

WWU Honors Students of Color (HSOC) Demands

The History of HSOC:

HSOC was created in 2019 by Silvia Leija, a student of color in the Honors Program who has been dedicating her college career to creating a safe space for others like her. Leija developed the idea of HSOC during her first year as many students of color experienced racism and microaggressions in Honors. However, being surrounded by predominantly white students and faculty, there was a lack of community for students of color – even with the Student Honors Board (SHB). We did not have any student representation to advocate for the needs of students of color in the program. After planning throughout Spring and Summer, Leija welcomed the first year cohort of Fall 2019 as the President and founder of HSOC. For the past three years, we have been an active student body and representative voice for students of color. However, many of our efforts have ultimately been unsuccessful due to a lack of support from the Honors Program.

Giving Credit to Our Predecessors:

Students of color across WWU's campus have historically organized and advocated for their needs through petitions when their voices have not been heard and demands have not been met. We believe it is important to acknowledge our privilege as a part of the Honors Program and credit the BIPOC student groups that have come before us, paving the way for us to be here. Here are our examples and inspiration: [BSO](#), [NASU](#), [Blue Group](#), and [ESC Demands](#).

Our Experiences:

For many students of color, the Honors Program is an extremely difficult stressor added to our college experience. Many of us have reported mental health issues and the consistent desire to drop out of the program due to personal experiences with racial injustice. Those experiences include but are not limited to:

- The usage of the N word by white students and professors
- Backlash when reporting the usage of the N word
- A lack of diversity in faculty/staff and students
- Studying Eurocentric and racist curriculum that excludes the BIPOC perspective and emphasizes BIPOC trauma from the white colonialist's perspective
- An added sense of responsibility to "fix" the program's racism on top of being a student
- Being tokenized while simultaneously ostracized
- Being continuously diluted through having our concerns lumped in with other marginalized groups
- Being ignored and gaslit when speaking about our experiences
- Racism, microaggressions, and not feeling supported
- Being scapegoated as a reason to transition the Honors Program into an Honors College

Notes: HSOC will not recognize the Honors Program as a college until these demands are met. The program promised that switching to a college would bring more faculty and students of color as well as resources for HSOC. However, we have not seen any of these promises come true.

What We Have Done:

Nevertheless, HSOC has consistently advocated for racial justice and reparations, accomplishing many goals and preventing several students of color from dropping out of the Honors Program. We proposed a mentorship program, with the goal of reducing the harm students of color would inevitably face within the Honors Program. We have provided BIPOC mental health resources and events. We have provided post graduation resources and BIPOC faculty panels for students of color. We advocated for Honors seminars surrounding DEI and decolonization. We pushed for more visiting professors of color in the Honors seminars. We have appointed at least two student of color positions (not permanent) on the Honors Board. We continuously meet with faculty, staff, and administration to speak about the above experiences and create solutions together. In addition, the presence of HSOC continues to be a space of support and connection for students of color in the program.

What Our Goal Is:

Our goal is for the Honors Program to add to a student of color's college experience and enrich it rather than take away from it. We hope this program will finally feel like a welcoming space to all in the future. We work tirelessly to advocate for students of color so they do not experience the hardships that we have gone through. No student should ever have to go through what we have gone through. However, there is persistent, overwhelming feedback from students of color across at least 5 generations that we do not feel welcome, represented, and safe despite the space and efforts we have made thus far. HSOC cannot do this anti-racist, systemic change alone. As students, our primary purpose at WWU is our academics. We demand the Honors Program staff, faculty, and administration do their jobs and support us in improving the quality of life for students of color in the program.

Our Demands:

EVERYTHING BELOW MUST BE DONE WITH HSOC PARTNERSHIP AND APPROVAL. This does not mean projects are taken away from us or dropped only onto our shoulders. These are partnerships where HSOC should feel heard and treated as equals in discussions. The process of starting each demand must begin by the end of Spring 2022.

1. Ending the usage of the N word by non-Black students, staff, faculty, and administration in the Honors Program. There must be repercussions for those who violate this.
2. Hiring another staff member that HSOC can go to who deals specifically with DEI and student of color retention in the program with a paid student assistant (who has experience in DEI). The hiring committee must include HSOC members and mentors.
3. More faculty and staff of color (who teach classes about race, not white professors). The hiring and/or selection committee must include HSOC members and mentors.
4. Financial reparations: Annual scholarships for Honors students of color, more HSOC funding, and DEI development and community building retreats akin to Honors Prologue.
5. Honors student of color affinity housing in Edens Hall.

6. A racial and accessibility Honors Program climate survey in consultation with HSOC.
7. Public access to retention and dropout rates for students of color in the program.
8. Curriculum reform: An analysis of the first-year sequence's efficacy in terms of cultural sensitivity and student satisfaction with an emphasis on Black and Indigenous student of color experiences. In addition, updating the Honors curriculum (with BIPOC authors) from less racist/Eurocentric to more anti-racist content that challenges white narratives.
9. Designated permanent student of color positions on Honors Board (at least 2).
10. Immediate demand: A reporting system in Honors for students of color experiencing microaggressions and racism. There must be ways in place for them to not take a certain professor, move out of a roommate situation, change an advisor, or any other actions they need immediately if something does happen (while working on longer term goals).

There must be consistent communication with HSOC and quarterly checkpoints. If we do not receive any communication, we will assume nothing is being done and will take retribution.

If the Honors Program Fails to Fulfill Our Demands:

If the above demands are unmet by Spring 2024 at the very latest, HSOC is prepared to take action. We will reach out to publications and become more vocal about how the Honors Program has mistreated students of color. We have written up and will publish a document with specific instances of racism by Honors faculty, staff, and administration and report them to the Title IX Office. We will contact alumni and donors. As HSOC, we will do everything in our power to break ties with the Honors Program and become an organization outside of it.

We are tired of being unheard after three years of repeating the same requests. We now demand that you hear us and help us heal from the pain caused by the WWU Honors Program towards students of color. It is your responsibility to give us reparations and work towards racial justice. This is our final attempt at diplomacy in our student advocacy. We have had enough.

Signed,
Sargun Handa
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