

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at Columbia Journalism School

A report by Lonnie Isabel

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Executive Summary

Background and Purpose

Dean Stephen Coll and Academic Dean Sheila Coronel commissioned this report in the Fall of 2020 after dozens of students in that year's class and more than 250 alumni, most of them people of color from both the U.S. and foreign countries, criticized the school in often bitter and personal terms, for what they described as a predominantly hostile and discriminatory environment.

In a series of petitions and electronic town halls, students and alums portrayed their own experiences on campus with DEI as disappointing and occurring across the entire spectrum of J-School life – including in classes, in interactions with the faculty and staff, in financial aid decisions and, in encounters with campus security. They questioned whether the school was preparing them for the stress, isolation, and racism they went on to encounter in the profession. They were supported by dozens of majority race alums, who signed the petitions and offered their own observations.

An excerpt from the online petition from alums:

“We are deeply concerned and disappointed that CJS has failed its Black, Indigenous and students of color (BIPOC) time and time again through a lack of diversity in its faculty, students and curriculum, and in ensuring their safety on campus. This doesn't just hurt the students and alumni of CJS, but the school's standing as a respectable journalism institution.”

Among the demands:

- More diversity on the full-time, tenure-track faculty
- Bias training for the staff, particularly security
- More attention to the needs and understanding of students who have limited income and who have families
- More financial aid for housing and living expenses in the city
- Hiring career counselors of color
- Mandatory courses in covering race and ethnicity
- More training for the trauma of covering news in a racially inflamed society

The student criticisms followed an extraordinary Spring semester and Summer in which the global COVID-19 pandemic physically shut down the school and much of the city and country. It was also a time of unprecedented and widespread Black Lives Matter protests of police killings of Black men and women that arose after video emerged of the strangulation death of George Floyd in Minneapolis. Former President Trump and his supporters were also pumping up attacks on the press. Journalists of color covering the protests were being targeted by police and counter-protesters.

In newsrooms and journalism schools around the country, journalists of color were demanding changes.

This study was commissioned to evaluate the alumni complaints closely, to assess the school's DEI environment, to examine staff and faculty demographics, to analyze school documents on DEI and related topics, to look at curricula and policies, and to recommend changes.

Conclusions

As at many other institutions, DEI issues at the J-school are perceived differently depending upon one's position in the community. No one denied that problems exist; the only differences were in perceptions of the intensity of problems.

Students of color and foreign students from the global south described their experiences in detailed ways that were believable and heartfelt. And alumni and former faculty of color from as far back as the 1980s related similar experiences and concerns. Most full-time faculty, adjuncts and staff agreed that the criticisms raised had merit.

Demographics show that the student body is much more diverse than the full-time faculty and that full-time faculty of color has stayed at the same number, three or four out of 35 or so (about 10 percent) for the past 10 years. The staff demographics show much higher levels of diversity – about 40 percent people of color, roughly the same percentage of students of color admitted to the 2021-22 class.

To be sure, not all faculty, staff and alumni shared these criticisms, but no one denied there were issues to be resolved. Several department heads, staff members and individual instructors vowed to be more proactive in DEI matters.

The alums' sharp criticisms of the journalism school's DEI environment centered upon classroom encounters with professors and other students; interactions with the staff about career choices or financial aid; and a lingering impression that they were not valued or respected as others were. In several cases, instructors and staff members of color made similar observations and spoke of their own experiences. Almost all those experiences could be categorized as microaggressions, or moments of cultural and racial insensitivity. Alums for example complained that professors and other students expected them to bear the responsibility of educating the rest of the class on issues that involved their perceived heritages. A Latinx alum was flabbergasted that she, a non-Spanish speaker, was constantly asked to serve as an interpreter, and a Black male alum, not from New York, was assumed by the class and instructor to know the intricacies of life in Harlem.

Complaints about structural inequities were less frequent but more alarming. They included alleged bias in awarding fellowships and internships; professors urging students of color and foreign students to focus on stories and projects that either did or

did not involve their own ethnic group; need for more financial aid and housing assistance for students of color who struggle to afford the tuition and expenses; no safe process to register complaints; more career support for students of color and foreign students who for different reasons sometimes have more difficulty finding employment after graduation; and challenges to the relevance of the curriculum to their professional experiences.

Most faculty members interviewed for the study said they were not surprised by the criticisms though several said they thought the environment the alums described wasn't apparent to them.

Many of the complaints were about what was described as a scarcity of faculty and staff of color. Adding minorities, according to most studies and common sense, doesn't automatically change an institution but it is a necessary tactic. It is also necessary for faculty and staff to be attentive to DEI concerns as soon as they arise. Students of color and foreign faculty and staff members can't cure insensitive behavior in others, but they are more likely to recognize problems and communicate more openly with students of color. This, of course, is only a part of the spectrum of advantages of having a more diverse school.

It's worth noting that the student body has gotten increasingly female and international over the years. The fall 2021 class, excluding the small doctorate program, had 349 students; 263 were female (about 73 percent) and 126 were international (36 percent). The racial breakdown of the 223 U.S. citizens and permanent residents (the only students asked to provide race and ethnicity data) was 32 Asians (14 percent); 25 Blacks (11 percent) and 29 Hispanics (13 percent). (See charts on page 28.) Though some alumni demanded higher percentages of students of color, the overwhelming majority of complaints were about financial aid decisions, the result of a complicated and individualized process.

What follows is a list of 21 recommendations for the future, including more involvement in the surrounding community and the nation.

Changing the DEI Climate: Recommendations

The J-School Environment

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 students and students of color, 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.

Introduction

Columbia Journalism School is widely ranked as one of the very best in the world. In the Spring of 2020, the school — like almost all others in the country — was deeply impacted by several huge national developments: the early stages of the Covid pandemic that moved all classes online; the sweeping protests of the police killings of George Floyd and other Black men and women; and the flagrantly public and primarily racist white nationalist movement spurred on by Donald Trump and others, including some prominent commentators on news networks. Journalism, like other major institutions in the country, came under direct attack with biting criticism from inside and out. Questions arose about the overall fairness, purpose and value of journalism itself in this moment of historic societal discord.

Professional schools, and perhaps more pointedly journalism schools, aspire to be more than a supplier of seasoned talent for industry. The best institutions of higher education are critical, forward-looking, even visionary. Over the years they have become forums for discussion of major events and conflicts and of their coverage. During the spring of 2020, often acrimonious internal protest over coverage of the Black Lives Matter movement, white nationalist and racist groups and other social justice issues broke out in newsrooms around the country, including at The New York Times, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, ABC News and The Washington Post.

At Columbia, an online discussion launched among Class of 2020 members and recent graduates — some of them working in newsrooms struggling to cover these same issues. The discussion led to an outpouring of criticism of the journalism school and of the industry, in particular its unrelenting focus on middle class white Americans as readers, viewers and users, and its inability to train, manage and sustain diverse newsrooms. As the nation went through a period of acknowledgement of racial injustice and endured both widespread protests for change and the inevitable backlash, so did the Columbia community.

Hundreds of members of the graduating class and mostly recent alumni signed two petitions and attended Zoom town halls where they panned the school's efforts on diversity, equity and inclusion, often in bitter and personal tones. Alumni from as far back as the 1980s described the school, its faculty and staff as failing students of color as well as foreign students from the Global South. The complaints ranged from microaggressions to outright discrimination. Individuals told of being treated differently from members of the majority race, of being singled out in class when discussions involved race, ethnicity and gender, of insensitive comments from instructors and staff, of a lack of knowledge or interest in them or their perspectives. Some students complained of what they saw as biases in awards and fellowships. Black male students said they were followed and harassed by campus security.

