

Chapter 12: 2000-2010

“Act Six and other Initiatives”

The first decade of the 21st century at Whitworth witnessed a remarkable convergence of efforts designed to raise awareness regarding racism. It was also a time of significant increase in the number of students of color on campus. Through launching the Act Six program, Whitworth embarked on its most effective effort to recruit and retain students of color. The new century also saw intense efforts to revise the college’s curriculum. Faculty passed a minor in United States Cultural Studies (USCS) with an emphasis on racial diversity. All of this occurred in a decade when United States voters elected the first African American president in the country’s history, and many administrators, faculty, staff, and students hoped that significant change was finally at hand. The decade offered promise that the combination of growing awareness of racism, as well as presence of a critical number of student leaders of color trained in leadership skills would transform racial dynamics on the Whitworth campus.

In many ways these initiatives proved enormously successful. Faculty gradually incorporated diverse voices and documents to classes; speakers of color were invited to the campus; faculty participated in workshops to develop effective teaching strategies to reach

diverse students. Students of color assumed positions of leadership and prompted discussion of diversity issues in and out of the classroom.

This trajectory was far from smooth, however. Most faculty accepted the importance of diversity in both pedagogy and content of instruction, but many students of color continued to find Whitworth a challenging environment. They reported encountering challenges, known as microaggressions, in interactions with other students, and to a lesser degree with faculty and staff. The ongoing difficulty associated with leaving diverse home communities and coming to a predominantly white Whitworth proved daunting for many students of color. Campus climate surveys during the middle of the decade revealed persistent race-related tensions.

Creating a culture that dealt directly with America's racist past and present, as well as the ongoing issues related to white privilege and institutional racism, proved difficult. The hope that all students would find Whitworth a hospitable place was a goal that unfortunately seemed elusive. At the same time, the college (which became a university in 2007) did not turn back from its commitments, and in many ways doubled-down on the issue of diversity.

The most significant effort to create a more diverse student body and develop a culture appreciative of differences came with the decision to initiate the Act Six program. Developed by a former high school teacher, Tim Herron from Tacoma, the initiative aimed to identify and support underrepresented groups, mostly students of color from Tacoma, who wanted to attend college. Herron hoped to nurture leadership skills and academic abilities in these students, equipping them to make a positive impact on campus; at the same time, he hoped the students would return to Tacoma after college to make contributions there. In 2001, President Bill Robinson and his cabinet decided to make Whitworth the first college to partner with the Northwest Leadership Foundation in Tacoma to adopt this program.¹

The name “Act Six” refers to the sixth chapter of the book of Acts, where the early church responded to the reality of ethnic inequality and the problem of inadequate food. As Herron would describe the biblical story, “The heart of the solution was selection of a cadre of leaders from the affected minority group that was charged and empowered to work toward a solution.” For Herron, the passage in Acts provided both an inspiration and a model. He offered to help recruit students initially out of the Tacoma area and provide significant training prior to their coming to Whitworth. The college would need to provide full scholarships for the ten students who were chosen as “Act Six Leaders.”²

In the fall of 2001, Whitworth collaborated with Herron to develop a pool of applicants. Herron scheduled visits with Tacoma-area high schools. Accompanied by Whitworth’s Assistant Director of Admissions, Marianne Hansen, they explained the Act Six program and features of Whitworth that made it an attractive school. After recruiting and narrowing the applicant pool to approximately twenty students, Whitworth brought them to campus for final interviews and selection. The selection process was led by Esther Louie from Student Life, Professor Ginny Whitehouse from the Communications Department, and Marianne Hansen from Admissions.³ Ten finalists were selected, and enrolled in the fall of 2002. Prior to their arrival on campus, the students met weekly with Herron, who led them through a leadership program. Louie joined Herron, and provided training regarding cross cultural communication and cultural identity.

The first year was critical for the future of the program. The central question was whether the students would succeed well enough academically and socially to return as sophomores and graduate at the end of four years. From the standpoint of the college, its willingness to continue the program hinged on the retention rate of the first class.

President Robinson and his cabinet were generally aware of the serious consequences for all concerned if the program failed. However, there was still a level of ignorance regarding challenges that this first cadre of Act Six students would face once on campus. Acknowledging those challenges, Kathy Storm, Vice President for Student Life, determined that Esther Louie should be the point person and conveyed confidence in Louie's decisions. Louie had come to Whitworth in 1999 to assume the position of Assistant Dean of Multicultural Affairs. She worked closely in campus diversity initiatives with Gordon Watanabe, the president's Executive Assistant for Diversity.⁴

Esther Louie, along with Marianne Hansen and Carrie Streepy from Admissions, provided programming and personal support for students in the first cadre and for a number of years thereafter. Louie was highly skilled in multicultural work; she had been employed in this field at Washington State University.⁵

