



USC ROSSIER SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Climate Assessment Report

Submitted By

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Executive Summary



The University of Pennsylvania Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education is frequently consulted to perform climate assessments at colleges and universities across the nation. Consistent with our work on more than 40 campuses, we spent three days at the University of Southern California conducting focus group interviews with master's, EDL, and Ph.D. students who provided perspectives on the Rossier School of Education's racial climate. We also facilitated a town hall forum on race that approximately 200 Rossier faculty members, staff members, and students attended.

Presented in this report are findings from seven focus groups we conducted on campus between October 26-28, 2016, as well as three virtual focus group sessions we hosted with students three weeks later.

Findings reveal how Rossier fails to actualize its urban mission, insufficiently engages racial issues in the curriculum, mishandles race in classrooms, and maintains a poor intellectual climate that affects cross-cultural learning and engagement outside of classrooms. Also, Ph.D. students provided perspectives on systemic factors that led to disproportionately higher rates of attrition among peers of color in their program. And some master's students of color expressed disappointment about the School's lack of investment into their academic goals. Across all degree programs, participants in this climate study spoke about the need to hire more full-time faculty members of color.

We conclude the report with several recommendations for Rossier faculty members and administrators, as well as members of the School's Diversity Task Force.

A Statement Concerning Research Integrity

We anticipate some members of the Rossier community might understandably read this report with skepticism because all three of its authors are relocating from Penn to USC this summer. The climate assessment and our recruitment to the University are in no ways connected. Conversations about having Professor Harper join the Rossier faculty began after our on-campus focus group interviews concluded. Neither before, during, nor after the recruitment process did anyone at USC attempt to persuade us to offer a favorable review of the School by offering us jobs there.

At no point has anyone, including Dean Karen Symms Gallagher, asked us to soften the presentation of our findings or alter this report in any way. Had we received this request, we would have refused, as we never compromise the integrity of our research and work products.

It also seems important to note that we did not treat Rossier any differently in our analysis and reporting than we have any other institution that has hired us to conduct a climate assessment. We hope this is apparent in the articulation of findings we present on pages 4-12. Doing our work in the most rigorous and trustworthy fashion strengthens the reputation of the Center we have built at Penn. Fortunately (and unsurprisingly), our future employer appreciates and has fully respected this.

Research Methods



Sampling and Participant Recruitment

Darline Robles, Professor of Clinical Education and Rossier Diversity Task Force Chair, was our primary point of contact for this climate assessment. Dr. Robles worked with academic program directors and other Rossier colleagues to distribute announcements about our visit and to invite student participation in the focus group interviews. Lists of students who had signed up for the various interview slots were given to us when we arrived to campus on October 26. We did not personally invite any student to participate in this climate assessment.

Originally, focus groups were intended to be separated by academic program – master’s, EDL, and Ph.D. However, due to the complexities of students’ schedules, most of our focus groups were mixed. We initially worried this would create discontinuity in the discussions and ultimately in data analysis because master’s students would likely have one set of experiences and perspectives, and doctoral students another. Despite this worry, most of what we heard was consistent across degree levels, concentrations, and academic programs. Nonetheless, we acknowledge this as a limitation below.

In addition to arranging the in-person interviews, Dr. Robles and others at Rossier offered students enrolled in off-campus and online programs the opportunity to participate in one of three virtual focus groups we facilitated via Adobe Connect from our center at Penn in mid-November. Participation in these was extremely low.

Across all interview slots, a total of 64 students participated in focus group interviews. This sample is considerably smaller than those in our typical climate studies. We usually interview 300-500 students in our campus-wide climate assessments. School-specific assessments, such as the one we conducted for Rossier, are often smaller. Please keep sample size in mind when reading findings we present in this report. However, we believe it would be a mistake to delegitimize or dismiss these findings because they are based on 64 students’ perspectives and experiences. Though the sample is small, the consensus students reached in the interviews was quite striking.

Participants

We asked students in each focus group to indicate the programs in which they were enrolled, as well as how they identify racially/ethnically. While confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in a focus group setting, we ensured students that they would be treated anonymously in this report. For that reason, we never asked participants to disclose their names.

A total of 36 women and 28 men participated in this climate assessment. Thirteen were EDL students, 12 were Ph.D. students, and 39 were students in master’s degree programs. All but six master’s students were enrolled in the PASA and MFT programs. Four international students participated. A racial/ethnic breakdown of the sample is presented in Table 1.