Some of the most damning charges came in descriptions of in-class racial, gender and ethnic tensions with instructors or other students. One of the online petitions signed by

more than 250, many of them majority race, was submitted to the administration and stated, in part: “This current moment presents an opportunity for the institution to look inward and create an environment that will truly foster a new and diverse generation of journalists. As one of the highest-ranking journalism institutions in the world, we expect Columbia’s Graduate School of Journalism to deliver when it comes to diversity in faculty, students, curriculum, and the assurance of safety of students each year.”

Unfortunately, countless students of color have had negative, unwelcoming and racist experiences at CJS, as outlined below. We include these stories — which are by no means exhaustive — to show areas where the school has failed students and why it’s critical for these systemic inequities to be remedied.

More specifically, alumni of color individually complained either in the town halls, the petition, or in subsequent interviews about:

- Instructors and staff members being insensitive to the demands of childcare and housing for those students of color with meager financial resources
- Racially charged comments in classes from instructors and majority race students
- Instructors and staff members who make assumptions about them based upon their features and last names, sometimes expecting them to lead discussions of issues involving their assumed ethnicity
- The sparsity of journalists of color among class visitors, adjuncts, and the faculty itself
- Being unprepared for the racism and discrimination they face on the job after graduation
- Lack of preparation to safely cover protests in which they as reporters of color may be targeted

The petition goes on to state:

“We are deeply concerned and disappointed that CJS has failed its Black, Indigenous and students of color (BIPOC) time and time again through a lack of diversity in its faculty, students and curriculum, and in ensuring their safety on campus. This doesn’t just hurt the students and alumni of CJS, but the school’s standing as a respectable journalism institution. Newsrooms and media organizations across the world expect alumni of Columbia Journalism School to be leaders in this space. They are looking to us as examples of how newsrooms should look and feel across the world. We are supposed to be the future of journalism.

But unfortunately, the school does not reflect its students or the broader community it engages with in any meaningful way.”

From these protests and complaints, this report arises. It was commissioned by Dean Stephen Coll and then-Academic Dean Sheila Coronel. The protesting alumni —

diverse in race, ethnicity, experience in the industry, and in age — organized and submitted petitions and attended the town meetings because, many said, they wanted to improve an institution they valued. It was clear in dozens of interviews and reviews of written statements that a significant amount of pain and torment was part of the experience of the students who spoke out. It was also clear that they did so knowing the potential for damage to their own careers. To protect them, interviews were conducted on a not-for-attribution agreement unless permission was given to use names.

From their perspective, students and alumni complained that members of the staff and faculty were creating an environment that, if not overtly hostile, was insensitive and negligent of diversity and inclusion. Their observations of the school, echoed by white students who commented, were consistent: they felt sometimes categorized, misunderstood and ignored.

A few examples of comments from alumni of color, made in interviews or in writing: “I was so excited to attend Columbia and learn as much as [I] could. Unfortunately, a lot of my first semester was tainted by my horrible reporting class experience. I was constantly picked on by the instructor during every class, for no reason at all and made to feel like I wasn’t enough.”

“Whenever I or my peers discussed race with non-Black students, we were met with hostility, tension, and comments that we were biased, not ‘objective,’ or that we were too sensitive.”

“What we want most is for these spaces to full equipped and ready to handle the diverse populations coming in. Those people should be equally valued and supported throughout their experiences at Columbia, and right now there is a discrepancy with that.”

Among the demands:

- More diversity on the full-time, tenure-track faculty
- Bias training for the staff, particularly security
- More attention to the needs and understanding of students who are mothers
- More financial aid for housing and living expenses in the city
- Hiring career counselors of color
- Mandatory courses in covering race and ethnicity
- More training to deal with the trauma of covering news in a racially inflamed society.

Cydney Tucker, '16, was a leader in getting the initial petition going. At the time, she was the only Black producer covering the Black Lives Matter movement for Al Jazeera and had started thinking about her experiences at Columbia. She posted on social media that the statue of Thomas Jefferson in front of the school, long a sticking point because of the third president’s history as a slave owner, should come down. It received a huge response, Tucker said. The discussion turned to whether a petition should be

sent to the administration. This soon evolved into complaints about the school itself. The petition and a similar one from students in the class of 2020 were submitted to the administration in June, prompting the series of Zoom meetings and town halls.

To be clear, some alums of color saw few or none of these issues, and some said they ignored them, put their heads down and kept working. Others pointed out how difficult it was to be limited to one factor of their identity — like race or nationality. People are more than one or two identifying factors. The concept of intersectionality allows for more complexity. A Latinx woman student may not speak Spanish, for example. Or an African American woman may have had an upper-middle-class upbringing and may be unfamiliar with life in an urban Black neighborhood, or a white male may identify more with his religion than his race. After interviewing several gay, lesbian, and transsexual alumni, it was clear that some of their experiences at the school were reflective more of their sexual identities than their race or religion.

As in the DEI reports of other universities and colleges like Rutgers, Princeton and Harvard, the administration, faculty, staff and students had differing perceptions of Columbia's DEI environment. In individual interviews with full-time faculty members and in group discussion during meetings with the full faculty and adjuncts, few expressed surprise at the alumni criticisms. Some saw the Spring of 2020 as another test for journalism itself, an industry straining to stay vital while facing huge financial pressures and the giant challenge of covering an increasingly diverse nation amid burgeoning distrust of traditional news sources. Others said the students are younger and less able to handle the rigors and setbacks of an intense year. Still others agreed with some students that journalists, particularly in times of social upheaval, should abandon the concept of objectivity. All pledged to do better.

Students have not been alone in describing an inhospitable environment. Several current and former faculty members and staffers of color reported their own experiences that mirrored some of those of students. They said they have encountered resistance and conflict in class, occasionally with another instructor, as well as tensions with other faculty and administrators and that they believed these were based in part on their ethnic or racial backgrounds.

The school has repeatedly made pledges to change. In self-studies, accreditation reports, required university documentation and in public statements made over decades and reviewed for this report, the Columbia Journalism School has acknowledged that it must improve its record of hiring and developing faculty of color, that it must improve recruitment of students of color and that its role in DEI is crucial to the sustainability of journalism itself. Already, the faculty and administration have begun to make changes during the course of this review.

This report is intended to move this process forward, to recommend to the school a series of initiatives that could improve the experiences of future students and position the school to better navigate through issues of diversity, equity and inclusion. It is based on 57 in-depth interviews, a study of staff and faculty demographics for the past 10

years, reviews of documents and the deliberations of a 25-member DEI Commission of faculty, staff and alumni. No attempt was made to resolve individual complaints because of time and resources — and because the intent is to be forward-looking.

During the course of the study, it became clear that many of the complaints were heartfelt and valid and that changes were necessary. The Inside the J-School section details some of the observations and thinking that led to the recommendations and proposals. The generous contributions and insights offered by the dozens of journalism community members who were interviewed and those particularly of the DEI commission were invaluable. The final list was put together by the author and represents his own conclusions.

METHODOLOGY

The material that forms the basis for this study came primarily from not-for-attribution interviews with individuals and groups, including current and past faculty, deans and administrative staff, adjuncts, alumni and diversity, inclusion and equity experts. Documents reviewed include alumni petitions; past Columbia Journalism School reports on DEI, including reviews for accreditation; internal studies and evaluations of the school's performance; diversity reports from a number of academic institutions, including Princeton University, Harvard University, Rutgers University and the Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism at CUNY; diversity reports from several media organizations, including The New York Times, the Philadelphia Inquirer and the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, past letters of complaint from alumni of color; faculty and staff demographic statistics from the past 10 years; financial aid and admissions reports; and the school's catalog of courses.