Marianne Hansen, who had met Act Six students during the admissions process, served as a trusted listener to students once they arrived on campus. Hansen conveyed acceptance; she would share that she was a middle-aged white woman, originally from Iowa, who knew next to nothing about the experiences of the members of other ethnic and racial groups. She simply communicated that she wanted to listen and learn and that worked for her and many of the students. In addition to Louie and Hansen, Carrie Streepy provided meaningful support, as did several faculty who served as Act Six mentors.⁶

In spite of meticulous preparations and the good work of Louie, Hansen, Streepy, and other faculty, many challenges emerged over the first couple of years of the program. Generalizing about all students is problematic, nevertheless both Louie and Hansen observed that many students expressed frustrations about not "fitting in" at Whitworth. Often, Act Six students

expressed feeling overwhelmed by the majority white population since they had attended high school with much higher percentages of students of color. Frequently the students felt the burden of “being on show”; the perceived pressure not to cause problems since their scholarship and perhaps the future of the program rested on their success. The expectation of campus leadership also created anxiety for many of the students. Often in the early years of the program, Act Six students encountered white students who charged Act Six students with receiving scholarship money that should have been given to more deserving students, or they were accused of receiving special treatment through the perception that the program was a part of affirmative action efforts. One African American student from that era reported that after a disagreement with her white roommate, the white student asked the Black student to tie the white student’s shoes. All of which was understood to be not only an act of white privilege but an overtly demeaning act. The net result was the reassignment of the two students to different residence halls.⁷

Some of the anxiety and frustration seemed rooted in the complexity of being a person of color in a predominantly white institution. While they wanted to “fit in,” that did not mean simply assimilating into the larger white culture. It did not mean abandoning their own culture or racial identity. As noted earlier, how to manage that tension has largely been an issue for students of color since the late 1960s.

Esther Louie helped Act Six students navigate this paradoxical process of fitting in while retaining a sense of separate identity via “Code Switching.” She encouraged students to see that they could learn and adopt codes that would allow them to succeed academically and socially within the largely white world. Those codes might necessitate speaking more formal English or even adopting more mainstream forms of dress in certain contexts. However, it did not mean

abandoning the codes that they had learned growing up in the “neighborhood” or among friends. Louie focused on “intercultural competency,” meaning that students of color as well as white students needed to learn how to function in different cultures, often simultaneously.

With the assistance of Herron’s training in Tacoma and Louie’s thoughtful mentoring of students, the program gained traction and proved successful. The retention of Act Six students exceeded expectations; of the fifty Act Six students enrolled during the first five years, eleven had graduated by the end of the five years, and the remaining thirty-seven students were still in school.⁸ Many Act Six students over the next few years were elected to leadership roles. These included Fa’ana Fanene and Obe Quarless as student body presidents. L. Denice Randle was elected senior class president and Sha’Nay McQuirter started a gospel choir.⁹

Yet, for many Act Six students the Whitworth experience remained daunting. For example, as the first group of Act Six students neared graduation, cadre members during a senior seminar offered reflections on issues related to race and the challenge of attending a predominantly white institution:

I know that I speak of . . . one day returning to my community on the east side of Tacoma . . . , but I cannot lie to myself that with each passing year at Whitworth College, I become more and more disconnected with my community. I feel that during my time at Whitworth if I had been more encouraged to discuss the conformity issues and my own cultural issues on campus than my connection with my community, culture, and family, I would not be so detached. . . . Rather I feel that encouragement to get involved in leadership, build relationships, and make positive contributions to the Whitworth community by giving my perspective and of course showing my colored-face on campus.

I do recognize that the intent for this kind of encouragement was a positive and meant to empower me as a student -of-color in college to be actively involved on campus.¹⁰

Another Act Six student, Michelle Bess, expressed frustration over the number of times she encountered other students who suggested that “minority students are not as qualified as other students.” Bess went on to say, “Achieving racial relations doesn’t mean some black person took your spot.”¹¹

Nevertheless, Bess and others expressed appreciation for the opportunity to serve in positions of leadership (she held the position of Cultural Events Coordinator). Years later, in an interview, she conveyed that her Act Six experience helped her learn how to work effectively with a predominantly white culture.¹²

Looking back on the impact of Act Six, it is difficult to overstate the significance of the program. An overwhelming number of students returned to their respective communities, primarily Tacoma and Spokane to take up various positions of leadership both as volunteers and as paid professionals. Act Six students became doctors, lawyers, college professors, teachers, nurses, technology gurus, trainers, administrators, consultants and many other meaningful professions.¹³

