

Faculty Senate Diversity & Social Justice Award Application

Please complete the application, save it as a PDF, and e-mail it to SJEC@wwu.edu by November 13, 2017.

Title of proposal

Truth and Reconciliation in Bellingham and Whatcom County: Constructing an Online Public Memory of Racial Policy and Practice

Name of proposer

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Department

Communication Studies

Rank (NTT, Assistant Professor, Associate Professor, or Full Professor)

Professor

E-mail

Phone number

Award type requested (\$6,000 or course release)

\$6000

Please provide a two-page narrative proposal that addresses the award criteria and provides a description of projected project plans and outcomes. Applicants should not assume that the reviewers are familiar with the details of their individual programs and should offer sufficient background information to assist the reviewers.

The struggle for racial justice can be understood partly in terms of transitional justice. The concept of transitional justice refers to the ways countries or communities address systematic human rights violations that have occurred on a scale that cannot be addressed adequately within the formal justice system [1]. Movements for transitional justice have many dimensions. One of these is the need to foster public recognition, understanding, and memory of past injustices [2]. In some countries, this has been advanced, in part, through truth and reconciliation processes. The most famous of these was in South Africa following the apartheid era. Since that time, similar processes have occurred in dozens of other countries, including a national process in Canada that focused on the harm done to First Nations peoples within the residential schools many were forced to attend.

Given the current political climate in the US, it is almost inconceivable that a national truth and reconciliation process will occur here, in the near future, to address the physical and cultural genocide of millions of indigenous peoples, the enslavement of millions of others, and the many other forms of racial oppression that have followed. However, a small but growing number of local communities have begun initiating their own truth and reconciliation processes, the first of which were in Greensboro, North Carolina, and Detroit, Michigan [3]. Such initiatives constitute a small step in a bottom-up approach that could eventually lead toward a national process that, in the long run, is clearly needed.

Bellingham and the surrounding Whatcom County are good candidates for a local truth and reconciliation process. This area has a history of organized and often violent white supremacy that traces back over a century and half. For many decades, the city and county were white by design – the result of policies and practices that ensured this. The current demographics of this area continue to reflect this legacy. Yet much of the white population is unaware, or in denial, of this history and the racial composition of the area is often naively attributed to innocent patterns of settlement and migration.

Parts of this local history are beginning to receive more attention. Small but important steps have been taken to foster public awareness and memory, but this is still occurring in a piecemeal manner [4]. There is no source that brings together the most salient aspects of this history in a relatively comprehensive and publicly available manner. Therefore, this Diversity & Social Justice Award will be used to research and develop a website that brings diverse sources of scholarship, archival material, demographic data, images, and other relevant information together in one place, organized around an interactive timeline that provides an overview of the history of racism in this area – while also highlighting significant efforts to overcome racism. The website

will be framed as part of an effort to advance the process of transitional justice in Bellingham and Whatcom County, including advocacy for a formal truth and reconciliation process in this area.

The research for this project will include library and archival research, census database research, interviews with local historians, and interviews with people who are able to share relevant historical knowledge and memories. The software that will be used to create the public memory website is Sutori (<https://www.sutori.com>) which is an educational platform for creating and sharing multi-media stories organized around timelines.

It should be noted, of course, that racism is not merely a historical concern. It is an ongoing concern in this area and across the country. In this regard, the purpose of this project is to document and raise awareness of the history of white supremacy in Bellingham and Whatcom County as a means of fostering public conversations and educational endeavors that can contribute to the ongoing struggle for racial / transitional justice. In this regard, the website will serve as a resource that scholars, educators, students, activists, and all community members can draw on. In addition, the project will encourage community leaders to initiate a formal truth and reconciliation process in Bellingham and Whatcom County. And finally, the project will constitute another small step toward a much-needed national truth and reconciliation process.

[1] Ruti Teitel, *Transitional Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Colleen Murphy, *The Conceptual Foundations of Transitional Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017). Refer also to <https://www.ictj.org/about/transitional-justice>.

[2] Ariel Dulitzsky, “Memory, An Essential Element of Transitional Justice” in *Peace in Progress*, 20 (2014); Chrisje Brants and Katrien Klep, “Transitional Justice: History-Telling, Collective Memory, and the Victim-Witness” in *International Journal of Conflict and Violence*, 7, no.1 (2013). Refer also to <http://historicaldialogues.org>.

[3] Joshua Inwood, Derek Alderman and Melanie Barron, “Addressing Structural Violence through US Reconciliation Commissions: The Case Study of Greensboro, NC and Detroit, MI” in *Political Geography*, 52, (2016). Refer also to <https://theconversation.com/dealing-with-hate-can-americas-truth-and-reconciliation-commissions-help-73170>.

[4] Refer, for example, the Arch of Healing and Reconciliation project (<http://archofhealing.org>); the Perilous Press History Project (<http://perilouspress.tumblr.com>); and the Decolonizing Bellingham Walking Tour developed by WWU’s Joshua Cerretti with the aid of a previous Diversity and Social Justice Grant (<http://www.westernfrontonline.com/2016/02/02/professors-rewarded-for-diversity-and-social-justice-efforts-with-grant-money>).

Please provide a brief justification for the selection of award type (\$6,000 vs. course release). If applying for course release, applicants should verify that they have provisional approval of their department chair for the release.

My department is too small and too short of faculty members to offer a course release for this project, so my plan is to complete this project over the summer, supported by the \$6000 grant.

Please provide a timeline for the project, including a brief statement indicating that the activity can be accomplished during the award period or how it will be sustained past the award period.

This project can be completed by the end of summer, 2018. To accomplish this, I have already begun conversations with a number of local collaborators who have expressed enthusiastic interest in supporting this effort. If this grant is approved, I will complete the IRB review process at WWU in the late winter or early spring (since the project will involve some interviews). The necessary library and archival research, census database research, and interviews will be completed by mid-summer. The project website will be developed and published by late summer, using the Sutori platform. The website will be set up in such a way that, after it is published online, I will be able to receive, review, and post submissions of additional information from community members who want to contribute to the project's ongoing development. Efforts will be made to publicize the website on campus and throughout the community. In addition, the website will be formally presented to the city and county councils, along with a recommendation to initiate a formal truth and reconciliation process in this area.