Thriving Staff of Color:

IMAGINING HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONAL TRANSFORMATION

CASCaDE
Change Agents Shaping Campus Diversity & Equity
National Center for Institutional Diversity
The University of Michigan

NATIONAL CENTER FOR INSTITUTIONAL DIVERSITY
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Thriving Staff of Color:

IMAGINING HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONAL TRANSFORMATION

Authors:

Amber Williams,
Angie Kim,
Patricia Coleman-Burns,
Arissa Koines,
Emma Soberano,
Nichole Burnside

1 Note: *Thriving* in positive psychology and higher education studies often refers to students' experience of academic success and positive psychological well-being within campus environments (Schriener, 2010). This study considers how staff of color at a Predominantly White Institution experience barriers and opportunities that support or deter the potentiality for professional agency, success, and well-being.

Executive Summary

"I just have to sit there and be a rock in a river and let the water flow over me." This is how a participant in this study characterized their experience working at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI). Despite all the vital ways staff of color (SOC) contribute to their workplaces, they experience unique challenges navigating taxing workplace environments that impact their workplace satisfaction and success. This report presents the findings of a study that critically examines how structural racism embedded in the fabric of higher education institutions directly impacts staff of color. We also present recommendations for transformation across leadership, policy, and practice that decenter whiteness and promote race-conscious and equity-oriented workplace cultures to support recruiting, retaining, and enabling staff of color to thrive[1].

Background

Over the last 25 years, the number of managerial and professional staff members hired to support the academic mission at PWIs increased significantly (Frye & Fulton, 2020). Despite the heightened interest in and distribution of institutional resources towards improving the diversity of faculty and students at PWIs, efforts to recruit and retain staff, and in particular SOC, have remained at the margins.

While significant growth in diversity scholarship about racial campus climate and equity issues has expanded in higher education, few studies take into account SOC experiences (Steele, 2018). Analyzing the stories of SOC adds detail to our understanding of how race and racism become embedded in the daily activities of higher education workplaces and ultimately shape institutional policy, practices, interactions, and norms such as promotion, supervision, and workplace culture. These specific policies, practices, interactions, and norms actively reproduce racial inequities and hinder or support SOC success. Studying the stories of SOC for examples of success also offers a roadmap to creating campus environments that support the thriving and success of SOC.

This report draws from the study's findings to provide recommendations that support the thriving and success of SOC working within higher education institutions[2]. The study comprised interviews with 50 SOC with full-time regular appointments at the University of Michigan (U-M) (see Appendix A). The stories of staff highlighted throughout this report identify the specific structures, policies, practices, interactions, and norms that contribute to documented racial inequalities in SOC experiences, in addition to the supports and resources that foster a sense of inclusion through all stages of the employee life cycle (e.g., recruitment, onboarding, development, retention, and separation)[3].

2 Note: The *This is My Story* study was initiated as a grant funded project sponsored by the U-M Office of Diversity Equity and Inclusion, and the National Center for Institutional Diversity. In the year 2022, the study was approved by the University of Michigan Health Sciences and Behavioral Sciences Review board.
3 Note: To protect the confidentiality of participants, all data is de-identified. Each quote published in the report is a pseudonym created by members of the research team.

"I just have to sit there and be a rock in a river and let the water flow over me."

— *Andrea* *(Latinx Staff)*

Study Objectives:

☑ **Illuminate** the racialized and gendered experiences of full-time regular SOC

☑ **Examine** the day-to-day work lives and experiences of SOC

☑ **Identify** the specific structures, policies, practices, interactions, and norms that contribute to racial experiences of validation and inequality among SOC

☑ **Highlight** the supports and resources that foster a sense of inclusion through all stages of the employee cycle (recruitment, onboarding, retention, and separation)

☑ **Explore** SOC perceptions of DEI initiatives and programs designed to support staff

Three themes were identified from their stories:

1. **Perceptions of U-M Work Cultures in Departments/Units Workplace**

2. **Experiences of (In)Equity in the Workplace**

3. **Community, Advocacy, and Professional Development Among SOC Affinity Groups**

Perceptions of U-M Work Cultures in Departments/Units

In this study, SOC illuminated the cultural characteristics of their work environments and the impact those environments have on their work lives. They described (a) how whiteness[4] circumscribes organizational practice and norms, (b) challenges stemming from holding a minoritized identity in interactions with other staff, and (c) how racialized and gendered tropes of caretaking influence the exhaustive practice of emotional labor among women and non-binary SOC.

SOC described enactments of whiteness that permeated through the organizational norms, behaviors, and practices that shaped their work experiences. Participants underscored implicit manifestations of whiteness that were evident in norms around professionalism, leadership, decision-making processes, and communication patterns. These aspects subtly conveyed elements of white supremacy that reinforced racialized power and authority (Leonardo, 2004, 2009; Okun, 1999; Ray, 2019). For example, supervisors and managers may promote professional standards and foster office cultures rooted in whiteness, impacting hiring and promotion practices. Participants agreed that staff who ascribed to dominant office cultures are often more likely to experience promotion and professional advancement.

