

W&L Advocate Coalition Appendix

Systemic Racial Inequality

In President Dudley's message to the W&L community this past June, he noted that, "we are the least racially diverse of the top liberal arts institutions."¹ Indeed, despite a 4% increase in domestic students of color over the last four years, 82.6% of W&L's undergraduate student body is white.² While the school commits itself to providing a "positive learning and working environment for all through open and substantive dialogue,"³ its efforts to alter campus demographics have yielded little success.

On campus, non-white faculty and students face a variety of situations and experiences that make life at W&L difficult. In the classroom, being the only or one of the few non-white students adds pressure, especially when they are expected to be an expert on their respective culture or assumed country of origin. Outside academics, non-white students and faculty often serve in a range of unpaid committee positions dedicated to advancing and supporting diversity. After enlisting their help, the University undermines their dedication and goodwill by failing to act decisively on matters of race.

For example, in 2017 several students were discovered to have been active in posting racist, homophobic, misogynist, ableist, antisemitic, and overall hateful memes on an app called GroupMe. W&L community members were disturbed and felt unsafe attending classes with students who had actively engaged in hate speech. Although the students were removed from their fraternities/sports teams, did community service, and attended sensitivity training, the harm they caused violated the trust of the entire community.

One need only skim the numerous recommendations contained in the [report of the Commission on Institutional History and Community](#) to glean the number of opportunities the University has declined to seize. Anti-racist actions are within the University's power, yet it fails to act.

W&L also plays a role in perpetuating systematic racial inequality by neglecting to adopt an accurate picture of Lee that encompasses his racist views alongside his tenure as president of the University. We cannot deny that Lee made significant and effective decisions that contributed to W&L's long-term financial stability. However, the current mythology of Lee, such as the false belief that he started the Honor System, stymies active dialogue around W&L's history and culture. The Commission on Institutional History and Community's report summarizes this best, "W&L's affiliation with its namesakes — particularly R.E. Lee — greatly limits the school's

¹ Will Dudley, "Priorities, Actions, and Next Steps," 23 June 2020.

<https://www.wlu.edu/the-w-l-story/leadership/office-of-the-president/messages-to-the-community/2019-20-academic-year/priorities-actions-and-next-steps/>

² "Top Colleges 2019," *Forbes*. <https://www.forbes.com/colleges/washington-and-lee-university/#209bde931c05>

³ "Statement of Commitment to Diversity," Washington and Lee University, 2002, revised 2018.

<https://my.wlu.edu/general-counsel/code-of-policies/board-approved-policies/statement-of-commitment-to-diversity>

ability to attract underrepresented minorities as students, faculty, and staff.”⁴ As long as W&L does not openly discuss and provide a more critical, in-depth view of our namesakes, it normalizes and even celebrates the harms caused by them.

Calls to Action

1. Provide a report detailing results from the Strategic Plan’s diversity initiatives.

The burden is on the university to prove these initiatives are truly creating a positive working and learning environment for all. Important measures may include student retention rate (broken down by race and/or socioeconomic background) and diversity data that similarly incorporate not only students’ racial identities, but also includes their socioeconomic backgrounds.

2. Issue a formal apology for benefitting financially from and taking advantage of slavery.

President Ruscio’s address to the community in 2014⁵ only stated that, “We acknowledge that [slavery] was a regrettable chapter of our history, and we must confront and try to understand this chapter . . . we wish had been different but that we cannot ignore.”

Slavery is more than just a “regrettable chapter,” and a statement from W&L that clearly accepts responsibility for being complicit in and financially benefitting from slavery is long overdue. In addition, the University ought to provide reparations for any descendants of enslaved people who were owned by the University, such as tuition waivers and/or other financial support.

3. Develop a regular inclusion and sensitivity training program for students and faculty.

The diversity training offered to students during Orientation Week is not enough; students may need a refresher during their four years they spend on campus. Perhaps such additional training could involve fraternity and sorority programming, as these are large and influential aspects of campus social life. Diversity training for faculty must also be reinvigorated such that all students feel welcome in classroom spaces. The African Society at W&L also suggested tailoring inclusion and sensitivity training specifically for departments, since these have different needs, different student populations, and different histories of problematic incidents.

4. Create a paid model for the time and work non-white students and faculty put into committees and advising university leadership on diversity initiatives.

University Ambassadors (tour guides), whose work is focused on outward presentation, are paid. W&L must similarly value work toward inward transformation.

5. Provide Title VII resources on an easily accessible platform.

Currently, information relating to Title VII is difficult to access. Publishing it (for example) on the W&L page dedicated to Non-Discrimination and the Equal Opportunity

⁴ “Report of the Commission on Institutional History and Community,” Washington and Lee University, 2 May 2018. <https://my.wlu.edu/document/report-of-the-commission-on-institutional-history-and-community>

⁵ Ken Ruscio, “Continuing the Community Conversation,” 8 July 2014.

<https://my.wlu.edu/presidents-office/about-the-presidents-office/history-and-governance/past-presidents/kenneth-p-ruscio/messages-to-the-community/president-ruscios-july-8-2014-message>

Statement⁶ would keep faculty and other stakeholders informed. It would also be an important check on the fairness of University employment practices.