Table 1. Participants by Race/Ethnicity

Racial/Ethnic Group	n
Asian American/Pacific Islander	6
Caucasian/White	17
Black/African American	14
Latino/Chicano/Hispanic	11
Biracial/Multiethnic	9

As previously noted, four international students also participated. We do not list their countries here because doing so may reveal their identities. For this same reason, we also do not identify specific ways in which three participants identified themselves ethnically. We do not typically 'other' participants in our reporting. We only do so here because Rossier is a relatively small context and there may be only one student in the entire school who identifies a specific way.

Data Analysis

Transcripts from each focus group interview was professionally transcribed. We also had a series of debriefing meetings in which the three of us compared notes from the Town Hall Forum on Race and focus groups we separately facilitated. We first read printed copies of each transcript and marked it with marginal notes. Those notes were used to develop a codebook of recurrent patterns, statements, and concepts. One of us used Dedoose, a qualitative data analysis software program, to do line-by-line coding of all transcripts. Having one person do all the coding eliminated the need to ensure interrater reliability. Code reports from Dedoose were arranged categorically and used to construct the findings we present in this document.

Limitations

There are at least three noteworthy limitations to this climate assessment. First, as previously mentioned, the focus groups were mixed. This is inconsistent with our normal procedure. To the greatest possible extent, we strive for heterogeneity by race/ethnicity, gender, location (e.g., on campus vs. off site), and/or academic program. Mixing PASA master's students with EDL students who take their classes in Orange County, for example, was not ideal. The second limitation is concerning the low turnout of students for the virtual focus groups. This did not afford us an opportunity to deeply, or even sufficiently understand students' appraisals of the climate online, in Hawaii, and at other off-campus locations. The final limitation is related to the previous. Our sample is not exactly proportional to student enrollments in Rossier's academic programs. All three limitations can be addressed with a quantitative survey of the full student body. Later this year, Rossier will be invited to participate, at no cost, in the pilot of the National Assessment of Collegiate Campus Climates. This instrument will allow the School to disaggregate data by academic program, various identity categories, and other variables.

Findings



Students we interviewed did not report being physically assaulted or called racially derogatory names in Rossier classrooms, being blatantly harassed or discriminated against because of their race, or being involved in racially hostile exchanges with others in the School. At just about every institution where we have conducted climate assessments, experiences such as these compel students of color to characterize the environment as toxic. Only one person explicitly called Rossier's racial climate toxic.

Instead, participants in our study identified several ways in which the School fails to actualize its urban mission, insufficiently engages racial issues in the curriculum, mishandles race in classrooms, and maintains a poor intellectual climate that affects cross-cultural learning and student engagement across racial/ethnic groups outside of classrooms. Also, Ph.D. students specifically spoke about systemic factors that led to disproportionately higher rates of attrition among peers of color in their program. And master's students of color expressed disappointment about faculty members' lack of investment into their academic goals. In the sections below, we describe more fully what students said about each of these challenges and opportunities. We occasionally present verbatim quotes from students who participated in our in-person and virtual focus groups.

In most interviews, participants were critical of the racial composition of the Rossier faculty. There is not a section on this issue because participants consistently spoke about it in a straightforward way. "We need more faculty of color," was a statement we heard over and over again. While there is not a section about this below, the shortage of professors of color was one of the most frequently criticized aspects of the School.

An Indistinguishable Urban Education

"Being located in South Central L.A., that's as urban as it gets at Rossier."

Across racial groups and academic programs, participants consistently noted the School does not place adequate attention on urban contexts, inner-city schools, or big city districts like LAUSD. Also, they reported that too little is taught and learned at Rossier about ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse children and families in urban environments.

"I don't know what they mean by urban education," was the most recurrent statement across the focus groups. Many talked about how the School espouses a commitment to urban education on its website and in recruitment materials, yet there seems to be no shared understanding of what that means in classrooms and curricula. "Honestly, I don't know what about this program is urban; it seems no different from the way education is taught everywhere else I have been," one MFT student noted.

Readings (even those assigned in diversity courses) tend to be mostly about broad education topics. This was deemed a mismatch with Rossier's mission and supposed emphasis. An EDL student maintained that not every reading can or should be about urban education; he thought it unrealistic and potentially too limiting. Others in the focus group agreed with him, but argued



that faculty could do a better job of situating broad readings into the context of urban educational, residential, and workplace settings. “The urban part of our Urban Education Policy Ph.D. Program is overshadowed by the policy part,” one student contended. Participants in this particular focus group unanimously agreed.

