



Whatcom Dispute Resolution Center

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2023 Bellingham Technical College Listening Session Executive Summary & Key Findings

As part of a continuing commitment to create a more equitable, safe, and just campus environment, and in alignment with state RCW 28B.10.147 Bellingham Technical College (BTC) convened the 2023 Listening Sessions to deepen understanding of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI)-related experiences and perceptions at BTC's campus. The sessions emphasized input from the respondent and demographic groups facing greater exclusion, discrimination, or lack of personal safety, based on the [Spring 2022 Campus Climate Survey findings](#).

Identity-focused sessions provided employee and students the opportunity to share information through a confidential process, and prompted folks to reflect on ways that campus resources and learning experiences can be more respectful, welcoming, and uphold the dignity of each member of the BTC community. All students and employees were welcome at all sessions and no one was turned away. There were 45 BTC Campus Community Members, employees and students who engaged in the 2023 Spring listening sessions

BTC contracted with the Whatcom Dispute Resolution Center (WDRC) to: (i) design and facilitate a series of DEI-focused listening sessions in May 2023; (ii) review responses and identify key themes; and (iii) submit a summary 2023 Listening Session Report on June 30, 2023. The WDRC presented key themes and findings to the BTC President's Leadership Team on June 20th; the Offices of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and Accreditation and Institutional Planning and Assessment will use the final report to inform strategic plan goals and action steps.

The 2023 Listening Session Report was prepared by WDRC and seeks to: (i) align the information with 2022 Climate Survey themes; (ii) highlight key takeaways that were raised by more than one participant or identity group; and (iii) name and frame input into actionable ideas for improvement as identified by students and employees. The information gathered in these sessions will provide BTC's DEI Committee and Institutional Planning & Assessment leadership teams insight on ways to focus strategic policy, process, and structural improvements to catalyze a more supportive and equitable campus climate.

Executive Summary of Key Findings

Participants in the 2023 Listening Session Series expressed an open attitude to the diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives at the BTC campus. Students were especially appreciative of the many programs and efforts underway to integrate DEI values into administrative forms, processes, clubs, and communications.

While employees also expressed support and appreciation for the DEI-related changes that BTC has implemented over the past two years, they expressed concern that there is insufficient commitment at upper leadership levels to DEI efforts beyond compliance.

Call for more commitment to DEI at leadership levels. Across all student sessions, participants expressed positive sentiments about the DEI climate while also emphasizing that there is room to grow among employees and students. Respondents shared that legacy issues arising from the history of Bellingham and the trade industries are part of the progress challenge on BTC diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) goals and mandates. Employees see a need for stronger leadership commitment and supporting practices, given this is a predominately White campus, coupled with employee recruitment from traditional, gendered industries/professional tracks.

Call to transform words and messaging into action – to go beyond the "performance" of DEI into commitment, action, and accountability. Participants expressed an interest in continued professional development experiences in DEI values and process improvements (e.g. teaching, advising, administration) that can contribute to the creation of a more welcoming campus community. Shared expectations and transparent, equitable access to professional development resources were raised in all student and employee sessions. BTC's current approach to engagement in DEI programs relies on a some, but not all approach. For example, some departments, programs, buildings, or employees engage while others do not -- with no expectation or apparent consequence. Employees noted this makes DEI efforts feel performative and not fully integrated into the BTC values, budget, standard processes, and practices.

Call for more recruitment and retention of faculty and staff of diverse identities (BIPOC, LGBTQ+, Women). Employees and students described different experiences about DEI progress at BTC and whether they are experiencing a sense of respect, belonging, and being valued.

Employees often feel pressured to conform and/or undervalued, particularly based on racial and/or gender stereotypes. A culture that allows microaggressions and passive-aggressive communication persists. Employees, across all sessions, noted experiences of isolation and limited access to build a BTC community of colleagues that are more diverse and inclusive of a BIPOC, LGBTQ+ identities from across BTC's campus and programs. BTC needs systemic training to support working with diverse leaders and leadership should prioritize increasing the number of BIPOC employees at all levels.

Employees expressed feeling some level of risk to raise concerns or seek additional resources/support. Many shared examples about improper conduct and practices that supervisors or leaders failed to intervene on. This gap in accountability raised concerns about mixed messages being given to employees about what it means to work with or serve all identity groups respectfully and without bias.

Students describe a uniquely welcoming BTC campus community, with a few exceptions across all identity groups. Students overwhelmingly indicated they felt fortunate to be in their chosen program, accepted by employees and peers, and see that student initiatives are being supported.

Both students and employees suggested improvements to recruitment and retention of more diverse staff and faculty, agreeing there are just too few BIPOC employees at all levels. Historically BTC employees have been predominantly White, and male.

Actionable ideas and strategies for DEI improvement are featured in each theme area and focus on:

- Actions for leadership and supervisors to strengthen BTC DEI practices campus-wide;
- Ideas for policy and employee retention strategies to foster growth, respect, and value of all identities; and,
- Safety strategies for BTC, addressing both process/communication systems and infrastructure.