

BLIND RESUME SCREENING TO MITIGATE BIAS IN THE HIRING PROCESS:  
THE CASE OF THE WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY WORKFORCE

A disquisition presented to the faculty of the Graduate School of  
Western Carolina University, in partial fulfillment of the  
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by

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## ABSTRACT

### BLIND RESUME SCREENING TO MITIGATE BIAS IN THE HIRING PROCESS: THE CASE OF THE WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY WORKFORCE

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Western Carolina University (September 2023)

Chair: Dr. Kofi Lomotey

As the face of higher education has changed, the need for a more diverse workforce has increased. It is aspirational and essential for students of color to see themselves reflected in the faces of their faculty and staff. Campus diversity enriches the educational experience for all faculty, staff, and students. Unfortunately, the rate of hiring faculty and staff of color has not kept pace with the increase in enrollment for students of color. A review of several aspects of the hiring process pointed to implicit bias contributing to applicants of color being rejected early in the hiring process. Western Carolina University's (WCU) Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) data indicated that applicants of color did not advance as far as White applicants in the hiring process. Improvement science, as a methodology, provided the foundation for this problem-focused improvement initiative. In this intervention, I implemented blind resume screening to mitigate bias in the hiring process, focusing on increasing the number of qualified applicants of color who advance to the seriously considered and interviewed stages. During the improvement intervention, four pieces of data were redacted that could identify an applicant's race or ethnicity in the cover letter and resume: (a) the applicant's name, (b) address, (c) university attended, and (d) professional affiliations. Although, I aimed to increase the number of

qualified faculty and staff of color who advance to the interview phase at WCU through the results of this study, this approach is not absolute. More research is needed to understand the impact of blind resume screening on improving diversity in the workforce.

*Keywords:* Implicit bias, hiring process, blind resume screening, interviews, diversity



## THE DISQUISITION

The disquisition is a formal, problem-based discourse. It is closely aligned with the scholar–practitioner role of Doctorate in Education (EdD) students and takes on a practical focus rather than the theoretical focus of traditional PhD dissertations. The purpose of the disquisition is “to document the scholarly development of leadership expertise in organizational improvement” (Lomotey, 2020, p. 5). The EdD program at WCU nurtures and matures students as both scholars and practitioners who are trained to understand systems and institutional challenges and opportunities through a lens of research and scholarship. Students apply their knowledge, using their institutional access and positionality, directly to the educational institutions where they lead. The EdD is an applied degree, and the disquisition is similarly an applied capstone experience for doctoral work. This disquisition borrowed elements from improvement science, which is a methodology shaped by critical theory and scholarly research, and engages the candidate in the application of the concepts in an applied manner through the development and implementation of an intervention within their local institution, focused on the improvement of equity within that system. Ultimately, the disquisition serves as documentation and assessment of an improvement initiative that “contributes to a concrete good to the larger community and the dissemination of new relevant knowledge” (Lomotey, 2020, p. 5).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Statement prepared by Alison Joseph, EdD and Educational Leadership faculty

## The Problem

Bertrand and Mullainathan (2004) studied discrimination in the labor market with the work entitled *Are Emily and Greg More Employable Than Lakisha and Jamal? A Field Experiment on Labor Market Discrimination*. In the experiment, the pair noted difficulties in coming to firm conclusions on the reasons for the gap in differential returns. Still, they found individuals with “White-sounding names” received callbacks for interviews 50% more often than individuals with names reflecting all other races combined (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004).

To measure ethnic discrimination in the labor market, another study varied the names on resumes to convey membership in different ethnic groups and compared responses from employers to the name change, noting that some employers responded differently based on the name change (Booth et al., 2012). Researchers concluded that applicants with resumes that included racial cues of underrepresented populations (i.e., African American sounding names, Asian names, or other non-White names) received 30%–50% fewer callbacks from employers than did applicants with identical resumes without such racial cues (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004).

Similarly, Derous et al. (2015) hypothesized that it appears “Achmed is less employable than Aisha” in their study of the same name to note the implicit attitudes that affect hiring, especially during the resume screening stage. Despite decades of legislation and human resource professionals’ commitment to equal opportunities, minoritized members still suffer a weaker labor market position than the majority with similar qualifications (Shen et al., 2009).

