

# WOCA

## *2019 – 2020 End-of-Year Report*

By Dr. Annie Isabel Fukushima, Ethnic Studies Division

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## OVERVIEW

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Women of Color Academics originally formed in April 2016. WoCA is a collective of doctoral students, researchers, and scholars at the University of Utah. The mission of WoCA collective is to support a thriving academic community for womyn/womxn/women of color and indigenous womyn/womxn/women academics. Through regular gatherings professional development support and writing support across generations – faculty and graduate students – this group sees itself as creating an inclusive environment for people in the academy. WoCA is a collective whose events are facilitated by volunteer staff and faculty at the University of Utah, led by Dr. Annie Isabel Fukushima in collaboration with members of the WoCA collective.

On behalf of Women of Color Academics (WoCAs) I would like to appreciate and acknowledge the land that the University of Utah resides on which are indigenous lands. The land WoCAs of University of Utah reside on and that also feeds us are indigenous lands that are connected to the Ute people, Goshute, Shoshone, Paiute and Diné peoples. Many diaspora, diasporic indigenous peoples and peoples around the world settle in this place we call Utah, and for some, they have settled for generations. In the spirit of acknowledgement, I would like to extend a gratitude to our indigenous communities and their efforts to preserve indigenous traditions, relationship to land, important present and historical memory, and to educate WoCAs and our communities that facilitates a teaching to all of us (indigenous, diasporic and settlers) regarding the historical and ongoing legacies of colonization and settlement. This acknowledgement is to extend a deep gratitude to indigenous peoples and to thank them for their commitment to protecting indigenous genealogies, lands, waterways, species, knowledges and practices, that will benefit future generations.

2019 – 2020 posed to be a quite challenging year for WoCAs. U.S. asylum process and immigration responses were defined as a crisis – as [children](#) and families were separated and incarcerated at the border, even as they sought asylum in the United States – Latinx communities were impacted by a relegation to death, deportability and anti-immigrant sentiment. Many Latinx faculty, staff, and students are from mixed-status families. Many WoCAs are diasporas who are also indigenous, as in our Kanaka Maoli (native Hawaiians) communities, who in the fall of 2019 actively mobilized to protest the building of a telescope on [Mauna Kea](#), and the desecration of indigenous land. Our Brazilian colleagues saw the devastation of the Amazon through deforestation, fires, and attacks on indigenous Brazilians, which will have detrimental effects for all of us inhabiting this world. While we had a moment of reprieve and inspiration from the [Chilean anti-rape anthem](#) that circulated globally, the world dramatically changed for the collective and our communities as we entered in an age of living in Covid-19. The pandemic has a particular impact for WoCAs as courses were quickly transitioned to online – requiring that an already service taxed group who are the cornerstone of mentorship, were also required to quickly online curriculum that had been envisioned for the classroom. Staff, faculty, and students found themselves working and living in dramatically altered ways – that for many, whether living alone or with families, would find that shelter-in-place and physical distancing would pose new challenges for everyday life. And for many, WoCAs would see our communities risking their lives as part of the essential work force. Our communities of color were particularly hit by pandemic – indigenous, Latinx, and black communities, the working poor – because of racist and classist regimes that relegate people of color and the working poor to labor in industries that comprise of the essential work force. Additionally, US colonization creates the living conditions impacting indigenous communities where tribal lands do not have easy access to clean water, sanitation, nor other essential resources during pandemic. And, for Asian / Americans, they experienced a resurgence of yellow peril discourse with ongoing messages of Asians as a “threat”. Our black colleagues experienced the fatigue of having to time and time again, assert with their allies, that black lives matter – Ahmaud Arbery (February 23, 2020), Breonna Taylor (March 13, 2020), and George Floyd (May 25, 2020), are some of the names of those whose deaths occurred because of ongoing racism and anti-blackness in the United States. 2019 – 2020 was a year of immense witnessing, action, and events.

WoCA endeavors are in solidarity to the diverse communities that represent our collective. We all have endured so many systemic forms of racism, (hetero)sexism, and ongoing colonization at a macro-level, that culminates in our everyday lives. These

events are only a short list of many, that summarize the conditions WoCAs persevere through and for many, serves as a central drive for our research, teaching, and service. WoCAs are essential to an education system.

WoCAs live, survive, and thrive because of the communities and collectives that surround us, near and far. It was in this climate that WoCAs organized collective gatherings – social and intellectual.

While 2019 – 2020 brought many tragedies, there are so many small and large events, people, and things to celebrate. In previous years, we would have had an end-of-year get-together, however, for safety and public health it was not organized – additionally, there was concern that WoCAs are “zoomed out.” Therefore, although there was no festive celebration of WoCA achievements, there is so much to celebrate about the community that comprises of WoCAs – from graduations, to awards, to simply being a part of our community.