The interviews were conducted on background — no sources revealed by name or other means — because of the initial volatility of the complaints and the imbalance of power among those who granted interviews, including 21 full-time faculty members, an indeterminate number of alums (many were group interviews or online discussions) and most key staff members. The object was to get as clear and unguarded a discussion as possible about subjects that involved personal risks for all concerned, especially teachers on a quest for tenure and alums who were mortified that their complaints and comments would lead to negative career consequences, because of the power dynamic between professors and their students. None of the school's teachers or staff declined an interview.

An important asset to the study was a volunteer Commission of faculty (both full-time and adjunct), staff and alumni that met periodically to discuss the study and to make solid suggestions that have formed the bases for the final recommendations. A forum for a crosscurrent of ideas, experiences and perspectives on DEI issues seems an indispensable tool as the school moves forward.

As with other similar university studies, a survey of alumni, staff and faculty was planned to explore attitudes and experiences with DEI at the school and to help document the complexity of diversity by allowing individuals to define their personal intersectionality — on race, ethnicity, sexual identity, religion and other issues. The survey was abandoned on advice of statisticians because of the difficulty in finding a large enough group from each of the past 10 classes to make viable comparisons. One of the recommendations of this study is that going forward the school should conduct annual DEI surveys of graduating students, along with staff and faculty, including adjuncts and visiting faculty.

INSIDE THE J-SCHOOL

The journalism school, established in 1912, currently offers four graduate degrees and several certificates. An eight-story building with imposing steep stone steps and columns and the statue of Jefferson at the base, it is home to the Pulitzer Prizes and other important journalism awards, the Columbia Journalism Review, the Tow Center for Digital Journalism, the Brown Institute of Media Innovation, the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma, and several other fellowships and professional development programs. It has about 70 full-time staff members and 35 full-time faculty, including some of the most celebrated and decorated journalists in the world. Its alums populate newsrooms worldwide and count among the top journalists in the country.

Throughout the building the space is tight, and the pace is intense. The domed entrance hall is adorned near the ceiling with likenesses of lions of media of another age — all white men and mostly lost to history. Photos of early classes — again almost all white men with a few women — line the halls. Although the statue of Jefferson outside the entrance draws the most protest, students of color, international students and women complain of the lack of representation of their culture and history inside the school itself. It adds, they say, to their feeling of not really belonging.

This alienation goes back decades. Students of color and international alumni from Asia and the Global South interviewed for this report consistently said they didn't feel welcome or a part of the school at least as long ago as the 1980s. Others, even those who said they had no complaints about exclusion or insensitivity, saw evidence of what they described as unfair treatment of students of color. "I had a fairly good experience," said a post-2010 graduate who at the time of the interview was working as a journalist for a major outlet. "But I know of people my year that had a really tough time."

"I never hung out at the journalism school when I went there," said a graduate from the Global South who attended the school in the early 2010s. "I would go to the law school or anyplace else because I didn't think the atmosphere was welcoming."

An Asian American alum from a class after 2015 said she fell sick and was emotionally wrecked by her experiences in one class, which she described as hostile. "I suffered some really hard criticism, and it threw me off balance," she said, sobbing. "I was told that I would never be a reporter." Accustomed to academic success, she gave up on her dream and decided to attend another graduate program in a different field.

Several current and former faculty members and staffers of color reported their own experiences that mirrored some of those of students. They said they encountered resistance and conflict inside and outside of class, which they believed to be based in part on their ethnic or racial backgrounds.

One instructor detailed friction with a majority race co-instructor who she said attempted to dominate the class and treated her as a subordinate. This reminded the professor of

the many racial slights and insults she had encountered throughout her life. “I’ve been made to feel like I did before I got here. I didn’t expect it.”

Still another instructor, who left the school, put it this way: “The school reflects a white male power structure in ways that are both overt and passive aggressive. A cohort of older white male professors have a lot of power over the school.”

This view of the school was challenged by a number of tenured faculty and members of the administration who point to the positive response to demands for more women professors in the past five years; the willingness of the school to explore changes in the curriculum that occurred after this review was launched; and the hiring of the new dean of student life, John Haskins, an African American with a stellar career at The New York Times and strong advocate for DEI.

Still, for many of those interviewed or who responded to petitions, the current experience of attending the journalism school is fraught with tension — over the cost of the tuition and living expenses in New York City, the job market during a pandemic, and a frenetic pace of assignments and classes that can be overwhelming. For others, the year at the school can be a struggle over what journalism means to them.

Tensions Everywhere

Journalism education has long adopted a model of instruction that is in part an attempt to create the conditions of working as a reporter, editor or producer. Strict deadlines, unbending ethical rules, competition, sharp criticism and pressure to produce are all tactics in use at Columbia and other journalism schools.

In the Spring of 2020, when the pandemic and stories of police shootings and protests were ubiquitous, journalists everywhere began to question whether the verities of journalism are still applicable. This mostly surfaces as a desire to cover a different set of stories than those proposed in a particular course or to write and produce with less restraint on impartiality or point of view. This desire becomes amplified among those students of color and Global South students who see journalism primarily as a means to justice in their own societies and neighborhoods, and they report feeling misunderstood by their instructors. One alum from the 2010s told in a podcast of the experience of first being assumed to be an international student when he was the child of immigrants and being simultaneously discouraged from doing stories about the country he was presumed to be born in.

Many examples emerged of this disconnect between educators and students of color. A professor who said he understood the students’ frustrations put it this way: “I believe we’re all well-intentioned, but we don’t ask the students enough what they think about the future of journalism and its failures. We act like we always know what is best for them.”

Disagreements and assumptions about what's best for students of color and international students arise primarily from a failure to communicate and a lack of acknowledgement of students' thoughts and beliefs of what journalism should be now. One long-time faculty member said a generational divide on what journalism actually is was one of the underlying points of tension at the school and contributed to the feelings of disassociation.

"The world is coming apart, and we're talking about some theoretical way to stay unbiased," one recent alum said. "I began to question the relevance of the school to what I was doing — trying to cover the police killing people."

"I needed more talk about how to survive in a newsroom covering racial protests when you're the only person of color there," said another.

DEI in the Classroom

Journalism schools, including Columbia, have evolved the curricula relatively quickly to encompass the full range of available technology that has radically transformed all media. Instruction in the baseline crafts of reporting and writing have changed more gradually. The petitioners' demands for more courses on covering race and anti-racism and on security when reporting on social justice protests echo those made during previous eras at the school. Changes in this area have come slowest of all over time.

The one-year Master of Science program, the largest with about 200 students annually, offers students choices that can help shape their experience at the school. Some alums said their experience, though, was largely determined by the first semester placements in required reporting classes and by their success or failure in getting the courses they wanted in the second semester.

Traditionally, students in reporting classes are asked to cover New York City neighborhoods and news. Language can be a huge barrier to reporting, and students who can translate or have an insight into a particular neighborhood can be valuable partners. Several dozen alumni of color complained that instructors and other students assumed they were willing and knowledgeable enough to assist based simply on their appearances or last names.

Of particular concern was whether the faculty and staff understood who they were — understood their complexity and that of communities of color in New York City, arguably the most diverse city on earth. Many felt the faculty and staff showed little awareness that they were not just a person with a Hispanic surname, or dark skin, or an accent. That they, like all people, have many aspects, some not obvious but important to the individual. Beyond race, this includes the social class they identify with, family income, their religion, sexuality and life experience.

The alumni petition suggests that students of color and foreign students want an environment that acknowledges them as they are and not as they are perceived to be.