Universities often espouse beliefs about diversity, equity, inclusion, and the need for a diverse workforce. Still, qualified candidates continue to be passed over or not seriously considered in the hiring processes (Feng et al., 2020). In addition, the hiring

rate for faculty of color has not kept pace with the rate at which students of color enroll in universities (O’Meara et al., 2020). As a result, the demographics of college enrollment in higher education institutions remain 55% White, and approximately 44% are members of a marginalized racial and ethnic category, including Black, Asian/Pacific Islander, Hispanic, American Indian/Alaska Native, and multiracial (Hanson, 2022).

Bendick and Nunes (2012) described some employers’ equal employment initiatives as symbolic and not action-oriented—doing the minimum to meet legal standards for their workforce and employment measures. An equal employment opportunity (EEO) law prohibits specific types of discrimination in certain workplaces (U.S. Department of Labor, n.d.). Universities should be intentional in their efforts to enhance diversity. Employers should not consider meeting minimum employment standards an impactful strategy to move the needle to increase organizational diversity (Bendick & Nunes, 2012).

In this study, I aimed to examine whether a blind resume screening process could mitigate bias to increase the number of diverse candidates applying to staff/administration positions at a comprehensive regional university who reached the interview stage. To address specific research questions, several data sources were used, including EEO data, a process checklist, a workload survey, a committee member profile, a postsurvey to committee members, and a debrief with the search committee chairs.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature was reviewed to examine research on topics related to blind resume screening as an approach to mitigate bias in the hiring process. These topics included implicit bias, workplace diversification, hiring in higher education, and blind resume screening. Blind hiring is a human resources process that aims to reduce bias during the hiring process. The concept is intended to promote talent acquisition and facilitate the hiring of eligible candidates regardless of their name, gender, or racial and ethnic background. Blind resume screening focuses on objectively evaluating the applicant's skills, talents, and abilities (Manikandan, 2020).

### **Implicit Bias**

The National Institute of Health (2022) defined implicit bias as unintentionally impacting decisions, attitudes, behaviors, and opinions. The Oxford Learner's Dictionaries (2023) defined a stereotype as a "widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing." Stereotypes are ubiquitous (Bordalo et al., 2016). The Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity (2018) at Ohio State University defined implicit bias in their training video as:

The attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions unconsciously. These biases, including favorable and unfavorable assessments, are activated involuntarily and without an individual's awareness or intentional control.

Though deep in a person's subconscious, they are not the same known biases that individuals sometimes conceal for social or political correctness. (Module 1)

Implicit bias can also create barriers to recruiting and retaining a diverse workforce.

However, research on workplace diversity has suggested that a diverse workplace can

benefit the employee and organizational outcomes when an inclusive environment is established (Adamovic, 2020).

Awareness of implicit bias has grown significantly. Researchers used the Implicit Association Test (IAT) to measure the differential association of two targeted concepts with an evaluative attribute (Greenwald et al., 1998). Due to the inability to observe discriminatory behavior directly during the hiring process, studies have been conducted to try to predict implicit bias behaviors (Goedderz & Hahn, 2022; Sukheta et al., 2019). Greenwald et al.'s (1998) study assessed types of implicit bias and found that behavior influenced in a structured environment can sometimes be labeled as implicit if unintentional and if it occurs unassumingly. The IAT can assess associations between social groups. The researchers suggested that the IAT data should present people as they are rather than how they would like someone to see them, including the attempt to mask racial and ethnic attitudes (Greenwald et al., 1998).

The IAT has also been used to assess various behavioral associations (i.e., stereotypes and beliefs), which can be reflected in hiring processes (Greenwald et al., 1998). The IAT can be used to evaluate different aspects of bias depending on the desired need of the organization. For example, Sukhera et al. (2019) did a meta-narrative synthesis, which compared and contrasted different groups' responses to the IAT as a metric of implicit bias to evaluate the success of an activity and promote awareness while encouraging discussion and reflection. This meta-narrative review found the IAT can illicit tension between groups. Their findings suggested that educational approaches regarding implicit bias require critical reflexivity assumptions, values, and theoretical positioning related to IAT (Sukhera et al., 2019).