> **Any concept of professionalism is a huge one and how it's been used or weaponized to particularly affect people of color. It's something that's so nebulous. There's no specific wording on what is professional, and what isn't. That's what helps it to be weaponized in certain cases and not weaponized in others. Specifically with a lot of my Black colleagues, they've shared that there's a limit to how emotional or how much emotion they can show, because there's fear of being labeled either overly emotional or overly angry. Whereas with a white colleague, emotion can sometimes be weaponized into white tears, or anger can be seen as positive or being passionate over something."**
>
> **— *Ángel* (Latinx Staff)**

SOC were often the only individuals within their department or unit with their racial identity and one of the few staff members with any minoritized racial status. They frequently described instances of being overlooked by supervisors and other colleagues and overburdened with extra tasks associated with their racialized identity. Participants described such challenges as tokenization, cultural taxation, minimization, and racial microaggressions[5]. These interactions negatively impacted SOC's sense of belonging

4 Note: The Appendix B glossary of terms includes a definition for whiteness.
5 Note: The Appendix B glossary of terms includes a definition for racial microaggressions and cultural taxation.

and inclusion, resulting in poor morale and job satisfaction.

> **They *[committees]* tend to be white male-dominated. They [*committee members*] will give you an opportunity sometime to speak, but they just ignore what you say."**
>
> — *Tessa* (Black Staff)

Women and non-binary SOC in this study shared examples of labor disparities and conflicts that included engaging in inordinate amounts of caretaking, such as regulating the emotional discomfort and negative feelings of others in interpersonal and group-based settings, to maintain organizational operations.

> **It's one of those spaces where I'm like, what do I do? I just have to sit there and be a rock in the river and let the water flow over me, because sometimes I'm like, I can help you process this, but only so much."**
>
> — *Andrea* (Latinx Staff)

Employers often perceived this emotional labor as a taken-for-granted effort unaccounted for in performance evaluation and promotion. The added emotional labor led women and non-binary SOC to experience exhaustion and a loss of agency over their time and expertise. It further hindered their ability to attend to daily tasks and prioritize caring for themselves.

Experiences of (In)Equity in the Workplace

Participants described three key areas that shaped perceptions of (in)equity at work, including, (a) how a sense of belonging and validation contribute to equitable work cultures (b) the role of supervisors and managers in perceptions and experiences of equity in promotion and hire, and (c) how fear of reprimand and distrust of institutional resources that address workplace toxicity, affect SOC feelings of vulnerability.

The experiences of participants who described positive workplace environments were characterized by diversity among staff, inclusive leadership practices, positive managerial relationships, appreciation and respect for SOC expertise, increased trust among colleagues, and an affirmed sense of belonging. In particular, interactions and behaviors that display genuine

interest and appreciation contribute to SOC's positive perceptions of the workplace and convey the value of their professional knowledge and work performance. These findings suggest that validation and sense of belonging may have implications for agential professional practice and leadership, as well as capacity to execute work tasks as well as decision-making authority.

> **I will say my boss who is my supervisor's supervisor is also very giving and very supportive and very protective of us. In all staff meetings, any time someone from the team has something to share out, I feel as empowered as another department head to just carry myself, lead, and bring up some agenda item."**
>
> **— *Irene* (APIDA Staff)**

Participants described challenging relationships with supervisors, including over-surveillance, unprompted timekeeping, micromanagement, inconsistent communication of work expectations, and managerial avoidance of organizational equity practices. These relationships highlight the perceived asymmetry between racial equity claims conveyed by the university, and employer managerial practices. Negative supervisory behaviors left many SOC feeling restricted in their work performance and fueled a lack of trust in managers, which resulted in skepticism of institutional DEI efforts designed to support staff. Although few participants provided examples of their experience undergoing grievance procedures, those who did file a grievance about toxic or hostile work climates frequently described dissatisfaction with institutional equity procedures that redress misuse of power and authority among managers and a lack of protection against racial harm. Subsequently, these participants expressed disillusionment with the university's commitment to equity for minoritized staff, as a part of DEI strategic efforts. Overall, data from the study demonstrates how cases of racialized toxicity in the workplace can go unreported, due to fear of retaliation, or insufficient sanctioning systems and processes. Additionally, SOC noted fear of hostility

> **I had a boss who, again, all the Black staff were just like leaving, that reported to her. Some of us talked about going to [Office of Institutional Equity] and we ended up not doing that because a couple of the staff were afraid of the consequences that something might happen and they might lose their jobs. It was really too bad that they were afraid. But it was a really terrible work situation. I got out of it as quickly as I could, as did staff member after staff member, and the institution didn't seem to notice or care and that's disappointing."**
>
> **— *Cindy* (Black Staff)**

from employers and reports of toxicity in their departments. These fears were often exacerbated by prior instances of asserting expertise, challenging co-workers, or questioning leadership decisions, and resulted in looming concerns of being fired or pushed out, which led to negative well-being outcomes, including stress.

> **We had this DEI action plan and our project manager wrote these super racist comments that were like, how dare you focus on race? What about the white women? It was emotionally a lot, and also very emotionally charged in a way that there wasn't space for discussion because of the kind of emotional response she was having."**
>
> — *Jacob (APIDA Staff)*

Many expressed increased hypervigilance and notably, distrust due to past negative experiences in designated units such as human resources or compliance units intended to protect and support staff rights and well-being. This resulted in staff hesitating to report racial hostility and harm, and a lack of confidence in the potential for intervention. Moreover, when SOC did challenge policies or practices perceived as resistant or threatening, oftentimes, fear of retribution, retaliation, reprimand, or acrimony clouded their day-to-day work experience with anxiety and a decreased sense of agency.