If Act Six provided the most sustained and financially vested effort to recruit students of color and to influence the culture of the campus, other initiatives from the faculty also surfaced during the decade. In September 2000, Professor Doug Sugano, along with Professor of Psychology Jim Waller, secured a \$75,000 grant from the Hewlett Foundation for a two-year program. Whitworth matched the grant with another \$25,000. The grant’s primary aim was to provide support for two four-day workshops in the summers of 2001 and 2002. These

workshops were designed “to provide training and resources for faculty development in curricular areas relating to diversity—encompassing racial, ethnic, gender, political, economic, and religious diversity in domestic and international cultures.” Sugano and Waller’s proposal stressed goals for developing new courses as well as revising existing ones.¹⁴

The grant also aimed to establish new community ties through service-learning and internship experiences. It identified Critical Race Theory as the principal content area to be taught. Perhaps most impressively, Waller was able to secure as workshop leaders two of the founding scholars of Critical Race Theory—Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, both from the University of Colorado. The grant brought Gonzaga faculty and administrators together with Whitworth faculty for training. Raymond Reyes and Mary Jeannot led the Gonzaga contingent. In each of the two workshops, ten Whitworth faculty and four Gonzaga faculty received stipends, although another ten Whitworth faculty enrolled in the workshop. By the end of the grant in February 2003, nearly forty Whitworth faculty, staff, and administrators had participated in training around Critical Race Theory.

As a result of the workshops, an estimated thirty-seven courses at both Whitworth and Gonzaga had either been revised or created. Sugano began offering a one-credit course largely for first-year students on Critical Race Theory. In addition to Delgado and Stefancic, other noteworthy individuals came to Whitworth to speak on diversity issues as a result of the grant. These included noted historian of American racial and ethnic history Professor Ronald Takaki, as well as guest artist Jose Guerrero. In addition, Therese Kuoh-Moukoury, an African feminist author from Cameroon, came to Whitworth to give a public presentation.

Apart from the Hewlett grant, other resources were used to bring notable speakers to campus. Professor of history Arlin Migliazzo and Esther Louie brought nationally-known

African American journalist Leonard Pitts to address the student body in February 2003. In 2005, Whitworth hosted a one-man show by actor African American Dave Casteal, who had graduated from Whitworth with a Master's degree in teaching. Casteal had teamed up with Spokane playwright Bryan Harnetieaux to create a one-man play based on the character York, the one slave on the Lewis and Clark Expedition. In the following year, the Reverend Samuel B. McKinney, pastor of the largest African American Church in the state, Seattle's Mount Zion Baptist Church, came to Whitworth to speak about his role in the Civil Rights movement.

In addition to outside speakers, students of color on campus organized themselves in order to celebrate their identities and cultures. Stephaine Nobles-Beans continued to serve as a catalyst for the Black Student Union Gospel Explosion. In 2006, the event marked ten years of bringing area Black Gospel choirs onto campus. In addition, Whitworth's chaplain Dr. Terry McGonigal employed Reverend C. W. Andrews, long-time pastor of Calvary Baptist, the oldest predominantly Black congregation in the state, to preach occasionally in chapel as well as to serve as a resource and confidant for students. McGonigal developed a close relationship with Reverend Andrews, as did Dr. Don Liebert who frequently took students to Reverend Andrews's church, as well as Dr. Ron Pyle, who teamed with Andrews for several years to offer a Jan-Term course on African American preaching.¹⁵ McGonigal developed a popular course entitled "Shalom" in which he focused on the biblical mandate for reconciliation. This course was particularly attractive to the Act Six students.¹⁶ In Jan Term 2009, McGonigal took over leadership of the "Prejudice Across America" study program. Visiting Washington D.C., McGonigal and students were on hand for Barack Obama's inauguration. In addition, they listened to future U.S. Senator Raphael Warnock preach at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, the former church of Martin Luther King Jr.

During the decade, a serious effort was made to revitalize a club dedicated to Indigenous culture. In 2004, after an eight-year hiatus, the Four Directions Native Club was revived in an attempt to bring awareness to Whitworth of Native American students and culture on campus. Crystal Viken, an Act Six scholar, took the lead in generating interest. She organized “Entering the Circle,” an event that featured authentic song, dance, drumming, art and guest speakers from the Native American community. “As a Native American, I feel very small,” said Viken, a sophomore. “Whitworth is a small community. We have to represent more than normal. I came to Whitworth to share my life.” Though the club included only eleven members, president Matilda Sampson was able to bring well known Indigenous artist Richard Gendron to campus.¹⁷

In 2008, Act Six student Michelle Bess helped organize, along with Ana Vasquez, the first Hispanic Heritage Month. Events included food from a local Mexican restaurant, a short presentation about Mexican Independence Day, and music by Professor of Communications Joe Vigil and his family band, Los Vigiles. Approximately eighty people attended the event.¹⁸ In the following year, Professor Lindy Scott from the World Languages Department began offering a course entitled, “Latinos in the U.S.”