A PASA student understood it was necessary to learn about Harvard and the history of higher education in her first year, but felt it was also important to learn about the emergence of postsecondary institutions in cities, especially urban community colleges. This student went on to note that it was the end of October and she had just heard the words ‘urban education’ for the first time earlier that week in any of her fall semester courses. She said it stood out to her because it reminded her of Rossier’s purported emphasis, something she had forgotten. “I was like, oh yeah, this school is supposed to be about urban education.” Others across focus group interviews noted that the word ‘urban’ had not once emerged in any course in which they were presently enrolled. This was especially frustrating for students who were working full-time while pursuing their degrees at Rossier. An African American EDL student, for example, was working in LAUSD and had previously taught in public schools in New York City. Almost all of what she and her cohortmates had been assigned to read was disconnected from the realities of urban environments, she believed. “This does not fulfill the mission of explicitly addressing urban education. We’re not talking about black and brown people the way we can or should. There’s a disconnect.”

The lack of attention placed on urban contexts affected student satisfaction and the racial climate in assorted ways. Most students of color indicated they chose Rossier because it markets itself as a leader in urban education. They entered the School expecting to read and learn about people like themselves, communities in which many of them live and work, and so on. Although some White participants in our interviews said they also chose the School because of its urban emphasis, students of color believed most of their White classmates selected USC because of its prestige and network, not because they really wanted to learn about education in the context of cities. This is impossible to confirm without systematically surveying students across racial/ethnic groups about their reasons for coming to Rossier. Regardless of how important it was in their choosing USC, interview participants across racial groups agreed that discussions about urban education ought not occur without a deep, explicit emphasis on race.

Racelessness in Classrooms and Curricula

There’s no venue at USC, there’s no class at Rossier where people are forced to critically understand, even engage in the most basic ways, how race impacts education. There’s nothing in my entire program that talks about race and whatever urban education is.

We go over to UCLA because we’re not going to find it at USC. They have faculty in their education department that take questions of race seriously, even some of their White faculty do. They’re just more critically oriented at UCLA. You certainly wouldn’t find that here. I think there’s a sociology of race class in USC’s Sociology Department, but it’s not specific to education. Nothing in Rossier.

These two sentiments reflect what students of color and white students alike repeatedly said



about the availability of race-focused courses at Rossier. Some stated that race was never engaged at all in any of their courses. Others calculated low counts of readings assigned to them about racial equity, people of color, immigration, and racist structures, policies, behaviors, and cultural norms. “I would say maybe two articles, if that, in a given semester,” one participant estimated. An EDL student was excited about being exposed to Critical Race Theory in his thematic dissertation group. “I’m reading such awesome stuff that would be great for so many other students to read, but they’ll never see because it’s just not what we cover in our curriculum,” he asserted.

Students also talked about the ornamental nature of race in the curriculum. In many classes across academic programs, they said race was segmented, only engaged during the obligatory ‘race week,’ as opposed to being thoughtfully integrated across the curriculum. Participants were simultaneously calling for more courses that focused explicitly on race, while also expecting racial topics to show up in other courses. Regarding the latter, it was not their expectation that entire courses be reframed to focus only on race. EDL students, for instance, recognized there were other important dimensions of equity, difference, and culture beyond race that needed to be covered in the diversity course. Nonetheless, they, like students in other academic programs, wanted the curriculum to more closely reflect the racial demographics of Los Angeles and other urban contexts.

One noteworthy exception is the MFT Program. Students said multicultural competence was built into every course, plus there was a standalone course on the topic. Despite this, one participant observed, “Yes, multicultural competence is talked about in every single class, but people still aren’t getting there [to higher demonstrated levels].” Explanations for this are likely attributable to the pedagogical missteps we write about in the next section of this report.

Some Ph.D. students felt their faculty members undervalued and ultimately deemed race-focused scholarship less rigorous. One shared the following:

There are a couple weeks where the race stuff gets segregated... it’s like the professor is saying ‘we’re going to take a break from the normal, reliable theory and research to look at this critical stuff before we resume our normal course of education.

In a multitude of ways, many students of color experienced the curriculum as a recurring microaggression because it largely excluded them and neglected topics about which they most cared. Consequently, it engendered for them an insufficient sense of belonging at Rossier. In some courses the only time people of color were discussed was in the context of poverty, which reinforced one-sided and deficit narratives. And whenever race was raised in classrooms, it was almost always narrowly focused on Black and Latino students; Asian American and Pacific Islanders were excluded, which made participants from those populations feel invisible and unimportant.

Readings on white privilege, white fragility, white allyship, and critical whiteness studies were also missing from the curriculum. Here is one white participant’s reflection: “I feel like race is viewed as the minoritized groups are the ones who have race and ethnicity, White is not viewed as a race.” A woman in the EDL Program did not believe she had ever heard the word ‘white’ in any of her courses. “One thing I’m noticing with the faculty is them being afraid to engage what it means to be White and also running away from their proximity to whiteness,”

another student observed. We write more about this in the next section, as it is one of many ways race was mishandled in Rossier classrooms.