Social and Professional Belonging in Racial Affinity Groups

One resource emerged as a crucial counterbalance to racial isolation in participants' departments. Affinity groups are associations that organize individuals with shared or central interests or specific identities. Affinity groups are also often referred to as Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) and are programs established by employers in public and private sectors to attract a diverse workforce and foster inclusion and connection among colleagues (Welborne et al., 2017; Welch et al., 2018). Many study participants discussed their involvement in racial affinity groups sponsored by the university, including the benefits and barriers to the success of racial affinity groups.

SOC described several benefits offered by the structured support of racial affinity groups: they can cultivate belonging, community, and professional growth and advancement. Participants described these organizations as

"Some of us talked about going to ODEI and we ended up not doing that because a couple of the staff were afraid of the consequences that something might happen and they might lose their jobs."

— *Cindy (Black Staff)*

spaces for authentic connections, appreciation, respect, and visibility that allow SOC to process racialized and gendered experiences on campus while fostering authentic connections that communicate genuine care and validate the importance of SOC work. In particular, participants illustrated affinity groups as a counter space to the racial isolation they experience in departments.

> **While I identify as a woman, the experience of being a woman of color is very different from being a white woman. I was able to connect with others with similar experiences. It is the only time they [women of color] see a woman of color at a meeting. Having that connection is what sustains me, and the great work the [affinity group] has done in the past 20 years that I've been on it; providing mentorship opportunities for others, career workshops, speakers, and networking opportunities."**
>
> — ***May*** *(APIDA Staff)*

While affinity groups support SOC professional advancement and connection to campus life, some participants in the study expressed concern for the quality of institutional support to sustain the longevity of these organizations and the burden placed upon staff to maintain their operations. Members volunteer time outside of work to maintain the coordination and leadership of affinity groups, at times with substantial strain and burden in the absence of structured institutional resources, and shifting leadership.

> **Being a part is good and bad. It's good because it exists. Bad because there's no resources. There's no one that helps organize us. Our website is out of date, and there's no one to do it unless someone takes it on. It's usually a woman who goes in and tries to organize us, but she has a full-time job on campus. It would be wonderful to have someone help coordinate so we don't ask for a person on our own. I know that resources are limited, but [right now] it's one person who helps organize and keep up the website, helps with communication, and helps with coordination of gatherings and meetings."**
>
> — ***Luisa*** *(Latinx Staff)*

13

Recommendations

The recommendations presented in the report are informed by the domains of the THESIS model (Transforming Higher Education for Equity, Success, & Inclusion of all Stakeholders). The THESIS domains include cultivating a critical consciousness, developing social and political navigation skills, and utilizing diversity scholarship to make evidence-based decisions. Each domain has distinct and overlapping features that encourage ongoing reflection, learning, and action. The THESIS model was developed by the CASCaDE (Change Agents Shaping Campus Diversity and Equity) project to build knowledge and tools around equity-minded leadership for faculty and staff.
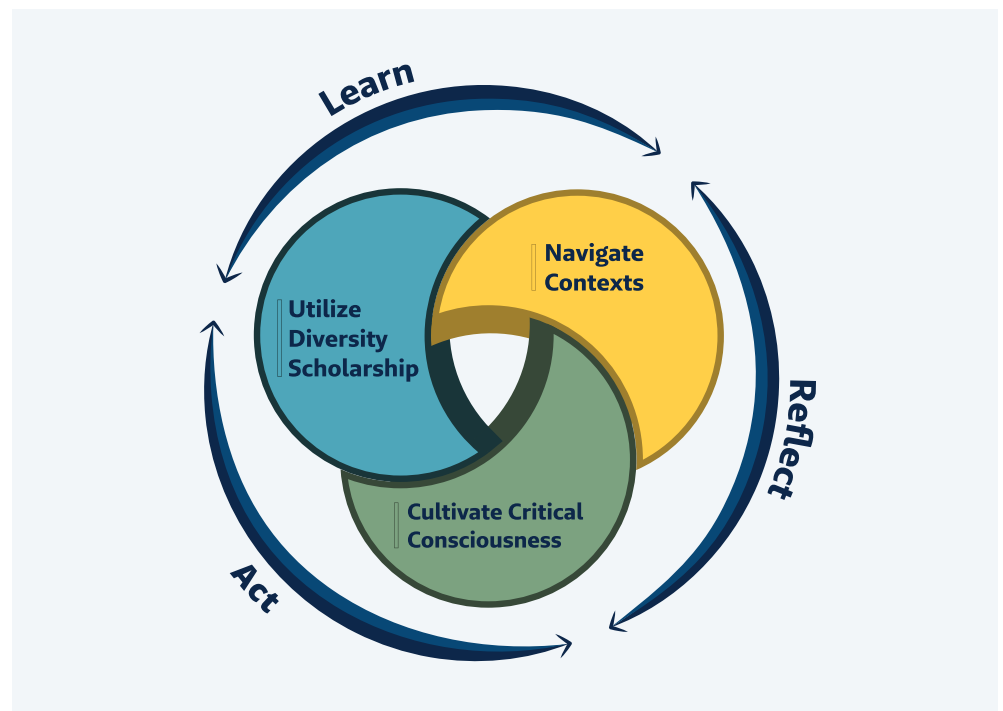
THESIS model Domain chart