Largely due to the many Act Six students who were encouraged to seek leadership roles throughout the campus, many positions in the early 2000s were filled by students of color. These included student body presidents, cultural diversity advocates, and cultural events coordinators. Throughout the decade, students brought speakers to campus and organized “Prime Time” programs in the residence halls. A.S.W.C. president Obe Quarless, an Act Six student, received acclaim for his work creating the Spokane Student Government Council, which brought student leaders together from Gonzaga, Eastern, and Washington State University.¹⁹

However, race relations at Whitworth remained problematic. In spite of the successes of an enhanced curriculum, the Act Six program, and a robust student culture that emphasized racial and ethnic affinity groups, Whitworth remained a challenging place for students of color. They reported continuing struggle with the idea that Whitworth was a comfortable place for them.

In 2005, Whitworth students took the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). Interpreting the results, Vice President for Student Life Kathy Storm reported that, “One of the areas that I would like to see us improve is understanding people of different ethnic backgrounds than our own. That’s an area where, comparatively, we need to do better.” In that same year, Professor Doug Sugano conducted his own campus survey out of his Multicultural Literature course. The survey revealed a stark difference between perceptions of white students and students of color. In general, white students by an overwhelming majority did not believe that Whitworth had a significant problem regarding race, while a significant number of students of color did. Summarizing the findings, Sugano concluded that “Whitworth does have a discrimination problem.” He further stated that “Part of the ‘blind racism’ has blocked many students and faculty from seeing that 40.8% of our non-white students have experienced racial discrimination while only 2.7% of the white students on campus have.”²⁰

In 2007, an incident occurred in one of the residence halls that revealed a great deal about the ongoing dilemma of differing perceptions of racial issues at Whitworth. Problems arose when white students posted images and photographs on hallway doors. Several students of color, including Act Six students Sha’nay McQuirter, cultural events coordinator Delia Orosco, and BSU president Tiffanie Beatty, found the images offensive.

The most notorious one was a picture that depicted a group of white sheep and a single black sheep walking through a school yard. All the white sheep had their books in their hands

but the black sheep did not have any books; instead it had sunglasses on and earphones, and was smoking a cigarette or cigar. The caption read: “there’s one in every crowd.” One of the offended students took the picture off the door and tore it up. As they went down the hall, they found other racially insensitive images and tore them up.

McQuirter, Orosco, and Beattie confronted the resident director of Warren, who said he would look into it, but according to the students, nothing happened. Associate Dean of Students Dick Mandeville offered to talk to students, but preferred that the students handle it within the existing leadership channels. When interviewed for the *Whitworthian*, McQuirter said, “It’s been four years. We’ve watched this stuff go on for so long. It was a build up of things.” Orosco said that she felt a distinction should be made between the side of the door facing one’s room and the side of the door facing the hallway—the former was the private space of the student, but the latter was public space. The students who originally posted the images resisted any suggestion that their outside door constituted public space that should be regulated for its content. Their response prompted an intense confrontation between the dorm’s cultural diversity advocate, Jeremiah Sataraka, and one of the white students. In the aftermath, Sataraka apologized.

Shortly thereafter, parents contacted school officials defending their white students. Subsequently several students of color went to the Associated Students of Whitworth College (ASWC) meeting of December 5th to voice their concerns about the racially offensive posters. The conflict centered on whether students had the right to put up on their doors what others considered offensive. The seriousness of the incident became fully apparent when President Bill Robinson felt it necessary to comment: “Sometimes the response to the act of incivility is incivility. And when that happens we lose focus on what is it that caused the incivility in the

first place.” It was unclear whether Robinson was referring to the larger issues of racism in the culture or whether he specifically meant the posting of an offensive image. Professor of history Arlin Migliazzo, who frequently taught courses related to race, was quoted as saying, “When there is a conflict, and if you come with an attitude of humility, wanting to learn, to take responsibility, try to not explain away the offending words or actions and talk directly to that person you hurt.”²¹

In its next issue, the *Whitworthian* posted two student letters to the editor which challenged the perspective of the students of color and asserted that in the writers’ opinions, they overreacted to the posters and images.²² Another student, Erika Prins, a regular columnist for the *Whitworthian* saw the problem differently and wrote:

At Whitworth, racism is often subtle and, in my opinion, based, more on judgments due to lack of multicultural experience than motivated by hate. It can take the form of offhand comments or jokes between friends with the subject being a racial stereotype, or it can be simply choosing not to associate with someone because of assumptions made about them because of the color of their skin.²³

As a consequence of events surrounding the posters, Act Six student Delia Orosco resigned as Cultural Events Coordinator and shared her letter of resignation in the *Whitworthian*:

In light of the many issues throughout this year we all know that being a member of this body has been a struggle for me, personally and as a leader. I have struggled to maintain the essence of what makes me the person I am, while also accommodating for the comfort of others. With the most recent events regarding incidents on campus and the *Whitworthian* it has become evident to me that my dedication to help the campus

understand diversity issues as useful and important to the Whitworth community has not been enough and I cannot continue as this year's Cultural Events Coordinator. . . .

