

# White Paper: Descriptive Analysis of Faculty Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Perspectives from the SLU Feedback Survey 2020

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## Background

At the end of 2020, SLU collected feedback about campus climate from faculty and staff from December 10 to January 8, 2021 in St. Louis and Madrid. The survey covered four areas including diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). This was the first-time feedback about DEI was collected as a content area at SLU. The response rate was 63% with 2,646 people completing the survey and 28% of those participants also commenting in the available comment boxes of the survey.

Quantitative findings from the survey were reported in the spring of 2021 showing employees felt overall engaged in their work and several strengths in the area of DEI. Most notably the report showed participants saw their workgroup leaders as fair and supportive and university leadership as treating people with dignity and respect. A few opportunities for growth in DEI were identified – a need for more training in DEI and increased communication and dialogue about DEI.

The qualitative findings were not analyzed and integrated into the spring 2021 presentation, thus, they were requested by the *Joint Provost-Faculty Senate Joint Committee for Faculty Gender Equity* (here forward called committee) for analysis and to deepen our understanding of the climate at SLU.

## Qualitative Method

The SLU Human Resources (HR) office provided a subset of the St. Louis campus survey data, including qualitative comments, to the committee in the fall of 2021. All faculty data was not provided in order to maintain confidentiality of participants, per HR.

There were 3 main areas of comments gathered. Participants were asked respond to three questions in the survey: 1) *Do you have any additional comments about diversity, equity and inclusion here at SLU?* 2) *Do you have any other thoughts of suggestions you would like to share?* and 3) *Do you have any additional comments on your experiences working through the COVID-19 pandemic?*

Comments were organized by race and gender (e.g., male-racial minority, male-white, female-racial minority, female-white) to create an intersectional (race by gender) view of the data. The final qualitative data set of comments included 107 faculty from minoritized racial groups (22.6%; e.g., Black/African American, Latinx, Asian), and 474 total faculty. White faculty included 163 men (34.4%) and 204 women (43.0%). Gender was identified on the binary so non-binary or gender expansive faculty were not identified as a separate group.

## Analysis

Data analysis followed a descriptive approach (Colorafi & Evans, 2016). First data was coded and summaries created by race/genders groupings. Then a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) across groups generated two themes. The focus of the analysis was on DEI, though all comments were coded given how DEI crosses comment areas. For example, comments by women faculty about the pandemic identified the impact of COVID-19 to create an increased caregiving burden that paired with a lack of technological support impacting scholarship and success in teaching online. The total number of comments coded were 1,131.

## Rigor

The codes and emerging themes were compared to categorical coding and a subsequent report created by the HR office staff on the same qualitative comments in the Fall of 2021. The HR's analysis and report were different than the findings in this report in two key ways. The HR analysis only used comments in the DEI section and the categories were used were "positive, negative, mixed, and neutral" responses to DEI at SLU. This created some confusing combinations within a single category. For example, negative comments included both comments that thought there was too much DEI effort at SLU and those who thought there was not

enough. There was also agreement between this report and HR, for example, the HR report and this report found hiring was a primary concern by faculty from minoritized racial groups.

Bias is inevitable in research because it is conducted by humans who are inherently biased (Wilholt, 2009). The author of this report and the committee have a clear agenda – to insure equity on campus for all faculty. This is its own bias, however, it does not preclude the use of steps for insuring coding, analyzing, and reporting accurately reflects the data collected and participants it represents (Morse, 2015). This was done through review of the findings by HR staff, the committee, and then Division of Diversity and Innovative Community Engagement for curating and clarifying final themes and recommendations to the Provost and the university based on the findings.

## Findings

### Between groups comparisons

Initial analysis focused on differences drawn from each grouping of comments. This allowed for distinctions and amplification of smaller demographic groups (for example, female faculty from marginalized racial groups) while maintaining the perspectives of larger groups. Summaries are organized by highlighting differing concerns between the groups.

**Faculty from minoritized racial groups.** Faculty from minoritized racial groups (FMR) uniquely commented on a lack of accountability and transparency when harmful and biased events occur. This included incidences of harassment, discrimination, microaggressions, and inequity in pay, advancement, workload, and biased annual reviews:

*“I’ve also been told by a male and female colleague of mine, who were hired at the same time, that they discovered that the male was offered a significantly higher salary for pretty much the same job, having similar levels of experience. I believe the sentiment about equity is real, but there hasn’t been meaningful accountability - at least in terms of righting old wrong doing.”*

*“As a person of color who has dealt with discrimination and outright hostility based on my racial identity at SLU I would like to say I have seen progress made, but the total lack of diversity at the administrative level (from department chair on up), the stagnant diversity numbers in student recruitment, and the fact that we continue to lose bright young faculty of color, tells me SLU has a major problem and despite the rhetoric, has not taken concrete steps to make diversity, equity, and inclusion real.”*

Some FMR commented on lengthy emails from the upper administration with DEI language, that lacked actionable steps. Examples of “empty words” and “all talk and no action” included the lack of hiring and retention of junior FRM and the lack of funding for DEI efforts. These latter sentiments were shared by white faculty as well and are considered below in the themes generated in the across group analysis.