With high expectations and acquiring in most cases a high debt load, they come as most people of color to majority race institutions somewhat leery that they will be accepted. They come perhaps looking for evidence that they won't be. It is the duty of the school, some said, to show them nothing but acceptance.

Identity and intersectionality — the concept that people have many parts to their identities and cannot be described just by visible characteristics of color and gender — have a role in many of the criticisms of the school. Students of color and international students insisted in interviews that the school's intense environment and fast-paced classes left them little time to figure out who they were as journalists and that having the added pressure of representing their identity groups in classes was too much to bear.

Many said they simply wanted to be listened to as in the case of a dispute that arose during the study, when a student of color had become upset in class after a professor did not read her cues to back down from asking her questions about immigration and her family. The professor thought that he had insulted her, and she told him afterward that while she was open to talking about the issues in private, she thought the questions were too intrusive and personal to discuss publicly in class.

Complicating the identity issue is the resistance of some students of color to be “assigned” a race or ethnicity by others, particularly instructors in classrooms. Christine Souders, who recently retired as director of admissions, revealed that only about a third of applicants described their race or ethnicity when prompted on the application form. One alum of color said in one of the town halls that she objected to Career Development telling her to play up her ethnicity on job applications to have a better chance of getting a job.

Some of the reported microaggressions and outright verbal humiliation described by alums in the petitions and interviews represent a mindset among some instructors that the classroom is their domain and that students have to get tougher to survive. Some professors acknowledged that they offer tough criticism in the reporting classes, because it is where standards are set, and success in the program depends on a firm foundation. While a few professors who teach reporting said it was best to take a more empathetic approach, some said their style is aggressive because the industry is so competitive and unforgiving. One professor admitted being a tyrant in the classroom. “The profession is cutthroat, and I think it would be wrong not to the stress that.”

Alumni, particularly alumni of color and foreign alumni, saw this approach differently; some saw it as unfair to them personally that they were subjected to sharp public criticism. From interviews, it emerged that the alumni of color and foreign alumni often came away with the impression that harsh assessments were visited upon them more frequently than others in classes — often where they were the only person of color — and that they were embarrassed in front of classmates.

More commonly, alumni said they felt alone in class or singled out for their race and ethnicity. In a few cases this led to loud conflicts. A Latinx alumna, now a television

journalist, said a professor asked her repeatedly to give the class her insights on immigration issues. This made her uncomfortable because her family had lived in the U.S. for many generations.

An African American student complained about a professor berating him because he knew nothing of urban Black life and was uncomfortable going into what he considered a dangerous neighborhood. In several instances in recent years, alumni and professors described loud, racially tinged arguments in class among students and professors. Several alumni suggested that some professors didn't know how to talk with sensitivity on issues involving race and sexuality.

"I thought she was being mistreated in a way, always talked down to," said one international post-2010 graduate of a Black classmate, now a television journalist. "I wouldn't have expected that here."

These allegations were not investigated, but as one noted African American journalist used to say, "Where there is smoke, there is at least smoke."

The recommendations call for several measures that would address these issues, including a confidential system for registering complaints and a requirement that professors up for promotion or tenure be judged on their performance on DEI initiatives.

Commission member Dolores Barclay, an African American journalist who has had a distinguished career, described her teaching approach as tough love that never involves humiliation or public berating of students. "There is a way to be tough, and I will always be tough," she said. "But I also work hard with the students and try to get to know them."

As a professor, Barclay is conscious always of identity, racial and ethnic, and she advises all other instructors to become more involved in learning the goals and aspirations of the students without bending their commitment to excellence in student journalists.

All faculty who were asked said that they teach only to make students better journalists, though a few acknowledge that the school's younger and more female classes in recent years have gotten them to reconsider their methods. The faculty members interviewed welcomed more diversity in the full-time faculty and among adjuncts, some declaring themselves lacking in the ability to teach a diverse class about sensitive issues involving race and identity.

'Tough Place to Be'

This sense of a disconnect is not a new development. In 2008, the year Obama was elected president, alumna Elizabeth Mendez Berry wrote a detailed and thoughtful letter to then Dean Nicholas Lemann that raised many of the same issues that arose 12 years later, after George Floyd's death. It also offered similar suggestions for solutions —

some of them based on interviews with 10 other graduates that year, most of them students of color.

“The alumni I spoke with had positive experiences as well as negative,” Mendez Berry wrote in her letter. “But it’s clear that for many students of color, Columbia J-School was a tough place to be.”

She described classes that focused on covering communities of color that were marred by students’ and instructors’ degrading comments and opinions about the people who lived there, including one instructor who bragged about covering crackheads and murderers in the Bronx. One of the grads that year was asked by an international student if he had to carry a gun to cover Black and brown communities because he had heard so many tales of how dangerous it was to report there. One Latinx student complained about the absence of U.S.-born Hispanic students.

As did students in 2020, Mendez Berry said she valued her education at Columbia and was motivated to make it a better place for minorities. “While my two years at Columbia have been a great experience, my friends’ warnings were not unfounded,” she wrote in the letter. “Like them, I was disappointed by the school’s failure to confront race though it came up again and again. I think that when students are encouraged to examine all of their biases in reporting (not just their racial biases), the quality of their journalism will increase.”

The letter called for more hiring of Black and brown instructors, more training and readings on racial matters and the integration of race and ethnicity into the curriculum. Now a book editor, Mendez Berry said in an interview that she met with two deans after submitting the letter and that as far as she knew nothing was done.

“We would be in a different place if the school had tried to change then,” she said. Like herself, several of her classmates have left the news business. More recent alumni of color predict it may happen to some of their classmates, not because of a lack of opportunity but because of a failure of journalism and the school to listen to their own ideas of what journalism can do for them. “It feels like a missed opportunity,” Mendez Berry said.

DEI and the Faculty

Diversity in numbers is a key indicator of institutional commitment, though not the only one. More hiring of faculty of color has been a consistent demand for generations at the school. Scotti Williston, who was the first woman of color to head a foreign bureau for a major television network, taught at the school in the early 2000s. She and several others said there seems to exist a de facto quota of three full-time Black instructors. A review of the records suggest that has been a steady number. (See “Full-Time Faculty by Race/Ethnicity 2011-2021” on page 29.)

Over the years, the school at any given time has only had four or less full-time Black professors, one or two Latinx and one or two professors each of Asian and Native descent. Former Dean of Student Life Ernest Sotomayor, a recognized national leader of Hispanic journalists, decried the school's lack of effort in hiring full-time Latinx instructors during his tenure, which ended in 2020. "I raised this issue many times, and I wasn't listened to," he said.

Williston said the school tried during her tenure to address the coverage of race with a workshop. But after the instructor teaching it left the school, this effort was dropped.

The debate over whether more instructors of color are necessary shouldn't be accredited only to alumni of color, who have said consistently that the presence of authority figures who look like and better understand them are essential to their education and their professional success. The benefits of diverse backgrounds are clear for majority race students as well. There was universal agreement on the part of all interviewees and commenters from all parts of the school, past and present, that more diverse hiring is urgent and that more efforts should be made to hire and retain instructors of color.

One primary recommendation of this report is that the school institute an aggressive hiring plan that places top priority on adding professors and adjuncts of color and international professors and adjuncts when any opening occurs. The full-time faculty is rather small (35), and two degree programs, the doctorate and the Master of Arts, have no faculty of color. Some commission members said an opportunity was missed when the M.A. program, which trains experienced journalists, launched without a single faculty member of color. "This cannot happen again," a commission member said.

The heads of both departments have agreed that the lack of instructors of color is problematic and have declared they will work diligently to diversify the faculty.