In another study, researchers examined participants' responses to IAT feedback indicating racial bias. Goedderz and Hahn (2022) noted that doing IAT evaluations and not

discussing the results is not beneficial to the organization. Participants should not be surprised at the biased feedback they receive from the IAT. With planning and discussion, participants can become less defensive and not focus on the social-desirability concept but instead acknowledge their biases. De Houwer (2019) deduced that implicit bias is behavioral and less likely to solicit a negative response because it is seen as something people do naturally.

One could infer that when an applicant of one race receives more interviews or job offers than someone of another race, bias against the latter group may be one explanation for the discrepancy between the two. It has also been stated that a consensus has not been reached regarding implicit bias as a scientific explanation of discriminatory actions (Fisher & Borgida, 2012). Wåhlin-Jacobsen (2019) reviewed studies that asserted being ascribed to a specific membership category implies that some rights, obligations, and actions establish an association with that specific category. Their study explored how the outcome of empowerment practices shaped employee participation in identity ascriptions that took away the employee's voice to change the organization—versus membership categorization analysis as an innovative approach to studying identification as an anomaly negotiated during interactions. Researchers found the use of empowerment practices (e.g., self-managed work teams, employee voice and participation in organizational decision-making, and total quality management) was actually an attempt by higher education institutions to lessen democracy in the workplace. Employees should engage in empowerment practices and avoid undesired identity ascriptions due to their involvement (e.g., being seen as passive or docile) because empowerment practices cannot be successful without the partnership of employees. Furthermore, it was suggested that employees should promote their interests while managing identity ascriptions within the empowerment practice rather than just submitting to workplace interests and identity regulation (Wåhlin-Jacobsen, 2019).

Chamberlain (2016) offered a more intensive dive into the biases that impede the ability of search committee members to see the candidates' experiences and skillsets. Chamberlain (2016) suggested that search committee members should evaluate a candidate's credentials without the appearance of bias in the decision-making process. Higher education institutions should not only say that they value diversity but also create opportunities to support inclusion. There should be an intentional effort to identify and mitigate bias before each search process and onboarding of new employees. Chamberlain (2016) suggested that interviewers must be aware of stereotypes and personal and cultural biases that may influence their judgment. Search committee members must also work to build a broader capacity for understanding (a) their potential influence on the process, (b) the potential impact of their verbal and nonverbal communication, and (c) how to develop a personal compass to determine when bias is present. Understanding how and why bias happens can impact the diversity of a search.

Woods (2020) maintained that the "why" bias happens can be informed by stereotypes, assumptions, cultural tendencies, and subjective experiences of exclusion. He also stated that employees willing to participate in implicit bias training often desire to improve organizational diversity. This type of employee can benefit from training as a learning strategy by enhancing awareness of their bias to improve their decision making in the search screening process. Wood (2020) asserted that institutions implementing implicit bias training as a solo strategy may have little to no change in campus diversity. Implicit bias training should be combined with other strategies, which may include inclusive job announcements and search criteria, promoting a diverse search, seeking diversity advocates on search committees, evaluation of teaching demonstrations based on the use of inclusive pedagogies, cluster hiring, systems of accountability, and support from campus leaders.

Higher education institutions should intentionally increase the diversity of the faculty and staff to align more with the student body demographics (Wood, 2020). O'Meara et al. (2020) posited that processes for hiring in higher education operate with cognitive and implicit bias. As implicit bias appears to be the most controversial, more exploration should be focused on the search committee chair and their role in preventing bias from coloring decisions (Leske, 2016). The challenge is identifying and recognizing when bias affects decisions and how to address it appropriately. A broad representation for search committees can work favorably toward this goal because members can question other members' responses that may appear to be biased. It was also noted that implicit bias could be expected in campus forums where participants discuss admissions, campus police, and faculty recruitment (Leske, 2016).

According to Liera (2019):

Faculty hiring is not a race-neutral structure. Instead, faculty hiring at White-serving institutions is a structure embedded in Whiteness, which shapes the foundation of hiring routines, including recruitment strategies, evaluation criteria, and understandings of merit and fit that faculty members use to make hiring decisions. (p. 1961)

As such, action-oriented thinking and equity-minded inquiry interventions (e.g., blind resume screening) can be instrumental in pursuing equitable hiring practices and promoting an organizational shift in hiring practices (Liera, 2019).