**Women from minoritized racial groups.** FRM women uniquely identified the problem of student evaluations as being overly negative and biased, particularly during the transition to online learning where they were technologically and practically ill-equipped to perform as well as they are when in classrooms. One suggestion was to remove student evaluations as part of the promotion and tenure evaluation. Women FRM commented on the loss of FRM in leadership over the years. Finally, the hiring of diverse faculty was frequently described as a need. This includes racial, ethnic, and religious diversity for creating intersectional diversity on campus.

*“I fully agree with the need to pay attention to issues of race at SLU. But SLU should also consider diversity in relation to non-Christians (Jews and Muslims, among others). On some settings (some departments) at SLU, being Jewish, for example, is considered a private issue and important Jewish holidays are totally disregarded.”*

**Women.** Women (regardless of racial group) commented on a loss of research productivity due to caregiving responsibilities due to the pandemic. Some cited the loss of daycares or closures of schools, while others commented on the lack of technological support for being successful while working from home. Though some men (regardless of racial group) commented on caregiving during the pandemic, none commented on how this impacted their scholarship.

*“Working from home for SLU should mean provision of things like: headphones, webcam, additional monitor, etc. I’m using my own home internet and space in my own home to do work for SLU, and none of these additional things were provided for me; I have set up my home office with the necessary items on my own dime. SLU has not provided training on things like using collaborative workspace platforms like TEAMS, nor has ITS provided access to sync calendars with Zoom or calendly or any of these tools that would help streamline the process.”*

**White men.** Differences existed within the white male comments suggesting two evident subgroups – 1) DEI as paramount to SLU’s success; and 2) DEI is favoritism towards certain groups. Those in group 1 sounded similar to their FRM colleagues:

*“SLU has major problems regarding diversity/equity/inclusion. There is plenty of talk, but a profound lack of substantive action. The board and administration are more concerned with placating the powerful, rather than challenging entrenched interests to promote authentic diversity/equity/inclusion.”*

The second group ( $n = 19$ ) were concerned with too much of a focus on DEI at SLU or the wrong kind of focus that would lead to other problems.

*“SLU seems to be going overboard on the diversity, equity, and inclusion issue to the point where decisions are being made to show favoritism toward some groups over others.”*

*“I feel that conservative and Christian views are discriminated against at SLU to the point it could drive some faculty to leave SLU if it continues to get worse. I also don’t feel that SLU respects political diversity at all (e.g. only supports liberal agendas).”*

Some offered alternative issues SLU should consider focusing on religious diversity, bias against men and white people, taking a “color blind” approach to hiring/retention efforts, and seeing SLU as leaving their Catholic roots. Though this group was small, they are likely influential given their overrepresentation in positions of department, school/college, and university committees and leadership.

**White women.** White women shared stories about observing sexist and racist behavior of men (race not identified) towards students and other faculty that went unaddressed. A few women talked about focusing on “surviving” in their departments in order to not upset those who make decisions about their workload, promotion, and pay. In this way, inequity was sustained through the absence of due process and fears of retaliation.

*“I work in a field where gender bias is historically bad and there are still comments/jokes/shunning at SLU that floor me. As an esteemed female colleague of mine said, some of the time it’s just about surviving. Had I known how lonesome and personally trying/depressing this was I might have chosen otherwise. Still I feel I have contributed and helped women students, something very important to me.”*

A small group of white women ( $n = <5$ ) seemed to agree with group 2 of white men who and shared fears of discrimination against conservatives and the loss of Christianity at SLU.

**White faculty.** One common coding for white faculty was “progress made” ( $n = 47$ ; as compared to 7 FRM) referring to their perspective on seeing SLU making strides in DEI on campus. Many made simple and short comments saying they saw progress in action and were in favor of a focus on DEI as an institution.

*“I believe the administration has worked hard to be transparent and inclusive.”*

*“I have been helped by my departmental leadership while working from home.”*

*“I believe SLU seriously and deliberately tries to live its values, as constrained by market and societal forces.”*

### **Across group thematic analysis**

When comments were considered in aggregate two themes were identified in the comments: 1) Morale is low; and 2) the “DEI Delusion” and promise. The two themes suggest a significant loss of trust in leadership that began before the pandemic and an urgency for change to align with the Jesuit and social justice mission of SLU.