The findings from this study demonstrate that the racialized experiences of SOC often present barriers to their thriving and success; to better support the success of SOC, we recommend implementing race-conscious and equity-minded transformational strategies that promote institutional transformation[6]. Despite how an institution may espouse DEI values, these organizational commitments can be forestalled at the departmental level by color-evasive policies and practices, inaction and resistance from leaders, as well as unchecked racial harm and toxicity in the workplace. Our recommendations include actionable changes to improve racial climates;

6 Note: The Appendix B glossary of terms provides an expanded definition of institutional transformation.

increased equity-oriented SOC leadership; transparency in promotion, hire, and pay equity; clarified pathways toward career advancement; and better accountability and oversight procedures pertaining to managerial workplace hostility and discrimination.

RECOMMENDATION 1:

Cultivate a Race-Conscious Organizational Culture

Departmental leaders, managers, and supervisors should cultivate a race-conscious organizational culture by confronting and questioning structures and processes that disadvantage racially minoritized groups in hiring, promotion, professional development, and compensation. This includes noticing and tracking patterns of exclusion within departments, developing safe opportunities to report microaggression or other harmful behaviors, and interrogating the values, beliefs, and practices shaping unequal outcomes in performance expectations, promotion, and access to professional development that include racial affinity groups. Institutions must interrogate how hiring decisions are made and create infrastructures that ensure opportunities for pay equity and promotion that align with institutional DEI priorities.

RECOMMENDATION 2:

Respect and Affirm SOC Professional Agency and Expertise

Supervisors and leaders are crucial in modeling the values of race-conscious leadership. Thus, they must be attentive to how they signal norms of white dominant culture and evaluate their positions and power as sites for action toward equity. To elevate SOC professional agency and promote equitable work cultures, their professional expertise, knowledge, and lived experiences must be incorporated into all decision-making processes, practices, and policies.

RECOMMENDATION 3:

Generate Resources that Support SOC Wellness, Social Connection, and Professional Development

Racial affinity groups play a significant role in SOC thriving and retention, and thus, are critical to the work U-M engages in to foster inclusivity and community. These organizations support SOC wellness, social connections, professional development, and goals for career advancement (Green, 2018). However, given the voluntary roles SOC takes on to lead these groups at U-M, this often invisible labor may be unrecognized and under-appreciated by supervisors and the institution as a whole. Institutions should create meaningful and equitable structures that support staff leadership, participation, and sustainability of these groups. This might include designated, compensated personnel support, budgetary and/or other institutional support. In addition, the need that is met by these organizations illustrates the importance of access to a like-minded community for supporting a sense of belonging. This trusted community can be an effective source for sharing information on needed resources for managing bias, conflict, and mentorship opportunities.

Conclusion

While the value and efficacy of DEI in educational outcomes are widely evidenced, the needs of SOC occupy the margins in the DEI efforts of higher education. By centering SOC narratives, our study reveals how certain racialized practices and interactions in organizations, including whiteness norms, shape inequitable workplace climate and culture and have negative implications for SOC well-being, professional trajectory, and thriving in higher education systems. Thus, we join other scholars and practitioners in urging institutional leaders to "transform policy, practice, and norms that reproduce inequity" as an important aspect of equity-minded leadership (Liera & Desir, 2023, p.2). To actualize institutional transformation, we emphasize the importance of racial consciousness, espousal of collective responsibility to address structural racism, and alignment between DEI strategic vision and action.

STRATEGIES AND GUIDING REFLECTION QUESTIONS[7]

Recommendation 1

Cultivate Race Conscious Organizational Culture

Recommendation 2

Respect and Affirm SOC Professional Agency and Expertise

Recommendation 3

Generate Resources that Support SOC Wellness, Social Connection, and Professional Development

[7] The recommendations and guiding reflections documented in the chart are informed by studies that include racial equity and transformative leadership implications for research and practice in higher education (Center for Urban Studies, 2019; Cho & Brassfield, 2022; Grim et al., 2019, 2023; Kezar et al., 2002; 2008; Kezar & Posselt, 2019; Liera & Desir, 2023; Milem et al., 2005; Patton et al., 2019; Pour-Khorshid, 2018; Ray, 2019; Stewart, 2018; Williams & Clowney, 2007)

