

I. OVERVIEW

The first meeting of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago's (SAIC) Anti-Racism Committee (ARC), Climate and Accountability Subcommittee, was held on Friday, November 6, 2020 online from 10:00–11:30 a.m.

A. ATTENDING

Dio Aldrige, special assistant to the dean and provost on diversity, equity, and inclusion (co-chair); Robyn Besana, disability specialist; Craig Downs, executive director of media and instructional resources; Dawn Gavin, dean of undergraduate studies (co-chair); Mike Nicolai, chief human resources officer; Don Pollack, associate professor, adjunct; Molly Scranton, associate director of faculty affairs; Patrick Spence, associate dean of student affairs for campus life ; Carly Trujillo, undergraduate student; Jeff Ward, special assistant for executive communications (notetaker).

B. VISITING

Jefferson Pinder, director of diversity, equity, and inclusion for academic affairs (ARC co-chair)

C. AGENDA

- Introductions
- Prioritizing Action Items
- Open Discussion

II. PRIORITIZING ACTION ITEMS

After warm introductions, during which everyone was encouraged to share a song or word that described their mood and aspirations for the subcommittee's work, the group discussed the four "to-do" items from the subcommittee's charge: a dedicated space for community members who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC); ombudsperson; grievance strategy alignment; and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) staffing. Ultimately, the committee members decided to initially focus on the BIPOC space and ombudsperson and volunteered for two working groups who would make progress toward each issue. Aldridge will chair the ombudsperson group, and Gavin will chair the BIPOC space group.

Salient points from the discussion included:

A. BIPOC SPACE

In the subcommittee's charge, this action item is expressed as: "Work with facilities staff to identify physical BIPOC space, needs, and timeline for opening space (using period of de-densified campus proactively in anticipation of eventual full-scale return to campus). Identify other materials needs and personnel support for space." Discussion points relating to this action item include:

- The subcommittee will need to consider location, programming, and staffing for this intended space for BIPOC.
- Space could be held virtually, during social distancing, while a physical space was identified, taking advantage of the low density on campus.
- While the space was generally understood to be for students, a role for BIPOC staff and faculty, perhaps in a mentorship capacity, may be considered.
- Determining how the space is managed (e.g., who maintain, timesharing among BIPOC student affinity groups) may require some staff support, but should also rely on student leadership.
- Other methods for visibility and connection—like a previous get-together for Black staff and faculty (that could now include students) or demarcation similar to pink triangle LGBTQIA+ “safe space” stickers—may help extend the ethos of the BIPOC space.
- Research on similar spaces at other colleges would inform proposal.
- Access to an outdoor space would be a desirable feature of a BIPOC space, e.g., outdoor dance and programming space at Oglala Lakota College, but all-season, indoor space is essential.

B. OMBUDSPERSON

In the subcommittee’s charge, this action item is expressed as: “Research ombudsperson position at other Schools and determine if full-time ombudsperson is recommended. Draft job description and review with appropriate personnel.” Discussion points relating to this action item include:

- An ombudsperson would help mediate conflicts and help to guide restorative conversations.
- In consider whether or not to hire an ombudsperson, to help investigate and resolve complaints, models at other cultural organizations and not-for-profits as well as four-year colleges and universities should be considered.
- When considering qualifications and skills, the ombudsperson could bring additional skills, e.g., training others in conflict resolutions, that could help overall climate. Community members at all levels—students, faculty, and staff—want to feel more competent in their cultural competencies and conflict resolution skills.

- How an ombudsperson would interact with and augment the community existing grievance procedures, e.g., Title IX, policies on nondiscrimination and retaliation. Many committee members sensed a desire for a more restorative and transparent—even warmer—process in the community wherever possible. Restorative justice practices should be considered; a number of committee members had experience with, or colleagues who used, such practices and endorsed them.
- The ombudsperson role could be particularly helpful for situations that were hurtful—e.g., cultural misunderstandings in the classroom, microaggressions—that weren't likely to be made into formal complaints. A trusted, restorative process could build confidence throughout the community over time, helping all individuals feel a greater sense of belonging.

C. GRIEVANCE STRATEGY ALIGNMENT

In the subcommittee's charge, this action item is expressed as: "An audit of existing student and employee grievance procedures to ensure equity." Discussion points relating to this action item include:

- This project will require a review of existing policies, identifying misalignments and bias and adding needs.
- Consider how existing policies align with potential ombudsperson.

D. DEI STAFFING

In the subcommittee's charge, this action item is expressed as: "Review existing DEI staffing and advise on a more robust model, perhaps to include a Chief Diversity Officer, as needed." With primary interest elsewhere, however, the subcommittee concentrated their conversation among the other topics.

III. OPEN DISCUSSION

The final portion of the meeting was left for unstructured conversation among committee members. They shared:

- It can be hard to shift a culture when everyone has their own limited experience and one perspective (white, male) is privileged. This bias can negatively affect people of color even as they become managers, e.g., authority is questioned.
- Restorative justice practices need to be integrated throughout the entire system to succeed.
- Don Pollack spoke about working with Native American and environmental groups in opposition to the Dakota Access Pipeline. He recommended the film *We*

Are Unarmed, directed by Gwendolen Cates (a trailer of which is available on [Vimeo](#)) and how he was hoping to find a way to screen the film on campus.

- As the population of the School is always changing each graduation and orientation, finding ways to continually re-communicate progress, beliefs, values, and aspirations will help the climate progress. Will also help continually educate new members of the community. Training is an important piece of this effort.
- Curriculum could be a vehicle for cultural competency and implicit bias training.