faculty and staff to fulfill and model transparency and catapult the next steps.

**July-August 2024 (upcoming):** Strategic Planning Meeting with the Dean. Theme: *Sustainability*. Format: In-person.

- Plan to align and inform the SSW strategic plan based on lessons learned from this work. This phase will move into next academic year.

### Participants as co-designers and evaluation process:

Between each session, the facilitator team distributed a post-session data collection Google Form to inform content for the next session that posed basic questions, such as: 1) Tell us what worked from the last session. What was helpful? 2) Tell us what did not work from the last session. What could have been more helpful? 3) These are the topical sessions we can engage with. Please vote for your top choices.

After the six sessions, participants received an invitation to provide feedback through an online Google Form. Questions included: 1) Tell us what are two things you have taken away from this experience. 2) How do you or will you use this in your role here at SSW? 3) Tell us two things you would have liked to see more of in the community of practice. 4) What else might you be interested in participating in around the well-being work? 5) Are there other reflections or ideas you would like to share?

An example of a response from one participant highlights how efforts to identify, develop, and reinforce shared community values at various levels within an organization promote buy-in for and underline the importance of maintaining a civil and respectful environment.

“I am taking away an affirmation that there are like-minded teachers and practitioners here (at the SSW), along with a handful of concrete practices that I plan to use in class and in team meetings to support well-being. I believe relational work that centers well-being is a powerful tool for disrupting white supremacy, and doing this in small steps as a community feels very useful at this moment in time.”

A staff/instructor from the Office of Field Education commented on how she is considering how the discussions in the community of practice model relate to her work, and to apply the anti-racist model to interrogate policies and structures in her department.

“Carving out work time to focus on community of practice reflection, reading and integration into my work. I am already impacted by the community of practice in my work, (am referring to the) anti-racism model from Columbia to interrogate where the Office of Field Education policies and structures are currently.”

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A tenured faculty, emailed reflections to Cantu and Kennedy following the fifth session that surfaced issues of power and hierarchy.

“Megan, I thought more about your question on where to intervene institutionally regarding faculty and staff safety...

First, it is crucial to acknowledge that there is a very necessary shift in culture on progressive university campuses towards concepts of dismantling oppressive systems. And, without real opportunities to examine our own systems in the university and time to do transformational work that engages all players, institutions are developmentally ‘behind’ in these processes...

It is also important to acknowledge that the pressures students are under are unlike any we have seen before in terms of cost of living, limited housing. - Let alone the climate crisis, global pandemic and horrific violence occurring locally and on many continents. We know the impact this is having on the social and emotional well-being of our students.

The email closed with suggestions for intervening, including a task force charged with collecting data, conversations with administration about why they did not intervene in robust ways, reviewing student conduct codes, and a call for a sea change in culture towards mutual respect and compassion.

As a result of this process, staff, faculty, and the dean learned concrete practices to use in class and teams for relational work that centers values that contribute to individual and organizational resilience and well-being. Secondly, they were introduced to an anti-racism framework to interrogate where department policies and structures currently operate. Lastly, they deepened their connection and received affirmation from like-minded teachers and colleagues working towards a culture of care and well-being for our students, ourselves, and our communities. The next step is to support SSW leadership in integrating the ideas that came from this community of practice into their strategic plan process, which will carry on into the 2024-2025 school year.

The process also builds on the UW’s Diversity Blueprint Goals around inclusion and accessibility and transparency. which are being carried forward within SSW. For example, two goals of the blueprint are:

- **CULTIVATE AN ACCESSIBLE, INCLUSIVE, AND EQUITABLE CLIMATE:** The University must actively work to create and maintain learning, working, living, and healthcare spaces in which students, faculty, and staff from diverse backgrounds believe they can thrive. Our goal is to foster a welcoming climate that is accessible, inclusive, and equitable across our research, healthcare, virtual, and campus environments.
- **IMPROVE ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY AT ALL LEVELS:** University leadership must commit to working toward established goals for diversity, equity, access, and inclusion. Leaders at all levels must accept accountability by implementing new initiatives to achieve these goals; ensure that best practices are disseminated across all three campuses and across all of our research, healthcare, and virtual environments; and make clear the University community’s responsibility for advancing diversity, equity, access, and inclusion.

**Next steps:**

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This project is an essential step in a long-term investment in supporting leaders and growing a community of practice responsive to the UW's commitments to address systemic harm and promote a more just, anti-oppressive working and learning environment. In sum, we aim to use this experience within the SSW as a model to build out this initiative to integrate into more schools and colleges across campus to make time and space to understand staff, instructor, and student experiences, center their voices, and collaboratively explore how the institution can support those in our community who are navigating challenging realities while also seeking to shift culture in positive ways.

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