After the most recent letters to the editor in this week's issue of the *Whitworthian*, the community can no longer deny the fact that latent and overt racism does exist on the Whitworth campus. I understand and acknowledge that discussions surrounding diversity issues are difficult for the dominant culture, but please recognize that my very presence and commitment to the Whitworth community has been three and half years of discomfort and vulnerability. Many other student leaders and I have worked endlessly and tirelessly to make Whitworth a better place for all God's children.

The community is suffering and has been suffering for a very long time, and we have failed, the students have failed, the faculty has failed, the staff has failed and the administration has failed. We have failed to live up to our very standards of a Christ centered community that honors God, follows Christ and serves humanity. We have failed to equally distribute and carry the burden of painful reconciliation to the many diversity issues we face as a community. Many have been left out on the margins and expected to make change happen without enough support from all areas of the community. If this community is to move on from this painful time we must come together.

I speak to you all not as a leader, not as a minority woman of color, not as the ASWC Cultural Events Coordinator, and not as an Act Six scholar recipient, but as a hurt, broken-hearted and vulnerable sister in Christ. I will make one last effort before I leave today to encourage the community to seek reconciliation for those suffering from the recent events. In my last plea for justice I would like to call on Whitworth College

President William Robinson, the administration, faculty, staff, alumni and students to be committed to justice and reconciliation of the recent events and those to come.

Please hear my heart, see my pain, and understand my struggle.²⁴

Orosco's letter of resignation prompted an intense ASWC meeting with two hours devoted to the ways "student government can help reconcile hurt feelings about race on campus." Sha'Nay McQuirter asserted that "People need to look at the monsters in their own closets. People need to deal with their issues and what's in their hearts first. Prejudice leads to discrimination and discrimination leads to racism." Several students suggested that the college address issues in the curriculum. Ideas included adding a cultural awareness emphasis to freshmen seminar and changing the Core program to include a wider variety of non-European worldviews. In fact, debate over Core consumed a good part of the discussion. While several students supported the existing curriculum, others, including Act Six student and Senior Class Coordinator L.Denice Randle, stated "that she should not be denied the opportunity to learn about her own culture simply because she is not of the majority." Still another Act Six student, ASWC president Fa'ana Fanene asserted, that students needed to take a more active role in "building relationships and trust between minorities and non-minorities." She further stated, "For me it's not preaching about not being racist, it's for people to be anti-racist."²⁵

The incident regarding posters in the dorm, the resignation of Orosco, and the debate over race relations in ASWC, all underscored the many challenges facing the administration in 2007. Administrators struggled to navigate between conflicting interpretations of facts and competing principles. On the one hand, administrators and faculty believed that students were attempting to communicate with one another and appreciate different perspectives. On the other hand, administrators and faculty tried to express sensitivity toward students who felt offended and to

acknowledge that white students often exhibited racial bias. The incident made for a generally unsatisfactory outcome for all involved.

In that same year, 2007, an Act Six student, Jeremiah Sataraka, brought two former African American students from the late 1960s, Frenchy Lamont and Frances Jones-Baker, to reflect on their experiences at Whitworth. Lamont had been one of the leading voices for change during his time at Whitworth. An estimated 175 students and faculty attended the event, which was held in the chapel. Jones-Baker, who came from New York, shared that her experience at Whitworth had been far from positive. “I had dealt with mild discrimination in New York, but I had never faced outright bigotry and ignorance until coming to Whitworth,” Jones-Baker said. “I am not bitter anymore, but it still hurts.”²⁶

Jones-Baker and Lamont remembered that they had encountered racism through “Wanted” posters in the student union building, racist remarks, and threats to their safety. Lamont related his experience of diving into ditches to avoid cars trying to run them off the road. Jones-Baker noted that one student had asked her if she really had a tail. When students complained to the administration, they were told that the other students were just joking.

Both Jones-Baker and Lamont decided that educating others was the only way to counter the hostility. “It was students educating students,” Jones-Baker said. “That’s how the BSU originally started.” The two shared the story of the formation of the Black Student Union as a vehicle for educating others about African-American culture and to gain support and strength from one another.