### **Workplace Diversification**

In a 2013 *Chronicle of Higher Education* article, Sidhu stated that a university must enroll a critical mass of students of color for diversity's educational benefits. In the diversity and representation context, critical mass is an accumulation of diverse people whose presence in an organization causes changes in attitudes, perceptions, and culture (Sidhu, 2013). Garces and



Jayakumar (2014) suggested that the contextual framework of critical mass requires understanding the conditions needed for meaningful interactions and participation among students unique to that particular institution, state, or local environment. As such, critical mass cannot be quantified in the general sense without referencing the particular educational context it uses to achieve its diversity goals (Garces & Jayakumar, 2014).

Critical mass can have an impact on the atmosphere of inclusion on campus that results in an increased likelihood of forming interracial friendships, talking about race and diversity, higher student retention, greater overall college satisfaction, and increased self-perceptions of intellectual and social self-confidence among all students (Chang et al., 2004). Kalbfeld (2019) defined critical mass as reaching a desired threshold number of underrepresented individuals and affirmed that many social scientists, Supreme Court affirmative action decisions, and diversity and inclusion advocates support the notion that critical mass is a cure for the ills of tokenism and racial and gender homogeneity in institutional settings. Kalbfeld (2019) also suggested that if institutions reach critical mass, it can prompt institutional change that can enhance institutional performance and eliminate the negative consequences of tokenism.

Gurin et al. (2003) examined students' learning experiences with peers of diverse backgrounds on a university campus. Gurin et al. (2003) sought to provide a theoretical rationale for why racial and ethnic diversity should foster education, and the researchers tested that rationale using empirical materials available in existing datasets at the University of Michigan and the Cooperative Institutional Research Program. Gurin et al. (2003) explored student experiences in the context of affirmative action lawsuits against the University of Michigan for considering race as a factor in the admissions process. The Supreme Court ruled in 2003 that the university had the right to consider race in its admissions process to achieve a diverse student

body. However, race could not be the deciding factor in the undergraduate admissions process. The rationale of this ruling validated that race matters, but race itself is not enough, and other educational factors such as active learning, intellectual engagement, and preparation for citizenship should be considered to examine the impact and meaning of diversity (Gurin et al., 2003). Gurin et al. (2003) also looked at structural diversity and its impact on diversity. They noted that structural diversity provides an opportunity for engagement with diverse peers that can support higher education in achieving its educational goals. They concluded that educational institutions should aspire to make diversity central to their educational mission because it enhances the student experience and prepares students to be active citizens within a diverse democracy (Gurin et al., 2003). Similar conclusions have been made in the labor market as well.

Over the past decade, human resources have focused on a common strategy to support system workflows from the application process to onboarding a new employee. However, as the labor market becomes increasingly competitive, the software to manage talent acquisition has become limited. Using artificial intelligence hiring versus human hiring outcomes in blind hiring may help human resources offices retain quality talent. Bias, whether unconscious or conscious, can present itself in an interview or hiring decisions (Veluchamy et al., 2021). Blind hiring anonymizes the search's information, leaving only the skills and competencies to be reviewed. This process employs both technological blinding using software and human hiring. Veluchamy et al. (2021) believed technology could help promote diversity in higher education institutions because of its manner of getting around racism, complicating recruitment, or placing financial hardship on the hiring department.

## **Hiring in Higher Education**

Faculty and staff hiring processes are inherently vulnerable to bias for at least three reasons: (a) explicit or implicit bias, (b) bias due to ingroup preference, and (c) the pressure of decision making (Pager & Western, 2012). Bias creates inequities that block minorities' and underrepresented populations' job prospects and career progression (Pager, 2007). In addition, the screening process for resumes and applications is highly susceptible to implicit bias. As a result, applicants of color do not progress in the hiring process as frequently as White applicants (Derous & Ryan, 2018).

Implicit bias can occur during any phase of the search process. It is imperative to be authentic and transparent when communicating personal preferences and closely monitor the process. Leske (2016) suggested that institutions should intentionally have diverse representation on search committees to minimize bias and increase the likelihood of a diverse pool of applicants. Diverse search committees bring a diversity of thought about ethnicity, background, gender, and biases to elicit open discussions about various viewpoints. However, more than diverse representation on search committees is needed to solve the problem of underrepresentation in the search pool.