To end, I end with gratitude - there is a deep gratitude for every WoCA. WoCA is a successful collective because of those who volunteer their time and support activities. We also extend an appreciation to WoCAs who are able to show up to our events as they offer invisible forms of leadership through peer, horizontal and vertical mentoring-across the generations, ranks, colleges, positions, and lived experiences. And we are appreciative of WoCAs who informally did the work of WoCA through their own work, that manifests in your teaching, service, research and leadership. 2020 ends with gratitude to all the WoCAs who are essential to our communities both in the academe and beyond.

-- Annie Isabel Fukushima, Ph.D.

## **SPONSORSHIP**

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Women of Color Academics is a thriving collective due to funds received from the Office for Equity & Diversity for the year 2019 – 2020 (\$5,000). WoCA received \$5,000 every year for three years (2019 – 2020 - Received; 2020 – 2021 - Received; 2021 – 2022 - Received).

# MEMBERSHIP

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In its early founding, Women of Color Academics consisted of faculty and doctoral students in the College of Social Work (4 faculty members and 11 students). Since the founding, the WoCA list-serv has grown to consist of 181 faculty and students from varying departments at the University of Utah including Architecture and Planning, Business, Cultural & Social Transformation, Education, Fine Arts, Health, Humanities, Law, Science, Social & Behavioral Science, and Social Work.

# COMMUNITY SUPPORT

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As a means to create diverse communities, it is essential that community is fostered. During the 2019 – 2020 academic year, WoCA organized multiple events.

WoCA regularly launches with a lunch gathering – therefore, on August 19, 2019, WoCAs gathered for the 2019 – 2020 launch.

On October 21, 2019, a Town-Hall Meeting was organized for Women of Color Academics to meet the new Vice President of Equity & Diversity, Mary Ann Villarreal. The townhall meeting allowed WoCAs to discuss research, diversity and inclusion challenges in departments, mid-career advancement challenges, mentoring gaps, mental resources (and the lack of such resources), and graduate student needs. Meeting notes were taken by Drs. Sharlene Kiuvara (Special Education), Crystal Rudds (English), and Elizabeth Archusleta (Ethnic Studies).

In addition to gatherings, an annual hit is the WoCA brunch. On November 16, 2019, WoCAs gathered for a lively brunch at our vegan friendly venue, *Zest*.

To wrap up the fall semester, WoCAs gathered for an intimate social gathering at Under Current on December 11, 2020.



# WRITING SUPPORT

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During the 2019 - 2020 academic year, WoCA organized two writing related events: 1) a book in progress workshop and 2) a writing retreat.

On October 4, 2020, a book in progress discussion was organized for Dr. Danielle R. Olden's (History) project, "Mexican Americans, Settler Colonialism, and the Formation of Racial Identity in the Post-Civil Rights Period." Invited readers included Drs. Hokulani Aikau (School for Cultural & Social Transformation) and Susie Porter (History and Gender Studies). Olden shared a chapter under revision, which was a part of her larger project for her book *Racial Uncertainties: Mexican Americans, Social Desegregation and the Making of Race in Post-Civil Rights America* (forthcoming).

The writing retreat continues to be an important feature of WoCA events. This year it was held on February 29, 2020, at our favorite venue, Red Butte Gardens. Dr. Annie Isabel Fukushima collaborated with Utah's Poet Laurette and an award-winning professor in the English Department, Paisley Rekdal. To start the gathering, Dr. Franci Taylor welcomed WoCAs and discussed responsibility and relationship to the land. Paisley served as the writing facilitator offering prompts, advice and stretching our creative intellectual capacities. In addition, the writing retreat included literal stretching, meditation and yoga facilitated by Jacoby Ballard.

In addition to events, WoCA purchases access to the Art of the Article from the Professor is In. Summary of content is found on the WoCA Canvas Page in the Modules Section and Media Gallery.





## RESEARCH SUPPORT

[Marie Paiva](#) offered to facilitate a workshop on exploring Marriott Library resources. The workshop included database search tips for efficient results, using pivot, Scopus and Web of Science databases, and helpful tips regarding Google Scholar. Marie Paiva has been an incredible resource for Women of Color Academics, and also connecting WoCAs to library resources.

As a means to spread more resources amongst WoCAs, Dr. Fukushima created a competitive opportunity for WoCAs to apply for funds for working groups. The call led to 4 groups submitting their applications, and ultimately, all four groups were funded.

### *Black Graduate Student Association*

The Black Graduate Student Association will meet weekly on Mondays for “co-working sessions.” These co-working sessions are intended to help graduate students working on their writing projects across the disciplines. Contact: Nkenna Onwuzuruoha (Writing and Rhetoric).

### *Critical Ethnic Studies Working Group*

CESWG is an interdisciplinary writing group composed of University of Utah faculty. Group members are rigorous, critical ethnic studies scholars from various colleges on campus; including, Humanities, Transform, and Education, whose research engages the major questions around race/ethnicity, gender/sexuality, and decolonization/indigeneity. Contact: Dr. Lourdes Alberto (Ethnic Studies and English).