Like the Ph.D. student who felt ‘policy’ was privileged over ‘urban education,’ others across academic programs knew that certain topics were seemingly more important to their instructors. For example, an EDL student talked about the emphasis placed on perfecting APA style and learning how to properly format citations. In his view, this seemed to be so much more important to faculty members than was demonstrating some level of mastery on topics pertaining to racial equity. “When you leave here, you’re going to know APA, but are you going to know much more about people of color and equity than when you first came,” the student asked.

Across racial/ethnic groups, but most especially among students of color, there was a palpable level of frustration with the ways in which many Rossier faculty members neglected to make space to talk about racial events happening in our nation – for example, the Flint water crisis, protests in Baltimore and Ferguson, and shootings of unarmed Black men, to name a few. They made clear that they were not expecting every class session to be devoted to issues like these, but thought there were several missed opportunities to connect race-related issues occurring elsewhere to urban education issues.

That’s when the faculty members should be cognizant of what’s going on and say ‘okay I know we have this curriculum, we have this agenda but this is going on in the world and you all are educators. Let’s have a quick conversation about it.’ Not once did that ever occur. As an educator I’ve had to do that because we’re sitting with students, they’re feeling it, they’re talking about it. In classes [here at Rossier], we act act like these crises aren’t happening. It’s a missed opportunity.

Mishandling Race in Classrooms

Though several students reported that racial topics were missing entirely from curricula and class discussions in their respective programs, others cited instances in which some attempt had been made to teach about these issues. With the exception of a handful of isolated examples of effectiveness (which we highlight at the end of this section), participants mostly spoke about missteps their instructors made.

In addition to excluding critical perspectives about them from the curriculum, White students were not required or seemingly expected to engage in class discussions about race. Participants noted that students of color were often thought to be the only persons who could talk knowledgeably about these issues. In some instances, it seemed the instructors had become dependent on them. This is perhaps best reflected in a story that two participants told in their interview with us. Prior to one class session in which race was being discussed, students of color sent text messages to each other and agreed they would not contribute to the class discussion that day. As usual, White students did not talk and the instructor did not solicit their engagement. Participants offered this description of class that day:

Female Participant

That was the worst class because no one talked.



Male Participant

We sat in class and said nothing. The instructor was like 'what the hell is going on' because a good five or six of us [students of color] were dead silent for 2 hours and 40 minutes.

Female Participant

Yes, she thought we were mad at her. She thought we were boycotting her. We eventually had to tell her 'no, we want more people to talk in this class.'

This was just one of many examples that students of color shared about Rossier faculty members relying on them to be race spokespersons without placing the same expectation on their White classmates. The classic microaggression of turning to the Latina in the class to speak on behalf of all Latina/o peoples, or even worse, on behalf of all people of color, poor people, and urban residents, routinely occurs often at Rossier, students said.

An EDL student praised the designers of the diversity core course for including lots of readings about racial issues on the syllabus. The problem, though, was that these readings were rarely discussed unless students of color in the class engaged them. It appeared that the instructor had nothing substantive to say about these particular readings, the student recalled. A different EDL student in the TEMS concentration remembered a professor showing a video of MAT online students having a conversation about race. The instructor simply asked what the EDL students thought about the video without offering any analysis of his own. Because of situations like these, students of color and White students alike said it was obvious to them that their professors were not comfortable with or sufficiently skilled in leading race-related discussions.

Other students said their instructors possessed narrow understandings of race, as conversations often defaulted to a black-white binary that excluded Latinos, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, and Native American people. Also, few faculty members seemed sophisticated enough to teach about how race intersects with other identities (gender, sexuality, religion, socioeconomic status, etc.). Students of color would occasionally call this to their attention. The typical response was simply, "thanks for that," and then the instructor would swiftly move on. In addition, faculty members would pivot by saying to students that a particular racial topic would be covered in a different course that was being offered by someone else in a future semester. Participants said they would sometimes dive more deeply into certain racial topics during breaks in the hallway or after class because the faculty member did not make space to further unpack them in class.

A White focus group participant reflected in the following way about needing assistance from Rossier faculty:

I feel like I haven't had a lot of spaces or resources or opportunities to reflect on race in a really meaningful way. I take some responsibility for not initiating it enough on my own. But I also wish the program had more of an opportunity to support us. It's not just the faculty that are creating this climate, but I also think White students – I think, I personally am probably complicit in creating this climate and it's something that I want to be more aware of. I don't think that reflection is modeled for me by any of the faculty so it's something that I think some students are trying to do on our own.