Faculty members who served on the commission were strong in their criticism of past hiring and in their insistence that more instructors of color stand before classrooms at the journalism school. More than half endorsed requiring at least one professor of color in each class with more than one instructor. Professors Samuel Freedman and Bruce Shapiro strongly endorsed this proposal. This has become one of the recommendations of this study.

Notably, there is a marked discrepancy between the faculty and staff demographics. In 2021, the staff was 61 percent female and 39 percent male. (See "Faculty and Administrative Staff by Gender" chart on page 33.) Over the past 10 years the percentage of whites on staff has declined from 67 percent to 59 percent, with minimal change in other demographic categories. In 2021, Blacks represent 18 percent, Hispanics 11 percent and Asians, 6 percent of the administrative staff. (See "Administrative Staff by Race/Ethnicity, 2011-2021" on page 32.) The remainder either declined to state or were of two or more races. The numbers represent significant and consistent staff diversity.

In addition, the hiring of John Haskins as dean of student life, and the promotions of Melissa O'Keefe to associate dean for faculty affairs and human resources and Tarin Almanzar to associate dean of admissions and financial aid are significant moves.

The small full-time faculty has had more challenges in diversity hiring, although several key hires, including Jelani Cobb and Nina Alvarez, represent an uptick. Overall, the faculty demographics have also maintained consistency over the past 10 years. For the first time, in 2020, women and men faculty were split 50-50, the result of a determined push by women professors to increase the numbers. In 2021, the faculty was 56 percent male and 44 percent female. (See "Full-Time Faculty by Gender, 2011-2021" on page 31.)

Opportunities to hire faculty on a tenure tract are limited, particularly in the small M.A. and doctorate programs. But visiting professor positions, adjuncts and teaching fellowships offer an opening to diversify the instruction staff. One recommendation of this report is that the school consider candidates of color for each new position before interviewing others.

Adjuncts, many of whom still work as journalists, are a key potential resource for DEI. Many co-teach with full-time professors, particularly in reporting classes. They support the recommendation that in such classes, one of the instructors should be a woman or a person of color or both. Several members of the commission argued strongly in favor of this and of establishing a better system to identify, develop and hire adjuncts of color.

"We work in this industry," one adjunct of color said. "We're in touch, and we can help students understand the potential roadblocks that may arise for them in newsrooms. We're closer most times in age and we have worked in diverse newsrooms, when many in the full-time faculty may not have, at least for a while."

During an orientation meeting in 2021 for incoming adjuncts for the second semester, several adjuncts spoke passionately about both the need for diversity not just in numbers of faculty and staff but also in the curriculum, books and other assigned reading and viewing material. They also agreed with students that more training was needed for young journalists covering stories like the movement that arose after police killings of Black men and women and the white nationalist counter protests.

Can a more diverse faculty fulfill the quest for diversity, equity and inclusion? No, said Professor Amber Johnson, associate provost of Saint Louis University's division of Diversity and Community Engagement, and a nationally known expert on DEI. "But it can only help. More diverse hiring in key positions has been effective and essential for people in an organization who feel under-valued, not spoken up for and ignored. The human cost is enormous. It's harmful to the minorities and to the organization."

Dr. Johnson went on to say that an organization has to acknowledge widely that there is a problem with DEI. "Solutions only come from that realization," she said.

Looking Ahead: Leadership, Community and Commitment to DEI

DEI consultants say leadership is one of the most vital cogs in DEI. Initiatives live and die with the interest or lack of it in an organization's leaders. For this reason, the report recommends a required annual DEI review of top leaders at the school. This can be a self-evaluation by the leaders themselves or by a committee. Only when an institution agrees to hold itself accountable can real change occur.

Leaders must also consistently and strongly advocate for DEI. The opposition to DEI measures can arise from ignorance, denial or lethargy. Leaders can't allow the drive for DEI to sputter because of such factors. An absence of leadership causes an institution to drift toward the traditional practices or lack of initiative that created the current crisis.

Each school year presents a new opportunity for refinement of DEI, just as it does for changes in the curricula or in new equipment and new technology.

The school's DEI environment, however, is created as much in individual classes as in overall policies and practices. A firm commitment to attentiveness to DEI in classes, in individual conferences, in student assessments and in everyday interactions is essential to change. Without threatening the binding principle of academic freedom, classroom accountability on DEI must also be established.

One of the recommendations is for an annual survey of students, and also at least initially of faculty, staff and administration, to gauge attitudes and record experiences at the school as it relates to DEI. This should help guide future DEI decision-making. It is also a vital way to stay in touch with the students' thinking over time on the school's DEI environment.

One exterior way to improve the environment at the school is community involvement, a well-established DEI tactic. The journalism school wisely uses New York City as a reporting lab, a source for stories, on-the-scene experiences and craft-building. Several of the recommendations involve opening up the school to more connections with communities of color, both academically and professionally. Exchange programs for professors and students can help change a DEI culture for the better. This could involve joint journalism projects, symposia and sharing of data resources.

Another recommendation is to create a summer journalism program for high school students, particularly those from neighboring high schools. Doing so would serve several purposes. It would help identify potential students; it would offer teaching opportunities for adjuncts and alumni; and most importantly perhaps, it would engage the journalism school more in the communities that have been part of its instruction for years, communities that have been ignored historically by the city's primary media organizations. It would be a community give back that would benefit the school and its future attempts to build a stronger DEI environment.

Building stronger ties through internships at Black newspapers and news websites, Spanish-speaking news, radio and television outlets, Arabic language media and many other of the rich ethnic media outlets in the city and elsewhere would increase opportunities for graduating students and should be encouraged.

Internally, adjuncts and those interested in becoming adjuncts are also important to establishing a better environment for students of color and foreign students from the Global South. Much care should be taken in the grooming of an adjunct force that better represents the city and the student body, racially and ethnically. The adjuncts spoken to are anxious to contribute.

Expanding the pool of applicants of color can be accomplished with more community involvement and input. The Admissions staff described extensive recruitment efforts. Everyone at the school, particular alumni, faculty, staff and administration of color, should be asked to recruit — at conventions, in newsrooms, on assignments. The school, conversely, must commit to finding more sources of financial aid for the recruits.

A few commission members asked if the school were recruiting some students of color who were under-prepared, particularly with insufficient writing skills, to endure the rigors of the J-School. A national decline in expository writing skills suggests it's not just students of color whose writing suffers. There was no way to fully determine the extent or origin of this problem, but it should be explored.

One indicator of student struggle is the high percentage of students of color who have received letters warning them they are underperforming or are facing academic probation. In 2013-14, for example, 11 of the 15 students sent warning or probation letters were U.S. citizens or permanent residents. Of these 11 students, nine — nearly 82 percent — were Black, Hispanic or Asian. (The school doesn't compile data on race and ethnicity from international students, so they are not included here.) In 2019-2020, 10 of the 15 U.S. students — 67 percent — who received warning letters were in those three demographic groups.

A very small number of students face more serious discipline — suspension or expulsion — each year for offenses as varied as failing a course, plagiarism and misattributing a quote. Between 2015-2020, 16 students were disciplined, eight of them domestic. Of these eight, five — 62 percent — were Black or Hispanic.

Each case is different, of course, but the numbers of minority students receiving a warning or discipline most years exceeds the percentages of minorities in the class. This is another area for further study. Is it unfamiliarity with the rules or expectations of the professor? Is harsher discipline meted out to students of color? It doesn't appear to be coincidental.