#### *Theme 1: Morale is Low*

SLU faculty seem to all agree on thing – morale is low. Generally, it seemed faculty were collectively saying what this one faculty offered:

*“Morale is in the toilet. It was before COVID. It's worse now. I almost didn't bother with the survey because I don't believe anything will change, but I don't want a false rosy picture, either.”*

The reason for low morale was many interrelated elements (see Figure 1) including low pay or loss of pay, loss of retirement benefits, need for tech support, heavy teaching workloads during COVID (e.g., moving to online teaching, hybrid classes, etc.), and concerns about hiring and retention. Pay comments included specific references to the School of Medicine given the “front line” work done by physicians and staff during COVID even as pay was decreased.

It should be noted, pay was restored for all faculty in 2021, merit and equity pay increases occurred in 2021-22 and are planned again for 2022-23, and faculty retirement match increased from 0 to 8% beginning January 2022. Thus, some issues may be resolved though this may not change the after-effects of lack of pay raises over the past few years, undue stress, concerns about leadership, and this may exacerbate the struggle to retain faculty.

In the COVID-19 and general comments, several faculty commented on a lack of technological support for working from home and working/teaching online. Inequity was described in the cost of obtaining their own technology (computers, monitors, etc.) and space available in their homes for working remotely and unobstructed. The workload of the 2020-2021 academic year was evident in the exhaustion and effort described.

*“Higher administration does not understand how hard people are working nor how tired they are. They say they appreciate the effort, but that does not appear to affect the expectations or workload, which have increased dramatically. They should weigh this faculty exhaustion heavily when deciding (not!) to start new initiatives.”*

*“I don't think the university did a great job ensuring that everyone had the computer tools/support necessary to work from home.”*

This was exacerbated by early retirement and hiring freezes. Hiring and retention was a common area of concern. Some talked about fears that SLU will be unable to attract talent. It was clear the general feeling was

being unappreciated that could not be remedied through “nice emails” but needed action to show it. Women commented on inequity in workload feeling the burden of service, teaching, and administration.

*“Constant downsizing of faculty and staff in my department has created unrealistic expectations for those who are left to do their jobs.”*

Faculty offered remedies for the current low morale including consistent pay raises, administrative support, reduction in workload, child care center on campus, funding and action for DEI to hire and retain diverse faculty and staff, and retention efforts for keeping excellent faculty.

Finally, faculty within each group seemed to say the same thing – are we asking the right questions on this survey? This was coded as “dumb survey” because many seemed to see the survey as pointless for capturing relevant experiences, attitudes, and significant issues. In these comments some comments on the various reasons for low morale (as in the comment below) while others talked about DEI and the need for action that they thought was not well captured in the DEI questions of the survey.

*“Does it matter what I say here? I've been here many years, and my salary has been in the lowest quadrille for university's like SLU the entire time. I'm paid way less than people in my department who were hired well after me. Nothing ever changes, so why waste university money on this survey, pretending to care what we think?”*

Morale is Low				
Low or Loss of Pay	Loss of Retirement	Need for Tech Support	Heavy Teaching Workload 2020	Hiring & Retention

*Theme 2: The “DEI Delusion” and Promise*

Overwhelmingly FRM (regardless of gender) and most white faculty reported SLU appears to put in some DEI effort but without needed funding, tangible outcomes, unified vision, or a systematic approach. One faculty summed up this situation in an evocative image saying SLU was living in a “DEI delusion” that held promise when our mission aligned with our actions. Some saw this as a lack of will or motivation on the part of SLU leadership who wanted the “good sides” DEI efforts (e.g., publicity, research grant dollars, etc.), but not real change:

*“We continue to ‘talk’ about diversity, equity and inclusion but no consistent action. There are small steps made forward and then it is put to the side. DEI should be fully funded and supported by all groups in the university. It needs to be and remain a top priority.”*

*“We really have to hire more racial and gender minorities on the faculty. Lack of racial diversity is especially obvious in leadership positions. Look, for example, department chairs in the college of arts and sciences. Except for the African American studies program, they are all white; none of them is Black, Latino/a, or Asian.”*

Some additional examples were given including the lack of support for research with and for the LGBTQ community, questions about if LGBTQ folks and those who are not Christian feel comfortable on campus, lack of funding to support DEI leadership roles, and lack of racial diversity upper leadership.