Sataraka asked the two invitees to comment on why many things had not changed since the 1960s. They responded, “The overarching problem seems to be ignorance rather than

outright racism.”²⁷ Lending weight to their observation was that fact that in 2007, Doug Sugano conducted another “Racial Climate Survey.” It revealed that 71.8 percent of students of color agreed that prejudice is a problem on campus, which reinforced the results from two years earlier.²⁸

One effort to address ignorance by white students of many challenges facing African American students emerged in spring 2007 with the formation of a subcommittee of the Black Student Union, called ACTION. The acronym stood for Activism for Campus Transformation and Injustice in Our Nation. Led by Tiffanie Beattie, an Act Six student who was the president of the BSU, the group hoped “to make it more inclusive and to capitalize on the white students that wanted to support black students and black student awareness.” Two other Act Six students, Bobby Walston and Obe Quarless, expressed hope that the group could broaden the discussion around race to more groups on campus.²⁹

However, by the end of spring semester 2007, frustrations among numerous students escalated to the point where a general protest was organized on May 8 at the Campanile in Whitworth’s Loop. Protest leaders encouraged any students who held grievances against the institution to gather and express them publicly. At varying times between 50 and 125 students congregated under the Campanile. For four to five hours students took the microphone and challenged Whitworth administrators and faculty to address race-related issues that had surfaced earlier that spring. They also demanded inclusive policies toward LGBTQ individuals, and more sustainable practices regarding food waste.³⁰

Nearly a year later, another incident underscored tensions involving race relations on campus. In part, the controversy emerged because the NAACP had issued a plea in 2007 for everybody to stop using the “N” word. In February 2008, Whitworth held a public discussion

on use of the “N” word in various contexts. Most of the comment focused on why the “N” word should not be used, especially by any white person, even if the intent was to express solidarity with African Americans.

The Reverend Dr. C. W. Andrews, a Black pastor who had been working with Whitworth’s chapel staff, argued that it should never be used because as someone who had grown up in Alabama, he always heard it used to proclaim white superiority and Black inferiority.

In a long commentary in the *Whitworthian*, white student Grady Locklear asserted that banning the word would be impossible, and even if banned would have little effect on the practice of racism itself. The author suggested that people should “challenge the culture to smile when the word is used as a friendly term, but to react with strong criticism when it is used harshly.”³¹

In response, the following week, another student chastised Locklear for using the word seven times in print. The discussion over the “N” word revealed that on the one hand, students felt somewhat comfortable discussing it, but on the other it epitomized the challenges of living in an American culture fraught with historical as well as current racist practices.³²

Recruiting students of color at Whitworth, as at other liberal arts colleges remained difficult. Beginning in the early 2000s, increasing numbers of schools experimented with making the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) optional for students. Data revealed that students of color were generally disadvantaged because of the number of white middle class assumptions underlying many of the questions. Whitworth’s Vice President of Enrollment, Fred Pfursich,

recommended that the university follow suit. After considerable discussion the board approved the recommendation for the fall of 2007.

Even with the SAT optional, many faculty members pressed for more proactive approaches to the recruitment of students of color. In 2008, Professor of English Doug Sugano and new Professor of communications, Joe Vigil, a Whitworth graduate, collaborated on what they described as a “White Paper on Diversity.” The two professors offered a ten-page single spaced prospectus elaborating on the need for recruiting more students of color and further diversifying and broadening the curriculum. Sugano and Vigil referenced the university’s 2005-2010 strategic plan, which identified increased diversity as a major strategic objective. The paper laid out a detailed rationale for greater diversity. Sugano and Vigil wrote:

In general, students on ethnically and economically diverse campuses experience higher levels of satisfaction with their educations. The reasons for this are clear as well: more diverse classrooms equip students to become complex critical thinkers, to develop different sets of social skills, to collaborate more readily and to become more aware of their ethical responsibilities. Particularly important for Whitworth is the observation that students in diverse classrooms have an easier time connecting their learning across the curriculum. Diverse campuses do a better job of preparing students to be good citizens of their communities, of the U.S., and the world. Students who have been educated at diverse campuses are better prepared for graduate and professional schools and for the workplace, wherever that may be.³³

While Sugano and Vigil prompted university officials to increase efforts to diversify the student body, the board of trustees in 2008 selected its first African American chair, Walt Oliver.

One of Whitworth's most distinguished alumni, Oliver had not only donated significant financial resources to the college but had served on the board since 1997.

In the same year that Oliver became board chair, the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU), of which Whitworth was a member, announced that it was honoring Whitworth with the Robert and Susan Andringa Award for Advancing Racial Harmony. The award was largely based on Whitworth's Act Six program. In announcing the award, the *Whitworthian* acknowledged the previous year's unrest over student posters, and Vice President Kathy Storm noted that Whitworth was in the beginning stages of offering conflict mediation training on campus. A few months earlier, President Bill Robinson had stated that "We've made some progress, but we're still not where we want to be. It's hard to feel great about our progress because we are still short of where we want to be."³⁴

The Andringa Award prompted a good deal of discussion on campus. The editorial staff of the *Whitworthian* published a long opinion piece that offered a sober critique of race relations on campus:

We face two challenges. First, if the university is going to be acclaimed for success in racial harmony, it must also accept responsibility for some of the negative fallouts of the past few years. Last spring, a *Whitworthian* article covered a seemingly isolated residence hall incident that arose because of years of slights, grievances, and underground racial tension.