Recommendation 1

Cultivate Race Conscious Organizational Culture

Strategies	▶️ Reflect	🔍 Learn	📋 Act
Interrogate and disrupt values, norms, and behaviors that reinforce racial dominance and exclude SOC knowledge and experiences	1. What do we know about SOC experiences in my unit, and what are the gaps in knowledge? What may be the consequences of our lack of knowledge about SOC experiences? 2. How does our department and/or unit define professionalism? 3. How have our own (in)actions perpetuated white cultural norms?	1. What do we know about SOC experiences at my institution? 2. Learn about how whiteness shows up in the workplace.	1. In our unit/department, re-evaluate how white cultural norms are embedded in promotion and professional advancement. 2. Establish collective accountability structures for unit and/or office to confront and question whiteness.
Assess how the definition of merit and fit centralizes whiteness and hold hiring, screening, and promoting committees accountable to use equity-mindedness to define merit and fit	1. What systemic factors present barriers preventing racially minoritized individuals from accessing roles in our unit, and what measures can be implemented to address and dismantle these barriers in the hiring process? 2. What skills and values do we recognize that center white cultural norms when considering promotion?	1. Evaluate who occupies leadership positions in our department and/or office and in what ways those leaders have (or lack) expertise in supporting SOC? 2. Understand the evaluative criteria used to hire new employees.	1. Use evaluation criteria that take into account individuals' understanding of institutionalized racism and how they have addressed campus racial climate. 2. Collaboratively establish metrics for assessing candidates for hiring and promoting.
Enhance the compositional diversity of managing staff with proven expertise in organizational DEI leadership	1. Who have we regarded as leaders in DEI, and why? What forms of expertise do they have, and where does their expertise stem from? 2. How are they promoting race-conscious norms and values?	1. How have SOCs in our department or unit engaged in DEI work that extends their existing roles and responsibilities?	1. Establish equity advocate leadership positions with substantial experience addressing campus racial climate. 2. Recognize, account for, and compensate the additional DEI labor undertaken by SOC outside of their explicit roles
Institutionalize data collection of SOC experiences and utilize the data to inform policy, practice, and processes	1. Whose narratives have been prioritized and privileged to design policies, practices, and processes? 2. Who provided feedback on the assessment tool?	1. Explore how data on SOC experiences have been historically collected. 2. Investigate if and how data is disaggregated in the collection and dissemination of SOC experiences.	1. Identify current assessment tools in place to understand SOC experiences. 2. Partner with affinity groups to identify the best long-term assessment strategy to understand SOC experiences. 3. Compile a resource highlighting SOC experience to inform policies, practices, and processes. 4. Generate and disseminate regular institutional reports (similar to those offered from U-M's ADVANCE Office) that share data, and support transparency, knowledge and institutional action to support the thriving of staff of color.
Assess the effectiveness of existing anti-racism initiatives designed to support SOC	1. Whose experiences were centered when generating anti-racism initiatives? 2. Who is benefiting the most from engaging in the anti-racism initiatives? White colleagues or SOC? 3. Who is often participating in the anti-racism initiatives? Who may be invisible in their engagement?	1. Become familiar with services, structures and/or systems in place in the department / unit to support SOC. 2. Inspect potential barriers preventing SOC from accessing support structures and services specifically for SOC within the unit / department (e.g., time, location, etc).	1. Conduct an audit of existing anti-racism initiatives that support SOC. 2. Identify who participates the most often in existing anti-racism initiatives, and what prevents individuals from engaging. 3. Learn and practice distributive leadership practices.

Recommendation 2

Respect and Affirm SOC Professional Agency and Expertise

Strategies	🎬 Reflect	🔍 Learn	📋 Act
Establish opportunities for advocacy and center the experiences and knowledge of SOC in decision-making processes	1. In our decision-making meetings, who is present? How many are white, and how many are SOC? 2. In meetings (e.g., 1:1 or committees), who speaks the most? 3. Who makes the final decision? 4. When and how are we elevating SOC knowledge and expertise at meetings and decision-making processes?	1. Consider existing advocacy processes for SOC. 2. Question how the expertise and knowledge of SOC have been incorporated into decision-making processes for determining departmental policies and practices.	1. Identify barriers and opportunities to access and execution of the advocacy processes within HR and other entities designed to support SOC. 2. Integrate the experiences and knowledge of SOC in decision-making processes, policies, and practices for the department or unit.
Establish accountability structures and processes to promote race-conscious leadership among managers and supervisors	1. How are we actively seeking out feedback from colleagues to interrogate our own biases rooted in dominant racial ideals? 2. What are the different ways to affirm SOC professional expertise?	1. Review how resources such as time, personnel, and finances are distributed to staff. 2. Understand current resource distribution and variance across racial groups.	1. Incentivize and reward SOC who demonstrate leadership in promoting equitable organizational cultures. 2. Reassign resources such as time, personnel, and finance intentionally to affirm SOC professional expertise and to have equitable outcomes for SOC. 3. Provide opportunities for SOC to engage in related and relevant institutional DEI scholarship production.

Recommendation 3

Generate Resources that Support SOC Wellness, Social Connection, and Professional Development

Strategies	🎬 Reflect	🔍 Learn	📋 Act
Introduce SOC to affinity groups as part of their institutional experience and support the sustainability and success of affinity groups	1. How can SOC be familiarized with affinity group resources after onboarding? 2. How are we supporting SOC in their participation in affinity groups? 3. Have affinity groups named areas where support is needed?	1. Consider the trends of SOC involvement in affinity groups. 2. Explore how SOC have historically found professional community. 3. Inspect potential barriers to participating in affinity groups. 4. Review budgetary gaps and opportunities for further support of affinity groups to pursue professional and community development activities.	1. Incorporate affinity groups as part of SOC onboarding processes. Make affinity group information more visible on HR websites, etc. 2. Encourage SOC participation in affinity groups by removing any barriers around time and labor. 3. Establish additional full-time staff to oversee affinity groups and professional development for SOC. 4. Provide consistent financial support and infrastructure to remove additional labor on SOC.