Others noted that faculty members seemed constrained by the syllabus and unwilling to depart from the predetermined semester plan. Students praised instructors who made time to connect current events with course topics and readings, even when it meant they did not accomplish all their goals for the day. Too few professors seemed willing to be so flexible. There was also praise for an instructor who incorporated critical race perspectives into an inquiry class, despite being seemingly constrained by the course design. And a faculty member of color who would call out White students by name and invite their participation in race-related class discussions was repeatedly commended by a few students across focus groups.

How Intellectual Climate Affects Racial Climate

So far, we have written mostly about curricula and classrooms because that is where students commonly experience Rossier. However, focus group participants also described other features and cultural norms in the School that undermine sense of belonging, substantive cross-racial engagement and learning, and community.

We were impressed by the level of engagement in the Town Hall Forum on Race at Rossier that occurred on the first day of our visit. It appeared to us that people were taking risks, making themselves publicly vulnerable, and offering authentic perspectives. At the start of each focus group, we asked participants one question, with 3-4 follow-up questions:

How many of you attended the town hall forum? For those who attended, what did you think of the conversation?

Follow up – What was missing from the conversation?

Follow up – How open and honest do you think people were?

Follow up – [If they say people weren't honest] Why weren't people more honest?

Follow up – Were there things not said that you think would be useful for us to know?

Focus group participants did not suggest that people who spoke at the town hall were being dishonest, *per se*, but a surprising number felt the conversation was not reflective of the realities of race in the School. Some even confessed that they had things to say, but did not because they feared retaliation from their professors and Rossier administrators. Accordingly, there is not a culture of talking openly and honestly about anything in the School, hence many students felt unsafe doing so in such a public way. One noteworthy exception here is in the Ph.D. Program. "We talk in our program meetings with the faculty about our experiences and concerns," one student clarified. She and others acknowledged that those spaces are more intimate and perhaps a bit safer than was the large town hall.

Most master's and EDL students indicated they had not been in Rossier-sponsored spaces outside of classrooms where they got to talk about race (or other topics) with each other or with their professors. "I don't see people beyond seeing them in class. There are very few events that bring students and faculty together across programs to learn about and discuss relevant topics," a participant commented. Because of this, members of the Rossier community are not afforded opportunities to learn together, debate and challenge each other's perspectives, or speak honestly about their views pertaining to race and urban education. Students of color found this particularly frustrating because they wanted to engage in these ways, but doing so would have been counter-cultural, perhaps politically hazardous.



It became clear to us as we interviewed more students that they desired deeper engagement with faculty members and each other around substantive matters, not just social events. One student presented an idea: “It would be nice if the School offered some type of symposium for current students that highlights our work and gives us an opportunity to share that work and receive feedback. It doesn’t have to be dissertation-level work...” Others agreed that activities such as this would strengthen the intellectual climate. Surprisingly, the Rossier Research Lecture Series was mentioned just once across all the focus groups. This suggests that either too few students knew about it, or that they did not view the series as an opportunity for engagement with well-known faculty members of color who study race, equity, and diversity.

A note about physical space: In one focus group students pointed out how the layout of Waite Phillips Hall does not permit them to engage in spontaneous conversations with other members of the Rossier community. They explained that when people do not have a place to talk and connect, they are not in community, which could lead to misunderstandings, stifled cross-cultural learning, and forfeited opportunities for collaboration.

Lastly, several participants across focus groups were critical of this line in a recent e-mail they had received from Dean Gallagher about the defacing of Black Lives Matter signs around Waite Phillips Hall: “We’re an institution of higher education, and the way we handle issues is with dialogue and openness.” They agreed with the dean’s perspective, but were left wondering how, where, and when such open dialogue would occur. “Tell me a room and a time and I’ll be there,” one person exclaimed. Others made the same commitment because, as noted throughout this report, they were hungry for intellectual engagement and solutions-oriented discussions about vexing racial issues facing Rossier, cities, and the nation. One student expressed skepticism about our climate assessment, then posed a set of important questions about climate conversations in the School:

I wouldn’t be surprised if the administration does nothing with the climate report because, frankly, if they really wanted to do something why wouldn’t they just sit down with us in a room and talk through these issues? Why doesn’t the dean just say, ‘okay let’s sit down and let’s engage?’ Do we need to bring someone from the outside – why can’t we just sit down as a community and talk about our community?

To that last question, “Because that isn’t the Rossier culture,” is how another participant in this focus group replied.