From incidents in Warren Hall, to the resignation of the cultural events coordinator, to the culminating 8th of May gathering, race relations and dissatisfaction with the Whitworth community were hot topics.

This fall, the Whitworth community has been relatively quiet on the topic of race relations. Maybe that's a sign of long-due harmony. Or maybe students are just afraid to say the wrong thing. Maybe they're just tired of being outraged.

An award shouldn't cause us to sit back and relax in our supposed harmonious campus. A certificate doesn't change the fact that students generally respond to race relations with either apathy or exhaustion. Unfortunately, racial harmony isn't something that can be forced by programs or posters, or proclaimed in press releases.

It's not fair to put the burden of ending racial tension and ignorance solely on the shoulders of cultural diversity advocates and Act Six students.

Racial harmony isn't about programming. It's about hundreds of individual choices. It's about the chaotic crossfire of expectations and reality, ideals, and action.

Whitworth prides itself on 'community,' but the community cannot survive on just the voices of the outspoken: If we want to live in harmony, we have to care, genuinely, about others. The tough conversations and, at times, tense atmospheres surrounding race relations may have brought us closer to achieving that goal.³⁵

That same year, several Whitworth faculty made their most serious effort to date to create a curriculum that would address issues of diversity. Under the umbrella of United States Cultural Studies (USCS), the faculty approved an academic minor whose stated goals were the following: 1) To study the foundations and interactions of diverse groups living in the U.S. —the groups can be defined by ethnicity, race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, and socio-economics; and 2) to develop intercultural competencies for graduate or professional schools and for eventual vocations. The initial advisory board included Jennifer Holsinger, sociology;

Scott Kolbo, art; Michael Le Roy, political studies; Esther Louie, Student Life; James McPherson, communication studies; Rhosetta Rhodes, Center for Community Engagement; Doug Sugano, English; and Roberta Wilburn, Graduate School of Education. The minor required a one credit Introduction to Critical Race Theory class, a one credit Campus-Based Research course, and a one credit Community Based Research Project. A three-credit course in Intercultural Communications was also required. In addition, another 11-12 credits of electives were to be completed from an approved list of courses. These included classes in women's and gender studies, as well as Julia Stronks' Poverty and Community; Patricia Bruininks's Psychology of Poverty; and Arlin Migliazzo's Identity, Race and Power in American Life courses.³⁶

For many years following the development of the USCS minor, Sugano team-taught the introductory class on Critical Race Theory with several different faculty, including Jim McPherson, Kathy Lee, and Dale Soden. Over the next decade, under the leadership first of Doug Sugano, then of sociologists Stacy Keogh George and Bob Francis, US Cultural Studies proved to be an important effort to provide coursework for students interested in studying diversity through varied disciplines.³⁷

As the first decade of the new century drew to a close, student interest in race relations expressed itself in multiple ways. In March 2009, Josh Swayne wrote a column in the *Whitworthian* entitled, "Identity as 'black' lies in one's own interpretation." Swayne, a white student, chose to interview Jermaine Easterlin, an African American student. Easterlin told Sway that "a person's blackness is connected to things that a person associates with his or her being black, which could be just about anything: family cohesiveness, dress, deportment, aspects of Southern culture, being a nice person, wanting to be successful, eating rice –

anything.” Easterlin went on to say, “I just think that people need to talk to people and look beyond skin color and get to know them . . . It’s hard enough being a human being, but it’s [even harder] having a skin color added on top . . . [the word ‘black’] builds barriers.” Easterlin lamented the many stereotypes that he still encountered about Black people: “On the basis of dark skin that he or she is poor and a poorly-educated person with a highly-developed sense of rhythm and a boisterous personality who likes to fist bump, listen to rap, vandalize, eat fried chicken and cornbread, sport corn rows, bust caps, play basketball, and speak in Ebonics: Being and doing any or all of those things is fine (except vandalism and busting caps), but having it asserted that you are or you do any of those things on the basis of skin color or self-identification as black would be a heavy burden to bear, no?”

Swayne also interviewed Jarvis Lunalo from Kenya. Lunalo identified himself as Black, but for him ‘Black’ simply means he has dark skin, and he chooses to identify himself as a Kenyan, not as a member of the U.S. Black community. One of Lunalo’s complaints about the U.S. was that people, when they learned he was from Kenya, make conversation about Kenya the basis of their friendship with him. “After the questions about Kenya have been exhausted, the friendship fades.”³⁸

Swayne ended his column with a request to his fellow white students: “So my fellow white people, if people you know use ‘black’ to describe themselves, let them define ‘black’ as they use it to express their identity, but get to know that identity, black and otherwise. Better than wondering what ‘black’ means would be wondering how someone is doing, who they are and what they are truly like.”³⁹

A month later, challenges for those who wanted to make Whitworth a welcoming place for students of color were revealed in another *Whitworthian* column from senior Kyle Navis.