"Any concept of professionalism is a huge one and how it's been used or weaponized to particularly affect people of color."
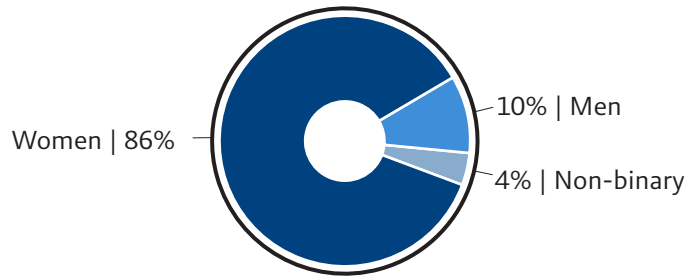
— *Ángel* *(Latinx Staff)*

Appendix A

Participant Demographics[8]

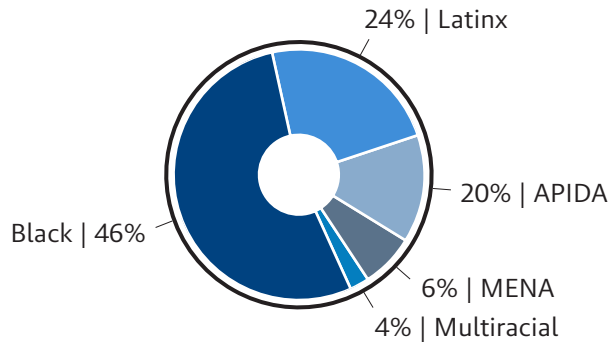| Characteristics	n	%	Analytic Sample Demographics: N=50

Gender

	n	%
Women	43	86%
Men	5	10%
Non-binary	2	4%

Women | 86%
10% | Men
4% | Non-binary

Race and Ethnicity

	n	%
Black	23	46%
Latinx	12	24%
APIDA	10	20%
MENA	3	6%
Multiracial	2	4%

24% | Latinx
Black | 46%
20% | APIDA
6% | MENA
4% | Multiracial

Job Role Classification

	n	%
Professional	42	84%
Managerial	8	16%

Professional | 84%
16% | Managerial
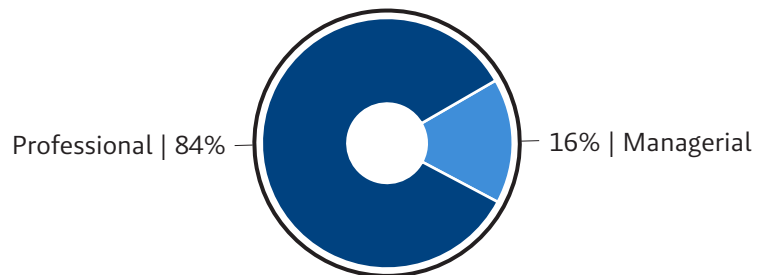
[8] Race and Ethnicity categories were disclosed by participants during interviews, as self-reported demographic data.
Job Role Classifications were determined by the U-M Career Family Classification system.

Appendix B

Glossary of Terms

TERM	DEFINITION
Color-evasive Racism	Color-evasive racism describes the organizational practices, norms, and behaviors, especially in hiring practices, that deter racial equity commitments and intentions espoused by higher education institutions. This concept draws from existing scholarship on colorblind racism and racialized organizations theory.
Cultural taxation[9]	The burden placed on people of color to enrich institutional diversity is referred to as cultural taxation or cultural tax credits. This burden benefits white peers, at the expense of the time, resources, and well-being of people of color, and is experienced as an inequitable practice to advance professionally within institutions.
Emotional labor	The "management of feeling"[10] or emotional labor, is referred to in this study as a racialized and gendered practice in workplace settings that involves conforming one's emotions to the expectations of others, including students, colleagues, and employers. In this study, women and non-binary staff of color describe caretaking as a form of emotional labor, imposed upon their work duties.
Institutional Transformation[11]	Advancing transformation involves attending to the cultural and structural dimensions of campus environments that result in sustained equity outcomes. By promoting transformation, institutions acknowledge contextual features that reproduce inequalities, commit to altering underlying organizational cultures that impede shared visions of equity, and create sustainable mechanisms with lasting impacts.
Job Role Classification[12]	This report refers to the U-M Career Family Classification System to capture participants' job roles and functions. Per the description of each classification, participants in the study are categorized as professional or managerial staff.
Racial Microaggressions[13]	Microaggressions are defined as verbal and nonverbal insults, jokes, and environmental cues that intentionally and unintentionally communicate negative messages and stereotypes and subtly demean a person's minoritized status. Racial microaggressions are experienced as racialized exclusion, hostility, and marginalization, and are interpreted as negative assumptions of inferiority, othering, and minimization (Solorzano et al., 2000; Sue et al., 2007).
Staff of Color	This report refers to Staff of Color (SOC) as full-time, regular appointed employees in a higher education setting, who self-identify as Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (BIPOC). During interviews, participants in the study self-identified as Black, Asian Pacific Islander Desi American (APIDA), Middle Eastern North African (MENA), or Southwest Asian and North African (SWANA), as well as Latinx.
Whiteness	Whiteness entails a taken-for-granted system of beliefs about power and domination embedded in individual perspectives, values, and behaviors, as well as the structures and norms, of organizations. This study refers to whiteness as a social construction of Westernization rooted in historical vestiges of colonialism, imperialism, and white supremacy. Within the educational context, whiteness studies scholars refer to whiteness as an ideology that delegitimates the harm of white supremacy, perpetuates notions of white innocence, and advances ideas of individualism and meritocracy, that perpetuate systemic racism (Leonardo, 2004; Okun, 2019; Tevis et al., 2023).

