

# Marquette University Cultural Audit of Campus Spaces Report

Prepared by the Marquette University Committee on Equity and Inclusion  
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## Introduction

In February 2020, Marquette University will launch its second Campus Climate Survey designed to reach all students and employees that are presently affiliated with the university. Campus climate surveys are generally designed to capture experiences and observations of all members of a given organization. The university's Committee on Equity and Inclusion agreed to augment information gathered in the Campus Climate Survey with a cultural audit of general physical spaces throughout the campus to gain insight into the degree to which the university provides a welcoming physical environment for its students and employees. The recommendation to conduct the cultural audit of campus spaces was also included in *We are All Marquette*, a three-year plan submitted for approval by the Office of Institutional Diversity and Inclusion to Provost Ah Yun in May of 2019.

While a cultural audit usually carries the connotation of assessing climate or organizational culture, here we are referring to an assessment of the built environment of the campus. Physical spaces tell stories – whether we intend them to or not. They can send messages about who is recognized and celebrated and can have a profound impact on one's sense of belonging in a place.

The committee understands this to be an area that is not well represented by prior research. In most instances, this process is driven by either the need to reconcile monuments or building names or the presence of safe spaces for students who feel marginalized on campus. Yet as more university architects consider cultural landscapes and dimensions of campus, there is also a need to take into consideration changing demographics of students and how to make sure that spaces are more inclusive.

## Methods

In the summer of 2019, the university's Committee on Equity and Inclusion, whose membership includes students, faculty, and staff from a broad cross section of the campus community and diverse backgrounds, met to discuss the logistics for the cultural audit (see Appendix 1 for a full listing of committee membership). During that meeting, members generated a list of guiding questions to attend to while auditing the campus environment (see Appendix 2). In September 2019, the chair and co-chair of the committee met with Lora Strigens, vice president for planning and facilities management, to identify sites where significant numbers of students congregate or traverse. Thirty-nine such sites were chosen for the audit (see Appendix 3).

Over the month of October 2019, members of the committee and several additional student leaders divvied up the sites and, either individually or in small groups, walked their assigned spaces, taking notes on details pertinent to the list of guiding questions. Notes on 32 academic, administrative/multi-use, and residential buildings were collected and collated (see Appendix 4 for full notes).

It is important to note that this audit is simply meant to offer a snapshot of diverse representations in campus spaces and is not designed to provide a comprehensive description of our physical environment.

## General Findings and Discussion

In sifting through responses to the guiding questions, several broad themes emerged from the cultural audit.

*Theme 1 – In many spaces on campus, there is a lack of imagery, color, or warmth in general.*

Aesthetically, many spaces on Marquette’s campus are somewhat bland. A number of buildings were remarkably bare and “institutional,” painted in grayish tones and devoid of creativity. In many buildings that had color or artwork, neutrality was the norm: images of nature, abstract art, and Marquette branded images and phrases, such as the MU seal<sup>1</sup> or the four pillars, proliferated, while images of diverse people and cultural settings were largely absent. Some of these spaces exuded a sterile feel. Others felt stale, with photos or imagery that seemed outdated. Newer spaces in general felt more vibrant but sometimes still had a more functional than inviting ambience.

*Theme 2 – Diverse representation was generally concentrated in pockets.*

Physical manifestations of diversity seemed to have been created very intentionally and led by key individuals or units. One example is the College of Education in Schroeder Complex, in which pictures, paintings and posters represent a range of races/ethnicities, genders, and languages, and student work displayed on the walls features incredibly diverse themes. The LGBTQ+ Resource Center and the Center for Engagement and Inclusion in the Alumni Memorial Union (AMU) also offer big, bright murals and diverse representation. At the time of the audit, the AMU second floor rotunda was also featuring a student-created Day of the Dead altar, including vibrant decorations and artwork, and at least one of the residence halls displayed signs affirming that “culture is not a costume.”

Other notable examples include the Office of Enrollment in the new Physicians’ Assistant building; the third floor of Sensenbrenner Hall, where large paintings of Thai art are displayed; the third floor of Raynor Library, where ethnically diverse women are represented; and the Ott Memorial Writing Center located on the second floor of Raynor Library, where student art was thoughtfully created to foster a more welcoming environment. This sampling of spaces is meant to provide some key exemplars but is by no means exhaustive of the diverse representation on our campus.

Additionally, committee members indicated that there is a general dearth of spaces that *support* the diverse needs of campus stakeholders. While gender inclusive bathrooms were noted in a variety of buildings and were appreciated by notetakers, there are very few spaces on campus devoted to health and wellness (for lactation, meditation, stretching, stress reduction, and/or quiet breaks). One interesting and thoughtful exception was a room in the Ott Memorial Writing Center, which was purposefully devoid of art to provide a space that is distraction-free and sensory-friendly.