Titled “Encountering White Supremacy,” Navis’s column described an incident he had experienced in February 2009. He and several friends had been hanging out around a campfire somewhere in the Spokane Valley. During the course of the evening, approximately fifteen other individuals gathered around a separate fire at some distance. It soon became clear that it was a White Supremacist gathering. Chants of “Heil Hitler” and “White Power” could be heard. At some point they came to Navis’s group and asked if they would like to join in. Kyle and friends refused, but the white supremacists harassed them with racial epithets. Navis could only conclude that “Racism is alive and well in the United States; let no one fool you. Every time I hear people say that Barack Obama’s election signals that America has moved past the race issue, I share a disparaging laugh with myself.”⁴⁰

In 2010, Bill Robinson retired from the Whitworth presidency. During his seventeen years as president, he had overseen a remarkable period of growth. Whitworth’s sense of mission was significantly strengthened, its physical infrastructure enhanced, and the undergraduate enrollment had nearly doubled to nearly 2,100 students. Robinson had also done much to change the racial dynamics on campus. He supported the work of professors Sugano and Waller and others, and most notably approved the Act Six program.

However, difficulties associated with race relations on the Whitworth campus continued to challenge administrators, faculty, staff, and students. 2010 would mark the beginning of a new presidency with many of the same persistent frustrations.

¹ Author Interview with Bill Robinson, June 15, 2022; author interview with Terry McGonigal, December 12, 2022.

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- ² Author interview with Tim Herron, March 15, 2022.
- ³ Interview Esther Louie, June 14, 2022; author interview with Marianne Hansen, July 20, 2022.
- ⁴ Author interview with Kathy Storm, September 10, 2022.
- ⁵ Author interview with Esther Louie, June 14, 2022.
- ⁶ Author interview with Marianne Hansen. July 20, 2022.
- ⁷ Author interview, Toni McIntosh, February 4, 2024.
- ⁸ *Whitworthian*, (February 19, 2008 p. 4.
- ⁹ Author interview with Denice Randle, May 16, 2022; author interview with Obe Quarless, November 1, 2022.
- ¹⁰ Author's files Soden Document, Act Six
- ¹¹ *Whitworthian*, February 19, 2008 p. 4.
- ¹² Author interview with Michelle Bess, November 1, 2022.
- ¹³ Author interview with Esther Louis, February 10, 2024.
- ¹⁴ Author's files Hewlett Grant
- ¹⁵ Author interview with Reverend C. W. Andrews, April 15, 2023.
- ¹⁶ Author Interview with Terry McGonigal, December 12, 2022.
- ¹⁷ *Whitworthian*, December 7, p. 1.
- ¹⁸ *Whitworthian*, September 23, 2008.
- ¹⁹ *Whitworthian*, March 10, 2009, p. 5.
- ²⁰ 2005 Campus Survey, Doug Sugano Papers, Whitworth Archives Box 2, Folder 19.
- ²¹ *Whitworthian*, March 6, 2007.
- ²² *Whitworthian*, March 13, 2007.
- ²³ *Whitworthian*, March 13, 2007, p. 5.
- ²⁴ *Whitworthian*, March 20, p. 9.
- ²⁵ *Whitworthian*, March 20, 2007, p. 3.

²⁶ *Whitworthian*, February 27, 2007, p. 10.

²⁷ *Whitworthian*, February 27, 2007, pp. 10-11.

²⁸ Sugano campus survey 2007, Whitworth Archives, Box 2, Folder 19.

²⁹ *Whitworthian*, February 27, 2007, p. 10.

³⁰ Interview, Terry McGonigal, December 12, 2022.

³¹ *Whitworthian*, March 4, 2008, p. 5.

³² *Whitworthian*, March 11, 2008, p. 9.

³³ *Whitworthian*, May 5, 2009, p. 1; Doug Sugano and Joe Vigil, “Diversity White Paper,” “Doug Sugano Papers, Box 2, Folder 19, Whitworth University Library Archives.

³⁴ *Whitworthian*, April 17, 2007.

³⁵ *Whitworthian*, February 19, 2008 p. 6.

³⁶ *Whitworthian*, April 22, 2008 p. 1.

³⁷ Interviews Doug Sugano June 15, 2022; Stacey Keogh George, November 22, 2022; Bob Francis, December 1, 2022.

³⁸ *Whitworthian*, March 3, 2009, p. 8.

³⁹, *Whitworthian*, March 3, 2009, p. 8.

⁴⁰ *Whitworthian*, April 21, 2009.