9 Note: Findings for cultural taxation were informed by conceptual analysis by Padilla, 1994 and Rosales et al., 2023, in education studies.
10 From: Findings for emotional labor were informed by the conceptual analysis of "feelings rules" developed by Hochschild, 2012.
11 From: This report refers to Grim et al., 2023 to capture organizational change processes related to transformation.
12 From: Researchers applied the Career Family Classification to categorize participants' staff role.
For additional information visit: *https://hr.umich.edu/working-u-m/management-administration/compensation-classification*
13 From: This report draws from psychology and education studies (Solorzano et al., 2000; Sue et al., 2007) that examine students experience of racial microaggressions as a definitional framework.

Appendix C

*Recommended Readings
and Reference List*

Recommended Readings

Frye, J. F., & Morton, C. M. (2015).
An Examination of Strategic Diversity Plans and Processes at Select Research Institutions.
Ann Arbor, MI: National Center for Institutional Diversity.

Grim, J. K., Sánchez-Parkinson, L., Soberano, E., Williams, A., Gámez, R., Cole, E. R., Ting, M. P., Chavous, T. M. (2023).
**Transforming higher education for equity, success, and inclusion of all stakeholders (THESIS):
A model for change agent empowerment.**
University of Michigan: National Center for Institutional Diversity.
https://lsa.umich.edu/content/dam/ncid-assets/ncid-documents/THESIS%20Model%20Nov%2029.pdf

Felix, E. R., Bensimon, E. M., Hanson, D., Gray, J. & Klingsmith, L. (2015).
Developing Agency for Equity-Minded Change.
New Directions for Community Colleges, 2015(172), 25–42.
https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.20161

Liera, R., & Desir, S. (2023).
Taking equity-mindedness to the next level: The equity-minded organization.
Frontiers in Education, 8.
https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/feduc.2023.1199174

U-M Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion & Advance. (2021).
**Black, Indigenous, and People Of Color (BIPOC) Faculty Retention at the University of Michigan:
Interviews with Michigan Faculty.**
https://advance.umich.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/BIPOC-Faculty-Retention-August-2021.pdf

---

Reference List

Bonilla-Silva, E. (2015).
The Structure of Racism in Color-Blind, "Post-Racial" America.
American Behavioral Scientist, 59(11), 1358–1376.
https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764215586826

Cho, K. S., & Brassfield, L. (2022).
An afterthought: Staff of color and campus wellness within higher education responses to COVID-19.
American Behavioral Scientist, 000276422211182.
https://doi.org/10.1177/00027642221118254

REFERENCE LIST

Center for Urban Education (2019).
Equity-mindedness.
Los Angeles, CA: Center for Urban Education.

Frye, J. R., & Fulton, A. P. (2020).
Mapping the growth and demographics of managerial and professional staff in higher education.
New Directions for Higher Education, 2020(189), 7–23.
https://doi.org/10.1002/he.20352

Grim, J. K., Sánchez-Parkinson, L., Ting, M. & Chavous, T. (2019).
The Experiences of Academic Diversity Officers at the University of Michigan.
NCID Currents, 1(1).
https://doi.org/10.3998/currents.17387731.0001.111

Grim, J. K., Sánchez-Parkinson, L., Soberano, E., Williams, A., Gámez, R., Cole, E. R., Ting, M. P., Chavous, T. M. (2023).
Transforming higher education for equity, success, and inclusion of all stakeholders (THESIS):
A model for change agent empowerment.
University of Michigan: National Center for Institutional Diversity.
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1INYNy-m_HquMVMaMqJmMdi6_vihV09yt/view

Green, W. M. (2018).
Employee resource groups as learning communities.
Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion: An International Journal, 37(7), 634–648.
https://doi.org/10.1108/edi-11-2016-0085

Hochschild, A. R. (1979).
Emotion work, feeling rules, and social structure.
American Journal of Sociology, 85(3), 551–575.
https://doi.org/10.1086/227049

Kezar, A. & Eckel, P. (2002).
Examining the institutional transformation process:
The importance of sensemaking, interrelated strategies, and balance.
Research in Higher Education, 43(3), 295–328.
https://doi.org/10.1023/a:1014889001242

Kezar, A., Lester, J., Glenn, W., and Nokamato, J. (2008).
Examining organizational contextual features that affect implementation of equity initiatives.
Journal of Higher Education, 79(2), 125–159.

Kezar, A., & Posselt, J. (2019).
Higher education administration for social justice and equity: Critical perspectives for leadership.
Routledge.