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<sup>1</sup> *It would be an omission to ignore controversy over the current seal of the University. Acknowledging the controversy, the university isn't likely to remove the seal from fixtures throughout the campus, but it did try to mitigate controversy by placing an explanation near prominent locations. Attention should be given to future depictions of Wisconsin's Indigenous populations, and in particular, the seal itself. (For more context on the history of Indigenous imagery on campus, see Mark Thiel's essay, "[Who's the American Indian on the MU Flag: A Timeline About Native Americans and Marquette University.](#)"*

*Theme 3 – White, male and Western normativity prevails in many spaces.*

While student activities spaces such as the AMU displayed more heterogeneity in their imagery, academic spaces displayed comparatively less. For example, spaces that depicted literary and historical artwork relied heavily on images of white Western authors or figures, mostly men. As our academic and cultural icons often tend to be white and male by default, we need to deliberately create pictorial narratives of women and people of color within our various academic disciplines.

In other spaces, there was extensive representation of past and current students, administrators, and benefactors. The committee recognizes that tension exists between celebrating our successes and prefiguring a more colorful future as, unfortunately, our success is often fairly monochromatic. We should work to create a balance between preserving tradition and more diverse representation in those spaces.

Sacred images and spaces also present a unique challenge. As a Catholic, Jesuit institution in which the majority of students identifies as Christian, most of our iconography and spaces for prayer are explicitly Christian. There are few spaces and images on campus that represent the broad diversity of religious traditions of our students, faculty, and staff, and non-Christian faiths could use greater visibility.

*Theme 4 – Beyond imagery, some areas did not feel inviting because of how the space was arranged.*

While not a direct response to the guiding questions, this theme appeared so frequently in committee members' notes that we thought it important to include it here.

Some spaces felt intentionally inviting, such as the Office of Undergraduate Admissions on the first floor of Zilber: the space is large, bright, and open, with comfortable seating arranged in small clusters and friendly student receptionists. In other cases, spaces felt disjointed, disconnected, closed off or perhaps socially inaccessible. Opaque and/or closed doors kept some communal spaces shut off from students who might otherwise choose to walk in. Some of these spaces might benefit from larger or accordion doors, for example, that could be closed when necessary but otherwise literally open the spaces up for all. Additionally, some buildings did not feel easy to navigate – there was a lack of wayfinding signage to help direct newcomers and often lack of visible accessibility for differently abled folks.

Spaces should be designed with a lens of comfort, keeping in mind such principles as navigability, accessibility, inclusivity, and openness.

## **Recommendations**

As a committee, we believe that the institution needs to rethink the nature of Marquette as “home” for existing and future students from diverse backgrounds. The committee therefore recommends the proactive injection of diversity into the physical space of our campus. But as the university begins to determine how to better represent diversity on our campus, it is of paramount importance that we make this process a collective effort. We also believe that creating inclusive spaces does not necessarily mean displacement of existing images as there is much empty canvas to work with across the campus. In cases where displacement of traditional or white, male normative images does occur, we must be thoughtful and intentional in how we work with all of our stakeholders to foster dialogue and transparency around these changes. **We offer as a guideline that, whenever possible and appropriate, students, faculty, and staff should be part of the process of reimagining our campus spaces.** To this

end, the Committee on Equity and Inclusion will continue to devote attention to the cultural dimensions of the campus landscape by creating a standing subcommittee. The subcommittee will be available for continued consultation and collaboration on actionable steps to make Marquette's built environment more inclusive.

We also present the following three recommendations as suggestions for how to begin to move the needle on diversifying campus spaces through both top-down and bottom-up approaches:

1. As new spaces are created, we believe the Office of Facilities and Planning Management should leverage their influence to help decision-makers think very deliberately about who is represented in our physical spaces and how. We therefore recommend that, for any renovation or new building project, consideration of the "guiding questions" (Appendix 2) be a mandated part of the planning process and that the university take steps to incorporate the work of the subcommittee into campus planning. Long-term planning should also consider the incorporation of gender inclusive bathrooms and wellness spaces to promote the health and well-being of our diverse campus stakeholders.
2. The Haggerty Museum's collecting and exhibition priorities over the past few years have directly aligned with Marquette's commitment to social justice and community engagement. As a result, their collection includes compelling work—including work created by and representing women and people of color—that would powerfully engage Marquette stakeholders. We recommend that resources be made available for Haggerty staff, Office of Facilities and Planning Management, and the Equity and Inclusion subcommittee to collaborate on the creation, framing, and display of prints of work from the Haggerty's collection in buildings throughout campus. The prints could also be accompanied by an educational effort, ranging from informational labels for each print to GROW sessions to online resources.
3. Engage in a campus-wide awareness-raising effort and incentivize change. Part of this process includes dissemination of this report to the University Leadership Council to begin a dialogue on ways that campus leaders can promote diverse representation in the spaces under their purview. Another way to accomplish this would be to set aside a small sum of money and conduct a university-wide contest, garnering proposals from those in charge of physical spaces to diversify representation and awarding several winners with the funding to implement their vision.

These recommendations are by no means exhaustive but rather represent some of the low-hanging fruit for moving the campus toward greater inclusivity. The report presented here is preliminary by definition and serves as a snapshot of the ongoing process to work toward greater inclusivity in our built environment. The committee would welcome conversations with university leaders and decision-makers around this report and recommendations.