Ph.D. Student Attrition, Deficit Explanations, and Institutional Denial of Racism

Findings in this section are entirely related to Ph.D. students. Before our visit to campus, several of them sent us e-mails, statements, and letters they had written about the shortage of faculty of color, the absence of critical race perspectives in the curriculum, and Rossier’s flimsy urban focus, among other racial problems in the School. These materials also repeatedly noted that students of color were discontinuing the Ph.D. Program in alarmingly high numbers. It therefore did not surprise us that many spoke at length about this in our focus group interviews with them. “When faculty members admit that there are retention issues related to race, they offer deficit explanations like, ‘oh, because we’re trying to have these diverse cohorts we’re bringing in people with less preparation and that’s why this is happening,’” one woman told us. Others highlighted problematic assumptions made about the



intellectual competence of Ph.D. students who had left. We recognize that due to FERPA regulations, the School is unable to disclose why students prematurely depart Rossier. Students said they understood this, too. However, the persons who left were their friends and cohortmates, hence they believe they had more complete understandings of what was happening to these students. Also, many of them had experienced those same challenges firsthand. Many felt that faculty members failed to adequately support their peers of color and ultimately pushed them out the program. There was no accountability for the role professors played in this racialized pattern of attrition, many Ph.D. students felt. Instead, it seemed faculty and administrators rendered the departed students solely responsible for their attrition.

“When so many of the students who leave are students of color, it is the sign of a larger systemic issue. The School has failed to acknowledge this,” one person added and several others agreed. Many felt that uneven faculty investment was one of numerous parts of this systemic problem. It was argued that faculty members did not want to work with or ultimately stand up for the Ph.D. students who left. Perhaps more frustrating to them than the trend itself was the School’s seeming denial of its complex explanatory undercurrents. The absence of an urgent response and coordinated set of strategies disappointed them, especially since they had invested so much time into articulating their concerns in writing and explaining exactly what the School’s race problems were. It seemed their concerns were only taken seriously when Rossier administrators heard students were considering publishing an op-ed about their peers of color being pushed out and other racial problems in the School.

While only Ph.D. students talked with us about students of color dropping out of their program, we were left wondering if similar trends exist in other academic programs at Rossier. We had no way of determining this.

Master’s Students’ Unmet Academic Expectations

Findings in this section pertain entirely to participants who were enrolled in master’s degree programs, specifically students of color and first generation college graduates. Several told us they came to the School with the goal of developing research skills and continuing on to pursue the Ph.D., either at Rossier or elsewhere. Apparently, theses are an option in some Rossier master’s programs. Some students wanted to take advantage of this opportunity to do a comprehensive research project, but faculty discouraged them from doing so. Others said they attempted to connect with professors to do research, but few had time or interest in working with them. At first, this problem seemed like it had nothing to do with race, as students of color did not report to us that White peers in their master’s programs were getting these research opportunities. However, we reached a deeper understanding about the racialized nature of this in our data analysis and debriefing meetings.

“We bring diversity to Rossier,” one Black student remarked. “And we pay a lot for these master’s degrees. Yet, we do not have chances to develop relationships with professors in ways that will help us get to the next level.” This PASA student, like some participants of color enrolled in other master’s programs, felt the School profited from being able to count him in its diversity numbers. But he and others felt they were not profiting as fully as they should from their academic investment. In other words, they were investing in the School, but no one was investing in them. Consequently, they were not getting research opportunities that would make them attractive for admission to highly selective Ph.D. programs immediately upon completing

their master's degrees. We determined that it was unnecessary for White students to report something different for this to qualify as a racialized experience – it is about race because it is a way in which Rossier systemically underserves some master's students of color and fails to meet their specific expectations. Students of color were also particularly frustrated by this because they had intellectual interests that seemingly aligned with the School's urban mission, which is why many said they chose to enroll in master's programs there.



Many of these students of color also reported that they were the first members of their families to graduate from college and pursue master's degrees. Therefore, they did not fully understand how to navigate the doctoral admissions process. The lack of faculty assistance and research partnerships disappointed them. Some worried they would not be admitted to Ph.D. programs without strong, substantive recommendation letters from professors and any research experience. Categorically, White participants in our focus groups did not talk about being underserved by the School in these ways, perhaps because comparatively fewer of them had aspirations to pursue doctorates right after finishing their master's degrees. This is another way in which some students of color felt their presence and interests were unimportant to the School.

Recommendations



We see numerous important opportunities for the USC Rossier School of Education to more seriously advance its mission, create a more inclusive community for students, and strengthen its intellectual climate. Below are 10 recommendations that respond to many challenges and opportunities described in the findings section of this report.