### *Decolonial Praxis Working Group*

Decolonial Praxis Working Group is a critical reading and writing group that consists of WoCA graduate students who are writing their dissertations. Collectively this writing group focuses on individual work on issues of race, gender, sexuality, and decolonization within neo-colonialism. As literature theorists, poets, and writers, our primary concern is how to create, interpret, and engage with “texts” (broadly defined), with neo-colonial, post-colonial, and de-colonial theories as our grounding methodologies. Our dissertation topics vary from sentimentality and imperialist nostalgia, to memory, sensation, and the gothic, to videogames within the context of racism, to decolonizing historical documents. The unifying element in our diverse research is a shared belief in the social and pedagogical potential of an activist critical practice. Contact: Paula Mendoza (English Department).

### *Women Writing Race*

Women Writing Race is a collective of graduate students and faculty committed to meeting on a regular basis to write. We meet Tuesday and Thursday mornings from 9:00am to 10:30 to work on our individual writing projects. While the weekly writing sessions are intended as a dedicated space/time to write, we also meet twice a semester, for a potluck at a WoCA member's home, where we will workshop writing. Contact: Dr. Hokulani Aikau (School for Cultural & Social Transformation).

### *Accountability Groups*

During the summer, June 2019, accountability groups were created amongst WoCAs.



# PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Through the leadership of [Mary Anne Berzins](#), WoCA collaborated to promote a WoCA leadership series led by Associate Vice President Mary Anne Berzins. AVP Berzins adapted a leadership series to fit the goals and needs of WoCAs. This series included the following:

- 2PM - 4PM, October 3 AEB 320 – “Leadership Context and Leadership Fundamentals”
- 2PM - 4PM, November 7SFEBB 5160B – “Navigating Conflict”
- 2PM - 4PM, January 9 Unity Lounge, Union 293 – “Negotiation Essentials”
- 2PM -4PM, February 20 Unity Lounge, Union 293 – “Difficult Conversations”
- 2PM -4PM, March 26 Unity Lounge, Union 293 – “Collaboration Essentials” – Cancelled due to pandemic.

Although AVP Berzins generously offered to facilitate a web training if there was interest, through survey, the demand on people’s time to online their own courses, led to a decision to postpone the workshop to an undetermined date.

In addition to the leadership series, WoCA facilitates upon request in advance, mock job talks. For 2020, a mock job talk was organized for Ilaheva Tuaone (Doctoral Candidate, English Department). The mock job talk was a collaboration with Department of English. Invited respondents included Drs. Andrew Fanta (English), Scott Black (English), Hokulani Aikau (School for Cultural & Social Transformation), Maile Arvin (History and Gender Studies), and AVP Mary Anne Berzins. The now, Dr. Tuaone successfully defended the dissertation and accepted a tenure-track position with the Women’s and Ethnic Studies Program at the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs. We also sponsored the Dr. Angela Robinson’s job talk – a Mellon postdoctoral fellow with the Pacific Islander Initiative. Robinson’s talk was immensely successful and she will be joining the faculty of Gender Studies and Environmental Humanities at the University of Utah.

# FUTURE

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WoCA continues to bring a diverse group of WoCAs across campus. Challenges are the snow-ball method of inclusion. We also grapple with the complexity of what it means to be “women”, a person of color, and supporting a gender-nonconforming/nonbinary community. Therefore, the group seeks to invite individuals through the list-SERV and is word-of-mouth. This requires members to actively share the opportunity to connect with prospective WoCAs – therefore, the infrastructure continues to be grassroots.

The leadership series facilitated by AVP Mary Ann Berzins was a means to collectively start a dialogue of leadership amongst WoCAs. Additionally, during the fall 2019, Dr. Fukushima met with Mary Ann Villarreal and Sarah Projansky to discuss the future of WoCA and the role of the Office of Faculty and the Office for Equity & Diversity in supporting WoCA long-term. Therefore, during the 2020 – 2021 year, Fukushima will facilitate a follow-up meeting to the town-hall to discuss the future infrastructure of WoCA. Currently it is run on the volunteer and collective capacity.

To meet the fall 2020 with public health in mind, WoCA events for the fall 2020 will be remote and in-line with university policy and practice – we are still living in pandemic. We welcome the day when we may collectively be able to be in each other’s company safely.

# EXPENSES

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WoCA Starting budget 2019: \$6,503.68\*

WoCA expenses for 2019 – 2020: \$4,581.56

End of year budget 2020: \$11,922.12\*\*

For a detailed budget, email Dr. Fukushima at [a.fukushima@utah.edu](mailto:a.fukushima@utah.edu)

\* \$5,000 from a sponsorship from OED, and \$1,503.68 carry-forward.

\*\* Sponsorship from OED for 2020 – 2022 added to the end-of-year budget.