Looking beyond this report, the challenge for the leaders of the journalism school is to keep the extraordinary DEI efforts of students and alumni moving forward. This report is meant not as a one-time assessment but as a map for the road ahead. The school has

made significant steps to change the curriculum and to make key new hires and promotions. It is now time to double down on those efforts and to create a school that is aware of its past and is dedicated to a more inclusive future.

DATA POINTS

STUDENTS AND FACULTY

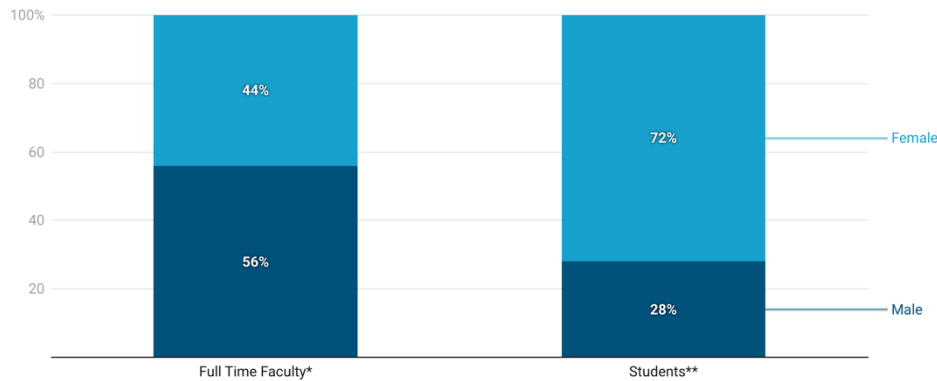
The charts on this page compare the student body and full-time faculty by race and ethnicity and gender.

Faculty and Students by Race/Ethnicity, 2021



**Excludes Lemann and Coll and part-time faculty. **Excludes international and PhD students. Non-Disclosed makes up 2 percent. Pacific Island and Two or More make up 1 percent each.*
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Faculty and Students by Gender, 2021

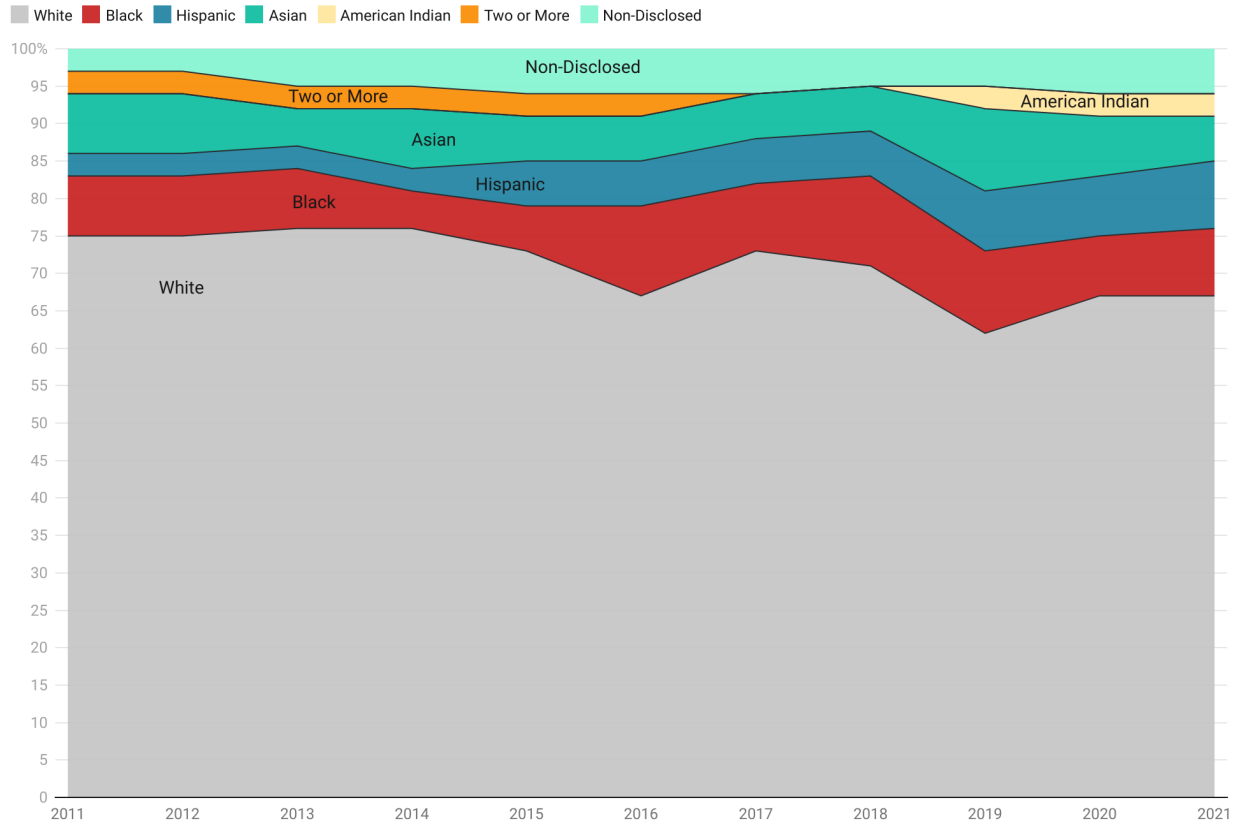


**Excludes Lemann and Coll. **Excludes PhD students.*
Created with Datawrapper

FACULTY

This chart and table show the overall breakdown of the full-time journalism school faculty by race and ethnicity over a ten-year period.

Full-Time Faculty by Race/Ethnicity, 2011-2021*



*Excludes Lemann and Coll
Created with Datawrapper

Full-Time Faculty by Race/Ethnicity, 2011-2021*

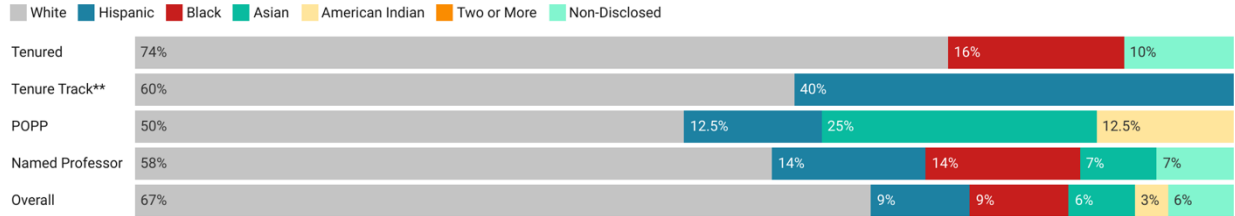
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
White	75%	75	76	76	73	67	73	71	62	67	67
Black	8%	8	8	5	6	12	9	12	11	8	9
Hispanic	3%	3	3	3	6	6	6	6	8	8	9
Asian	8%	8	5	8	6	6	6	6	11	8	6
American Indian	0%	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3	3
Two or More	3%	3	3	3	3	3	0	0	0	0	0
Non-Disclosed	3%	3	5	5	6	6	6	5	5	6	6

*Excludes Lemann and Coll
Created with Datawrapper

FACULTY

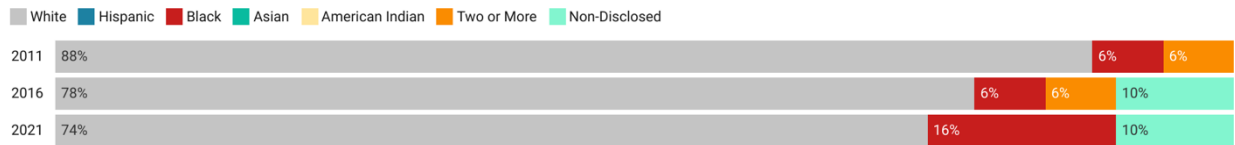
The charts on this page look at the race and ethnicity breakdowns of each track of the full-time faculty overall in 2021 and over a ten-year period.