Reaching Consensus on Urban Education

Faculty members and administrators must work together to determine what Rossier means by urban education and ways to better enact the School's espoused commitment to its mission. Its distinctive urban signature has to be more deliberately and responsibly cemented into the curriculum. Clarity and consensus are unlikely to be reached in a single faculty meeting, or even at one retreat. However, we caution against taking years to complete this important task. The outcome of this must be communicated clearly and frequently. It must be substantive and there has to be accountability for ensuring everyone who teaches and otherwise works at the School contributes to mission advancement in measureable ways.

Urbanizing and Racializing the Curriculum

It is essential to identify where and catalogue what students learn about urban education and race. Asking faculty (including part-time instructors) to submit to the Dean's Office syllabi with highlighted readings and assignments on these topics would be useful. The Diversity Task Force or a committee comprised of experts in the School could review the syllabi and offer recommendations to instructors. Faculty in individual programs should also review each other's syllabi for these same reasons, as well as to ensure cohesion and integration across the curriculum. The School should also consider sending syllabi to experts in the field and commissioning formal external reviews. H. Richard Milner, for example, is editor of *Urban Education* (a respected peer-reviewed journal), the Helen Faison Professor of Urban Education, and Director of the Center for Urban Education at the University of Pittsburgh. Surely, Professor Milner and other experts like him who are deeply engaged in the study of urban education at other universities could do an external review of syllabi and suggest readings and other activities that would bring a stronger urban emphasis to the Rossier curriculum. External reviews could also be commissioned from experts on racial equity in education.

Mapping Urban Engagement

We do not doubt that Rossier faculty are meaningfully engaged in a range of research projects, partnerships, and activities throughout Los Angeles. However, the extent of this engagement is unknown, at least by students. One way to capture this is through an interactive map. Here is one example: www.phillymap.gse.upenn.edu. Benefits of this resource are twofold. First, it would help counter the narrative that the School is not at all engaged in urban contexts. A surprisingly high number of students we interviewed made absolutist statements about Rossier's disengagement in Los Angeles. Second, the map could help master's students see local projects on which professors are presently working. This could be useful for those who are looking for research opportunities with faculty members.

Engaging Faculty Expertise



In addition to mapping how professors are engaged throughout Los Angeles, the School should sponsor an event once or twice each month in which a Rossier faculty member leads a brown bag discussion, presents a colloquium, or solicits feedback on works in progress. All faculty, staff, and students should be invited to attend. These events should be largely focused on urban education projects on which the faculty member is working, but could be flexible enough to accommodate other topics. This would amplify the School's urban emphasis, strengthen the intellectual climate, and afford master's and doctoral students opportunities to engage with Rossier professors' scholarship outside the classroom.

Developing Racial Literacy among Faculty

Racial literacy is the ability to talk comfortably and competently about race. It requires actual literacy (meaning reading publications on the topic), as well as recurring discussions that allow colleagues to talk with each other about their personal racial histories, interrogate their implicit biases, and better understand racial assumptions and behaviors they bring to their work. It is unlikely that race will be more skillfully engaged in classrooms if there are not out-of-class opportunities for persons teaching those courses to become more literate. The Dean's Office should host a series of workshops for faculty (including part-time instructors) that focus on developing racial literacy. Faculty members should also read a common book such as Estela Bensimon's "Engaging the Race Question" and talk about its implications for them as individual educators and for Rossier as a school. The School should also host more forums in which students, faculty, and staff engage in semi-structured conversations about race and urban education. These forums need not always be about Rossier's climate, but instead can focus on issues related to LAUSD, state and federal policies affecting people of color and immigrants, and other topics. Besides getting more faculty members and students accustomed to talking about race-related issues, these forums would also strengthen the intellectual climate.

Sharing Effectiveness and Learning from Racial Mistakes in Classrooms

Time should be occasionally allocated at meetings and retreats for Rossier faculty members (including part-time instructors) to share effective strategies they use in their classrooms to teach about race, engage White students in conversations on the topic, leverage the expertise of students of color without tokenizing or essentializing them, make good educational use of racial tension when it arises in their classrooms, and measure growth in the development of students' racial literacies. It is also important to make space for colleagues to learn from each other about racial mistakes they have made in their classrooms. One way to do this is giving faculty members blank note cards and instructing them to succinctly describe a time they made racial mistakes in their teaching at Rossier. Their names would not be written anywhere on the cards. The cards would be shuffled and a few would be read aloud. Colleagues would then collectively analyze the situation, talk about why the mistake was likely made, ways it might have been best handled, and how to avoid similar missteps in the future. This is just one of many strategies to engage faculty in conversations about effectively teaching in racially diverse classrooms – but first, space needs to be made for faculty members to talk.