Colonialism

We must examine how every aspect of the University, from its settler foundations on Monacan Nation lands, to the idolization of its men's-only school "glory days," stem from racial and imperial colonialism. Outside of a few courses, the University has not systematically or publicly examined, for example, the Eurocentricity of its liberal arts curricula, the school's role in erasing Native presence and contributions to Rockbridge County space and place, or of the hierarchical, top-down, corporate model of higher education—all of which are part of colonial and hyper-capitalistic patterns and systems of thought. For many years, Washington and Lee has mainly attracted and supported those with wealth and privilege in its student body, demonstrated in the predominantly wealthy students on campus.

At its core, the Eurocentric focus and unequal distribution of decision-making power based on white men's education has favored a canon of arts and literature that reproduce and reinforce these structures and identities. The predominantly white student and white faculty continue to focus on and replicate colonizer canons of thought over and over, instead of amplifying ancient and new, non-white, non-Western ideas and cultures. Only in the past 20 to 30 years has this been called into question, and the onus has been on the marginalized groups to put forward their own voices, cultures, and modes of thinking. For example, it was only in 2019 when a group of Native American faculty, staff, students, and allies created the first ever Native American Cohort and Native American Heritage Month in November, filling the hole left by a disinterested University.

While the professional degrees of commerce, journalism, law, and pre-med are seen by students and staff as valid professional paths, the other half of a liberal arts education — music, art, theatre, physical education — are taken merely for "cultural capital," or fuel for cocktail party chatter and professional mobility for the white men and women on campus. Though the University has committed to decolonizing the classroom space, new campus initiatives outside of these spaces are also needed.

Calls to Action

- 1. Continue amplifying and financially supporting Native American and Indigenous research.**

⁶ "Non-Discrimination/ Equal Employment Opportunity Statement," Washington and Lee University, 2009, revised 2017.

<https://my.wlu.edu/general-counsel/code-of-policies/discrimination-harassment-and-retaliation/non-discrimination-equal-employment-opportunity-statement>

We would like to acknowledge and uplift here the work of Professors. Miranda, Markowitz, and Guse in their efforts to research the important contributions of indigenous peoples in the history of Rockbridge County, the nation, and the world.

2. **Provide land acknowledgment of Native American space in lectures or programs.**
Encourage faculty and students to acknowledge the Monacan land our campus sits on. Add signs on campus to make visible the Native American histories and contributions to the school and to the broader Lexington and Rockbridge County region.
3. **Decolonize the school's curriculum.**
Facilitate a decolonization study on departmental curricula by an outside group, and mandate "decolonizing the classroom" training for all faculty, a process by which non-Native people can learn to unspool the colonial viewpoints they have absorbed so that they can craft courses that similarly question Western white hegemony.

White Supremacist Culture

The current state of racial inequality at W&L cannot be separated from the white supremacist ideas that the University has allowed to fester within its community. The University's continuous association with and veneration of Robert E. Lee, a man who fought for the preservation of white supremacist ideas and publicly discriminated against Black people, makes true racial equality and justice impossible. Anyone familiar with Washington and Lee can observe this veneration, from Lee Chapel's status as the "Shrine of the South" to the generally positive portrayal of Lee, to University symbols and programming. In recent years, non-white students have endured the threats of white supremacist groups, including the Ku Klux Klan, on the Washington and Lee campus, all while on "good" days they still must attend events in a building that is a magnet to such extremists.

The dominance of the Greek system over W&L students' social life also allows for the prevalence of different forms of racial discriminations against non-white students at W&L. It is widely known by members of the W&L community that certain fraternities and sororities at W&L only admit white students. Some even go so far as throwing parties with racist, sexist, and homophobic themes while turning away non-white students. We know from our own experiences how difficult it is to thrive in a hostile environment that enables social isolation in an already geographically isolated university.

How does it benefit the University to have initiatives aimed at attracting non-white students and faculty when its concurrent veneration of Lee and its predominant Greek culture limits these initiatives' efficacy?

We believe that Washington and Lee University, by virtue of its historical and, sadly, current, association with the Confederacy, has an indispensable and unique role to play in the global push for racial justice and reconciliation. In fact, it could become a leading national center for the study and reconciliation of these issues. The question is whether the University will rise to the

occasion and make the long overdue structural and cultural changes that are true to its mission of being mindful of the future.

Calls to Action

1. **Remove Lee from the name of the University.**

Removing Lee's name, and explaining the reasoning why this step is necessary, will do much to dismantle the myth of the "Lost Cause" that is responsible for the continued glorification of the Confederacy on our campus and beyond.

2. **Discontinue using Lee Chapel for mandatory University events.**

In its current state, this space has become the "Shrine of the South" due to the Valentine sculpture and the presence of the Lee family crypt, and as such it is unwelcoming to any student or person who does not share white supremacist views.

3. **Require at least one experiential course that comprehensively explores the University's history.**

Such courses and independent study/research experiences already exist; we ask that these be expanded so that all students learn the University's history. A course, for example, that investigates a holistic understanding of Lee and his complex relationship to the University and the nation would enrich student experiences and deepen their understanding of their campus.

4. **Create a reporting and disciplinary process for racial discrimination perpetuated by the Greek system.**

Give students resources to report discrimination they witness perpetuated by fraternities and sororities (as well as in any other aspect of campus life). Additionally, implement disciplinary measures such as probation or suspension to prevent racially discriminatory practices from continuing at W&L.