Full-Time Faculty by Race/Ethnicity and Track, 2021*



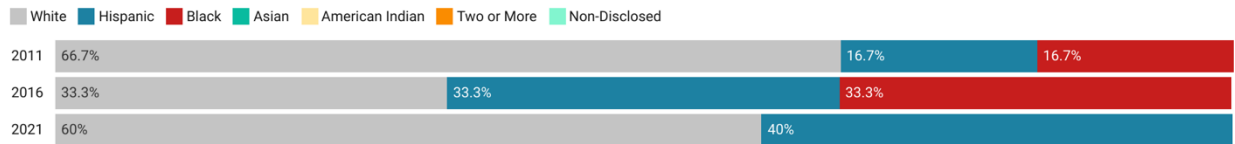
*Excludes Lemann and Coll. **Includes visiting faculty.
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Tenured Faculty by Race/Ethnicity, 2011-2021*



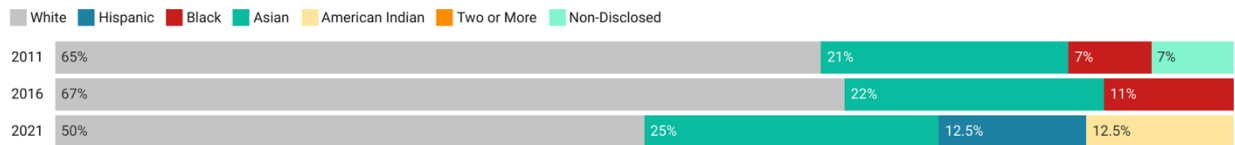
*Excludes Lemann and Coll
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Tenure Track Faculty by Race/Ethnicity, 2011-2021*



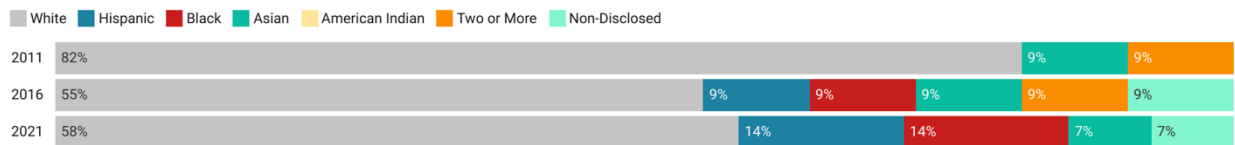
*Includes visiting faculty
Created with Datawrapper

POPP Faculty by Race/Ethnicity, 2011-2021



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Named Professors by Race/Ethnicity, 2011-2021*

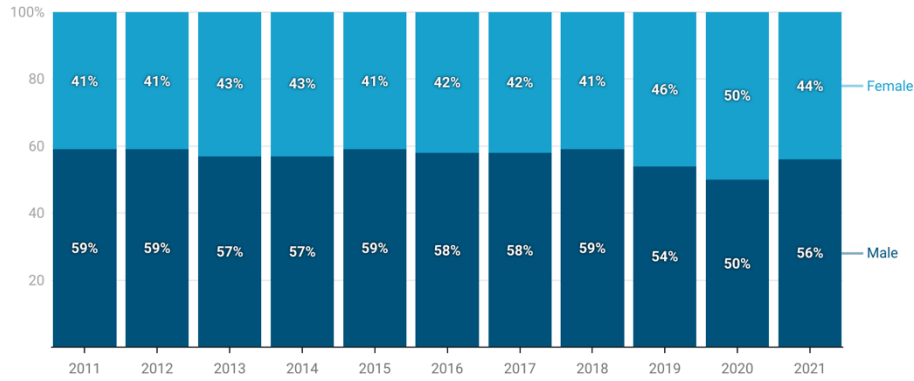


*Excludes Lemann and Coll
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FACULTY

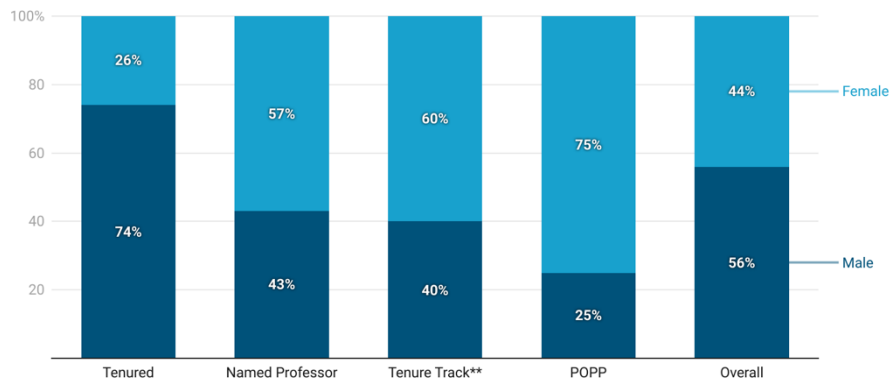
These charts look at the gender breakdowns of the full-time faculty.

Full-Time Faculty by Gender, 2011-2021*



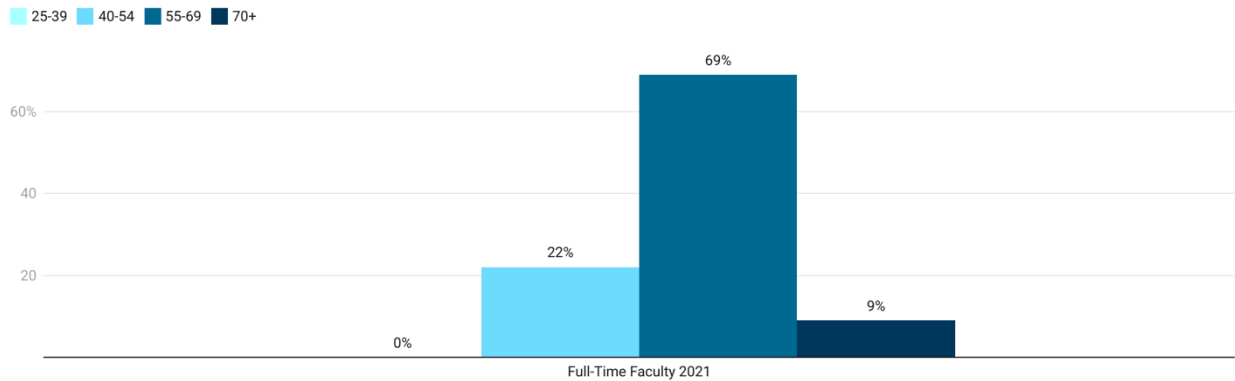
*Excludes Lemann and Coll
Created with Datawrapper