Liera, R. & Hernandez, T. E. (2021).
Color-evasive racism in the final stage of faculty searches:
Examining search committee hiring practices that jeopardize racial equity policy.
The Review of Higher Education, 45(2), 181–209.
https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2021.0020

REFERENCE LIST

Liera, R., & Desir, S. (2023).
Taking equity-mindedness to the next level: The equity-minded organization.
Frontiers in Education, 8.
https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/feduc.2023.1199174

Leonardo, Z. (2009).
Race, whiteness, and education.
In Routledge eBooks.
https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203880371

Leonardo, Z. (2004).
The color of supremacy: Beyond the discourse of 'white privilege.'
Educational Philosophy and Theory, 36(2), 137–152.
https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-5812.2004.00057.x

Milem, J. F., Chang, M. J., & Antonio, A. L. (2005).
Making diversity work on campus: A research-based perspective.
Retrieved December 16, 2022, from *https://secure.aacu.org/AACU/PDF/Milem_et_al.pdf*

Okun, T. (1999).
White supremacy culture. Dismantling racism.
Retrieved February 7, 2024, from *https://www.whitesupremacyculture.info*

Padilla, A. M. (1994).
Research news and comment: Ethnic minority scholars; Research, and mentoring: current and future Issues.
Educational Researcher, 23(4), 24–27.
https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189x023004024

Patton, L. D., Sánchez, B., Mac, J., & Stewart, D.-L. (2019).
An inconvenient truth about "progress":
An analysis of the promises and perils of research on campus diversity initiatives.
The Review of Higher Education, 42(5), 173–198.
https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2019.0049

Pour-Khorshid, F. (2018).
Cultivating sacred spaces: A racial affinity group approach to support critical educators of color.
Teaching Education, 29(4), 318–329.
https://doi.org/10.1080/10476210.2018.1512092

Ray, V. (2019).
A theory of racialized organizations.
American Sociological Review, 28.
https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122418822335

Rosales, O., Schell, E. P., Gutierrez, C., & Padilla, A. (2023).
Cultural taxation or "tax credit"?
Understanding the nuances of ethnoracially minoritized student labor in higher education.
Ethnic and Racial Studies, 46(6), 1109–1131.
https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2022.2143717

REFERENCE LIST

Schreiner, L. A. (2010).
The "Thriving Quotient."
About Campus: Enriching the Student Learning Experience, 15(2), 2–10.
https://doi.org/10.1002/abc.20016

Solórzano, D., Ceja, M., & Yosso, T. (2000).
Critical race theory, racial microaggressions, and campus racial climate:
The experiences of African American college students.
The Journal of Negro Education, 69, 60 –73.

Steele, T. (2018).
Toxicity in the work environment: Retaining staff members of color at a predominantly white institution.
College Student Affairs Journal, 36(1), 109–123.
https://doi.org/10.1353/csj.2018.0007

Stewart, D.-L. (2018).
Minding the gap between diversity and institutional transformation:
Eight proposals for enacting institutional change.
Teachers College Record, 120(14), 1–16.
https://doi.org/10.1177/016146811812001411

Sue, D. W., Capodilupo, C. M., Torino, G. C., Bucceri, J. M., Holder, A. M., Nadal, K. L., & Esquilin, M. (2007).
Racial microaggressions in everyday life:
Implications for clinical practice.
American Psychologist, 62, 271–286.
http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.62.4.271n

Tevis, T. L., Whitehead, M., Foste, Z. & Duran, A. (2023).
Higher Education: handbook of theory and research, Volume 38.
Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research, 95–148.
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-06696-2_12

Welbourne, T. M., Rolf, S., & Schlachter, S. (2017).
The case for employee resource groups: A review and social identity theory-based research agenda.
Personnel Review, 46(8).
https://doi.org/10.1108/PR-01-2016-0004

Williams, D., & Clowney, C. (2007).
Strategic planning for diversity and organizational change:
A primer for higher education leadership.
Effective Practices for Academic Leaders, 2(3), 1–16.

"While I identify as a woman, the experience of being a woman of color is very different from being a white woman."

— *May* (APIDA Staff)

Acknowledgments

CASCaDE

CASCaDE (Change Agents Shaping Campus Diversity and Equity) is an initiative for enabling equity-minded transformation in higher education. CASCaDE is part of the National Center for Institutional Diversity at the University of Michigan. The project aims to empower change agents to enact transformational change through knowledge, tools, research, and convenings centered on building equity-minded leadership skills for both formal and informal leaders in higher education.

National Center for Institutional Diversity

Vision:

Our vision is to empower people and institutions to leverage knowledge and skills around the benefits, challenges, and opportunities of diversity in order to create a truly equitable and inclusive society.

Mission:

To create a more equitable and inclusive society, we produce, catalyze, and elevate diversity research and scholarship. In this pursuit, we also build intergenerational communities of scholars and leaders to integrate these evidence-based approaches in addressing contemporary issues in a diverse society.

Recommended Citation

Williams, A., Kim, A., Coleman-Burns, P., Koines, A., Soberano, E., Burnside, N. (2024).
Thriving Staff of Color: Imagining Higher Education Institutional Transformation.
University of Michigan: National Center for Institutional Diversity.

Acknowledgments

CASCaDE
Change Agents Shaping Campus Diversity & Equity
National Center for Institutional Diversity
The University of Michigan

NATIONAL CENTER FOR
INSTITUTIONAL DIVERSITY
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

CASCaDE
Change Agents Shaping Campus Diversity & Equity
National Center for Institutional Diversity
The University of Michigan