Learning from and Responding to Students' Racialized Experiences



Rossier should provide a webpage on which students can report racially problematic experiences they have in classrooms. Students should have the choice to disclose theirs and the instructors' names, or to remain anonymous. They should also have the option of selecting a preferred course of action: talk with me, talk with the professor and me together, talk with the professor without me, or simply forward this complaint to the professor. When names are revealed, reports of these incidents should be forwarded to faculty members to raise their consciousness and hopefully prevent them from repeating these missteps in future courses. Program directors and administrators in the Dean's Office should intervene if students request a response or if multiple people repeatedly complain about a particular faculty members' actions. Anonymous submissions that mention neither the student's nor the instructor's name could be saved and later used as case scenarios in faculty development activities (similar to the notecard activity described on page 13 of this report). In 2018, the USC Race & Equity Center will release a mobile app for students across the country to report problematic racial experiences on their campuses; the app will function like the website described in this recommendation, but will have a speech-to-text converter. We will make this app available to Rossier at no cost.

Hiring a More Diverse Faculty

Rossier needs a strategy to diversify its faculty; proposing one here is beyond the scope of this report. We are reluctant to haphazardly recommend activities like targets of opportunity hires or a cluster hire of faculty of color. These could be effective, but the administration and faculty must first sit together and engage in meaningful conversations about how best to ensure that faculty colleagues of color are supported, promoted, and ultimately retained, instead of focusing narrowly on recruiting. As students repeatedly pointed out, the racial composition of the current faculty does not mirror the diversity of the student body or the urban context in which Rossier is located. We suspect they will continue to demand more diversity until observable progress is made.

Institutionalizing an Annual Visiting Scholars of Color Series

Penn, Harvard, Vanderbilt, and the University of Wisconsin all have a visiting scholars of color series that brings 5-7 professors doing interesting research to campus each year. Over a 2-3 day period, visiting scholars give a public lecture, meet one-on-one and in small groups with students and faculty colleagues, spend time with the dean, and engage with others across campus whose work aligns with theirs. Because most (but not all) visitors do research on race, immigration, and people of color, their consistent presence would greatly enrich Rossier's intellectual climate around these topics. It also gives the School an opportunity to audition persons who might be good prospects for targets of opportunity hires. It is likely that the Rossier Research Lecture Series is intended to achieve these same aims. Noticeably, everyone on this year's list is a scholar of color. Given that only one student mentioned it in our interviews, it is plausible that the series goals are not well known. Moreover, master's students probably do not understand how the series affords them opportunities to engage academically with people who could someday be their doctoral advisors at Rossier or elsewhere. Renaming the series to highlight that its visitors are all scholars of color would help.

Systematically Understanding Race at Rossier



Rossier administrators and faculty members should commit themselves to assessing the racial climate on a regular basis. As previously noted, the School will be invited to have every student participate in the pilot of the National Assessment of Collegiate Campus Climates, the quantitative survey the USC Race & Equity Center is launching later this year. We will allow the School to participate annually at no cost.

Additionally, Rossier should host an annual town hall forum on race in which students, faculty, and staff members talk openly about challenges, opportunities, and progress in the School. Making this an annual activity, in combination with all the other recommendations offered in this report would likely compel more students to talk honestly about their experiences; it would not be so “counter cultural” like the October 2016 forum.

Also, expert researchers in the School should collaboratively develop an instrument that measures students’ racial consciousness and competences, as well as students’ readiness (perceived and actual) for work in racially diverse urban schools and organizational contexts. These data could help inform curricular revisions and faculty development activities.

Lastly, the School should do another qualitative climate study within the next 3-4 years. The USC Race & Equity Center will help ensure the next qualitative assessment does not have sampling issues.

About the Center



The Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education unites University of Pennsylvania scholars who do research on race and important topics pertaining to equity in education. Center staff and affiliates collaborate on funded research projects, assessment activities, and the production of timely research reports. The Center's strength resides in its interdisciplinarity – professors from various departments in the School of Arts and Sciences (Sociology, Mathematics, History, Political Science, Anthropology, Africana Studies, English, and Asian American Studies), the Perelman School of Medicine, the School of Social Policy and Practice, the Wharton School, Penn Law School, and the School of Nursing join Penn GSE faculty as affiliates. Principally, the Center aims to publish cutting-edge implications for education policy and practice, with an explicit focus on improving equity in P-12 schools, colleges and universities, and social contexts that influence educational outcomes. The Center is home to the Penn Equity Institutes.

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