

AWARENESS & COMMUNICATIONS WORKING GROUP

WORKING GROUP MEMBERS:

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Recommendation Title: GLOSSARY OF RACIAL EQUITY TERMS

Problem Statement/Issue:

Moving forward, James Madison University needs to speak with **one voice** regarding the topic of racial equity. When various groups across departments are not using the same terminology, it creates disparate messaging that can be confusing to internal and external stakeholders alike. While no document is perfect, the university needs to establish a common understanding of concepts, words and their proper uses. A clear, easily identifiable glossary of terms to reference when writing communications is critical to brand building, especially during a period of so much upheaval.

JMU needs a **shared vocabulary for talking about matters of race**. The university communicates with several different constituencies (students, faculty, staff, alumni, donors, families of students, community members, strategic partners, etc.), which is both a challenge and an opportunity. The challenge comes when a constituent group reads/sees/hears one message using a certain vocabulary but then consumes a second (or third, or fourth, etc.) message employing different words. The opportunity is ours to leverage an already existing glossary of terms.

Recommendation:

The recommendation is for JMU to support [a glossary of racial equity terms](#). The time is now for the university to endorse a glossary that empowers all units across campus to distribute written messages about race that are **consistent, accurate and up to date**. Racial Equity Tools, a reputable group that supports groups working to achieve racial equity at every level, has created a comprehensive glossary (23 pages long in [this Google Drive link](#), consisting of 63 different terms). All terms contain detailed definitions, use cases and examples, and each is properly sourced.

The specific steps that would address the problem described above are:

- 1) **Short-term timeframe:** Task Force Leadership Council reviews the glossary listed in this recommendation and signs off on it being used as a primary resource campus-wide.
- 2) **Medium-term timeframe:** Departments are pointed toward this resource as a best practice and encouraged/required to reference it when communicating about race.

**WORKING
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Recommendation Continued:

The work of racial equity is everybody's job! For a successful implementation of this recommendation, ample time would be required to gain buy-in that JMU at large should get behind a single glossary that already exists. (There is no need to "reinvent the wheel" and create a new glossary of terms.) Another resource required for successful implementation would be to connect with [the people behind Racial Equity Tools](#), which developed the glossary as part of 600+ new resources available online and free, to make them aware of JMU's interest in leveraging this resource.

Rationale:

The work being done in this topic by this institution does not—nor should not—happen in a vacuum. Without a shared understanding of evolving and individual words, terms, phrases and their proper uses, JMU is missing an opportunity to speak with **one voice**. Additionally, a core tenet of the Awareness/Communication Working Group—and the Task Force on Racial Equity at large—is to foster civil, constructive discourse and hard dialogue on these issues. Those discussions—and the tangible, action-oriented work deriving from such conversations—could greatly benefit from a single source of truth to refer to, regarding how to use the correct words about this topic.

This would be a tool in the toolkit—but not just *any* tool. It would be fundamental to the work of this task force in the short term, medium term and long term. It is important that achieving complete consensus about each word or phrase is *not* the objective; rather, allowing space for people to disagree while ensuring everyone is drawing from the same shared understanding. Everyone comes to the conversation about racial equity from a place that's been shaped by their perspectives, privilege or lack thereof and lived experiences. We all have a lot to contribute, and we all have a lot to learn.

Success:

The following are measures of success for this recommendation:

- JMU employees will no longer wonder or ask, "What does this word mean, and am I using it correctly?" "What's the difference between diversity and inclusion?" "When do I use the term *people of color*?" "How do I discern between *white fragility* and *white privilege*?"
- Messages emanating from the university contain links back, references and attributions (as needed) to the glossary.
- Posters of the terms could be displayed in offices, classrooms, residence halls and general-use spaces across campus for greater visibility and to keep it top of mind for passers-by.
- The Task Force on Racial Equity could solicit suggestions from each working group as terms evolve and become outdated. The TFRE could create and distribute a Google form for co-chairs and members to suggest language that might be missing or obsolete. As language morphs over time, so should this resource to reflect the zeitgeist.
 - ◇ Education and knowledge sharing is key. Another sign of success would be to consider and amplify diverse perspectives in audiences with whom JMU communicates.
 - ◇ We recommend that the TFRE co-chairs determine who at JMU should maintain the glossary, as needed, to keep it up to date.
 - ◇ **Messaging has the opportunity to change the culture at JMU.** Implementing this recommendation could reduce splintered messages that vary widely.