*“Does this University remain committed to having a diverse faculty in terms of religious beliefs? The increased messaging from the President over the past year about the commitment to SLU's Jesuit,*

*Catholic values makes me wonder if SLU is still a welcome place for those who are not Christian, including faculty who consider themselves an agnostic or atheist.”*

Similar comments were coded “all talk, no action” across participant groups. Most of the white women and a subgroup of white men agreed with this assessment of the DEI delusion commenting on similar examples – the need for upper leadership (e.g., the president’s cabinet, provost, etc.) to reflect racial and gender diversity, effort needing to be made in hiring and retaining faculty from underrepresented groups, and some being fed up with all the talk and no systematic and continuous action or vision. Although many named and appreciated the leadership in DEI at SLU as being active and engaging, it seemed a clear vision and strategic plan showing it alignments with the mission was missing for SLU overall.

*“I am afraid the university gives lip service to this issue. If the university was really serious about this, they would identify a way to get all faculty and staff trained in these issues. Each college seems to be trying to create their own committee or center to ‘represent’ their efforts with DEI, which seems forced and showy. Why are we not having dialogue as a group? What are we in silos, trying to address this? Why do we seem to rely on the people of color to be the leaders for these issues.”*

*“To put it bluntly: We are not living the mission when we have departments without Black faculty.”*

*“Senior leadership is almost entirely male. The ‘boys club’ attitude trickles down to the department level and makes SLU a difficult place for women to advance in.”*

Faculty across groups offered areas for action including required DEI training, systematic mentoring for junior faculty, improved pay and benefits for adjunct faculty, annual pay raises to keep up with inflation, cluster hiring of racially underrepresented faculty to create cohorts, hiring more faculty in general to cover workload, hire specific faculty meeting the clinical and educational needs of students with tracks to promotion, and retention efforts that work to keep and assist in the thriving of FRM faculty and students.

*“I appreciate that this is an area in which SLU is trying to improve. In my particular work group I feel disadvantaged as a woman, primarily because none of the DEI training is actually required. I have taken several required modules about cybersecurity, but none about sexual harassment or implicit bias. This means that the people who already care about these issues take the training, while those who don't neglect to. These training opportunities should be REQUIRED of all employees, and especially for those serving on search committees.”*

Finally, some offered changes aimed at the entire campus including changing parking costs to per day or scaled fees based on income, “ban the box” (i.e., removing question on hiring forms about past incarceration or arrests), internal research of faculty, study, and staff on equity, clearer vision at SLU about DEI, increased technology support for flexible and at home work, and community building efforts to reconnect folks to campus and deal with mental health/wellbeing.

*“We at SLU can do much better on inclusion. So many talented employees have been overlooked. Some have been sidelined.”*

## **Summary and Recommendations**

The qualitative findings demonstrate we are at the beginning of a long arc towards inclusion and equity on campus. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated inequities at SLU through increased workload around teaching online, pay decreases and stagnation, balancing caregiving, stress and exhaustion, and lack of technology support, much like at other universities and institutions (Redinger et al., 2020; VanLeeuwen et al., 2021). As noted in the themes, this led to low morale and concerns that the increased talk about DEI would not and has not manifested into tangible changes.

Some may be concerned about the credibility of the findings because only 28% of faculty participants commented suggesting the comments (and these findings) do not represent faculty as a whole. This may be true. And it may be these 28% still present a significantly engaged segment of the faculty who offer important ideas and actions steps that, if taken seriously, could be vital allies in DEI change. Their comments offer insights into interventions needed to see the full potential for inclusive excellence and equity at SLU realized.

Changes aimed at faculty equity have been made since this survey was conducted including pay restored, pay increases based on merit and equity, a partial return of the retirement match to 8%, the creation of the Billiken Boost Program for addressing loss of faculty scholarship due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the significant expansion of the Division of Diversity and Innovative Community Engagement with new roles and integration into the administration and student, staff, and faculty communities.

### **Recommendations**

- Cluster hiring efforts
- Retention efforts that target talented folks from under-represented groups for specific mentoring and support
- Mentoring FRM and women towards leadership/administration roles
- Continued pay increases
- Restored retirement benefits to 10% match
- DEI required training; this should include – 1) orienting faculty from dominant racial and gender groups to where inequity can appear and how they can be part of prevention and to solutions, 2) training on having difficult and respectful conversations about differences (e.g., religion, LGBTQ), and 3) the implicit bias on hiring, workload, and pay decisions.
- DEI roles and personnel in every department
- Measurable DEI outcomes/benchmarks tied to comprehensive strategic plan
- Review IT support for faculty given new flexible work plan

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