Full-Time Faculty by Gender and Track, 2021*



*Excludes Lemann and Coll. **Includes visiting faculty.
Created with Datawrapper

Full-Time Faculty by Age, 2021*

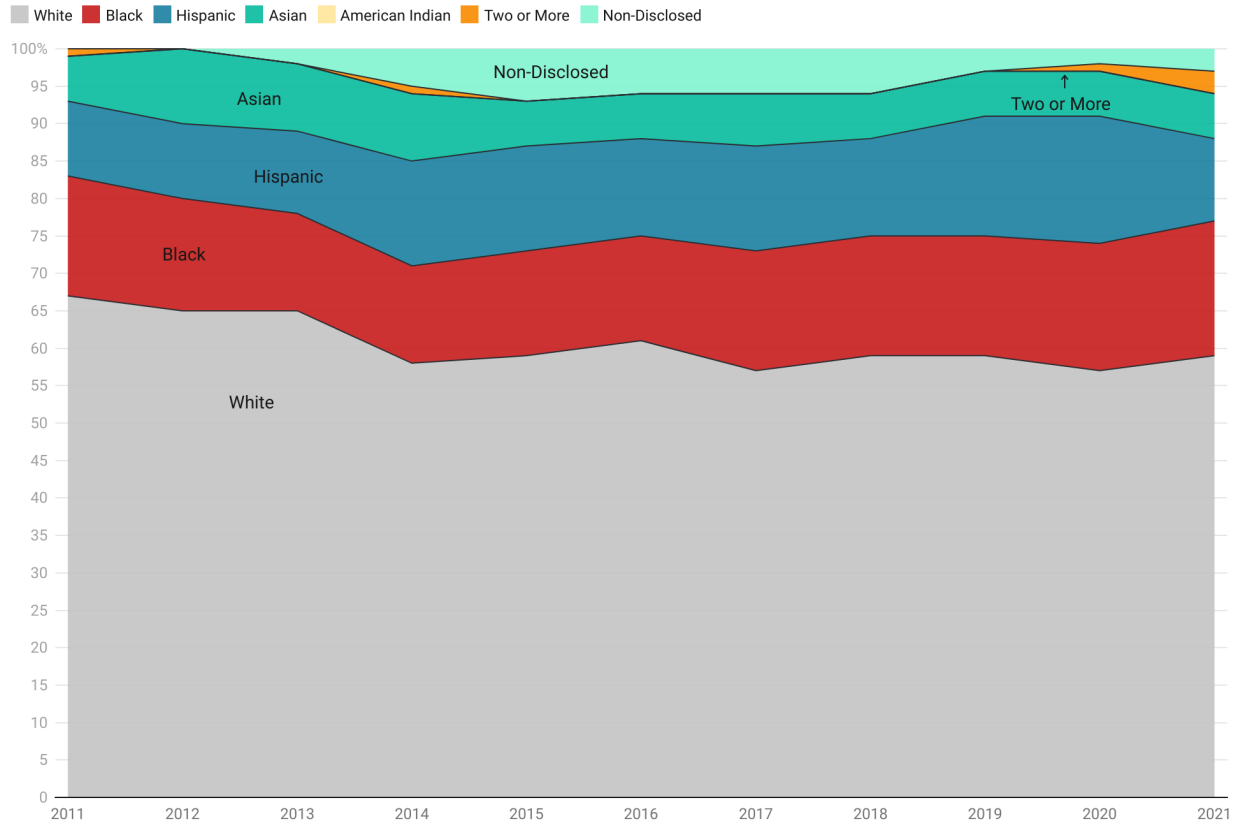


*Excludes Lemann and Coll
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ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF

These charts show the overall breakdown of the administrative staff by race and ethnicity over a ten-year period.

Administrative Staff by Race/Ethnicity, 2011-2021*



*Includes full- and part-time staff. Excludes casual and student workers.
Created with Datawrapper

Administrative Staff by Race/Ethnicity, 2011-2021*

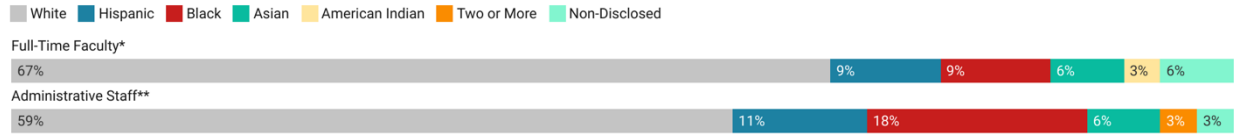
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
White	67%	65	65	58	59	61	57	59	59	57	59
Black	16%	15	13	13	14	14	16	16	16	17	18
Hispanic	10%	10	11	14	14	13	14	13	16	17	11
Asian	6%	10	9	9	6	6	7	6	6	6	6
American Indian	0%	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Two or More	1%	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
Non-Disclosed	0%	0	2	5	7	6	6	6	3	2	3

*Includes full- and part-time staff. Excludes casual and student workers.
Created with Datawrapper

FACULTY AND ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF

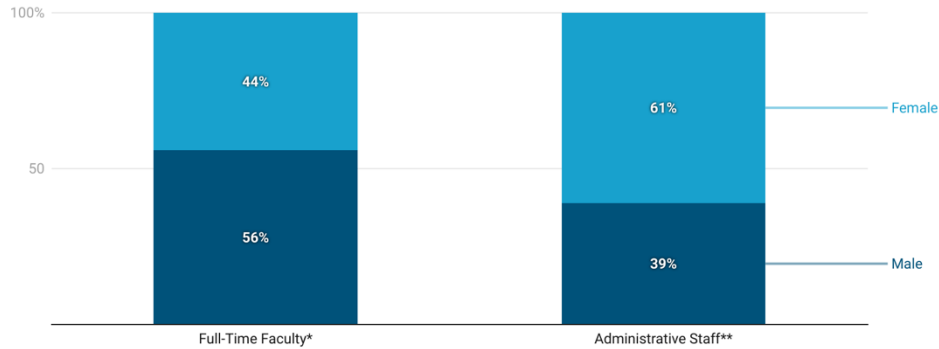
These charts show how the faculty compares to the administrative staff by race, ethnicity and gender breakdowns.

Faculty and Administrative Staff by Race/Ethnicity, 2021



*Excludes Lemann and Coll. **Includes full- and part-time administrative staff. Excludes casual and student workers.
Created with Datawrapper

Faculty and Administrative Staff by Gender, 2021



*Excludes Lemann and Coll. **Includes full- and part-time administrative staff. Excludes casual and student workers.
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DEI Commission Members

Alumni

Ben Conarck '16, Reporter, Miami Herald Media Company

Rishi Iyengar '14, Tech writer, CNN Business

Tesfaye Negussie '08, Digital video producer, ESPN's Andscape

Ayanna Runcie '17, Segment producer, MSNBC

Mythili Sankara '20, Data Scientist, Publishing, McKinsey & Company

Karen Toulon '85, Co-founder, Words Paint Media

Cydney Tucker '16, Freelance video journalist, Left/Right Studios for The New York Times Presents

Administration

Tarin M. Almanzar, Associate Dean of Admissions and Financial Aid

Gina Boubion, Director of Career Development

Elena Cabral, Assistant Dean of Academic Programs and Communications

Faculty

Dolores A. Barclay, Adjunct Faculty; Administrative Manager of the Ira A. Lipman Center for Journalism and Civil and Human Rights

Alexis B. Clark, Adjunct Faculty

June Cross, Professor of Journalism; Director, Documentary Journalism Program

Samuel Freedman, Professor of Journalism

William S. Grueskin, Professor of Professional Practice

Thor K. Neureiter, Adjunct Faculty; Director of Video Journalism

Bruce Shapiro, Adjunct Faculty; Senior Executive Director, Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma; Senior Advisor, Academic Affairs

Duy Linh Tu, Associate Professor of Professional Practice

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lonnie Isabel is a veteran journalist, educator and press freedom advocate who worked for most of his 40-year career in New York. He was a full-time instructor at the Journalism School from 2014-2019. He previously taught at San Francisco State University, Hofstra University and the Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism at CUNY, where he started the international reporting program and a fellowship for foreign journalists facing prosecution and persecution in their homelands. He has worked as a reporter and editor at several newspapers, including the Boston Globe and Newsday. He lives in Oklahoma, where he is starting a prison writing project and is vice chair of the board of Oklahoma Watch, a nonprofit investigative reporting organization based in Oklahoma City.

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