There has been ample research on applicants of color and their movement through the hiring processes (Feng et al., 2020; Kessler et al., 2019; O'Meara et al., 2020; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Nonetheless, it is not always explicit in noting that implicit bias threatens the hiring process. Some research on implicit bias in hiring leans toward anecdotal and circumstantial evidence, and some borders on pseudo-science. Other research has used an incentive-based model to measure employer preferences for candidates (Kessler et al., 2019).

Adverse impact, also referred to as disparate impact, is defined by the Equal Employment

Opportunity Commission (EEOC) as “a substantially different rate of selection in hiring, promotion or other employment decision which works to the disadvantage of members of a race, sex or ethnic group” (Bates, 2022, para. 1). Disparate treatment is a legal term used by EEOC to describe intentional discrimination in the workplace against a member of a protected class (O’Donnell, 2022). Disparate impact, while unintentional, may occur during every phase of the hiring process, to include applicant screening or the process as a whole. Disparate treatment is intentional discrimination that can happen at any phase of employment—from the dissemination of recruitment materials to candidate selection and during employment (O’Donnell, 2022). Identifying and mitigating adverse impact in recruitment efforts is critical to make certain each applicant has an equal opportunity in the hiring process, regardless of their race, background, gender, ethnicity, religion, age, or sexual orientation (Bates, 2022).

Many applicants of color are unfairly rejected early in the hiring process because they are unsure about job expectations, leading to incomplete applications or submitting inappropriate hiring credentials—placing White applicants in a better position to get the job. Dovidio and Gaertner (2000) suggested that discriminatory employment practices against minorities are most often present when the job’s qualifications are ambiguous rather than substantial. Unclear guidelines, inconsistent processes, and vague qualifications allow for bias to negatively affect hiring decisions of minorities but still give the hiring manager “justification” for their choice. Perceived insufficiencies or minimal experiences, communication skills, and commitment can be incorrectly used as an identifier for an applicant’s race (Moss & Tilly, 1995). Bell (1993) wrote:

When the faculty candidate's race or gender connotes diversity, either because of nontraditional qualifications or because of departures from the traditional scholarly subject matter and approach, opposition to such candidates can be as fierce as illogical and unfair. (p. 374)

Research has documented that employers discriminate by noting the search's deficiencies in soft skills (e.g., a lack of work commitment and inability to effectively communicate) as reasons to deny employment (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000). In efforts to diversify higher education institutions, it is essential to recognize that bias and biased hiring exist. Job descriptions and job announcements should be written using inclusive language, so all applicants understand (a) how to apply and (b) the expectations of the advertised position.

Rules and policies should be enforced; if not, they are just empty words. As an example, the National Football League enacted the Rooney Rule in 2003, which they do not enforce. This rule is a policy that sets standards for hiring processes to have at least one minority candidate seriously considered and interviewed (Shropshire, 2021). To see a difference in hiring practices, those higher education institutions diversifying their staff should be acknowledged and sanctions should be issued to those not adhering to the policy. Even if policies exist, bias cannot be eliminated because applicants of color do not move through the hiring process (Fisher & Borgida, 2012). Although discrimination occurs at the aggregate level, implicit or racial bias could explain why applicants of color receive few interviews and fewer jobs (Fisher & Borgida, 2012).

### **Blind Resume Screening**

O'Meara et al. (2020) suggested in their literature review that implicit bias contributes to applicants of color being eliminated early in the hiring process, often failing to proceed to the

interview stage or even being seriously considered. Recognizing that many social biases are rooted in system and structural inequities, interventions focused on mitigating bias should be done in conjunction with structural interventions—given the existing power systems perpetuated in institutions (O’Meara et al., 2020).

A strategy that minority applicants use to avoid bias in the employment process is to “Whiten” their resumes by deleting references to their race with the hope of receiving more interviews, and research has shown that the strategy is working (Gerdeman, 2017). Gerdeman (2017) noted that companies are more than twice as likely to call minority applicants for interviews if they submit Whitened resumes than is the case for minority candidates who reveal their race or include ethnic information. Again, supporting any discriminatory practice is as detrimental for higher education institutions that declare to value diversity as it is for those that do not (Gerdeman, 2017).

Fisher and Borgida (2012) reviewed audit studies, a specific type of research, to study bias and behavior that highlighted persistent discriminatory practices faced by members of underrepresented populations in the hiring process. The one common theme concluded from the studies was that implicit bias could not be definitively ruled out as a cause for group-based disparities. However, Fisher and Borgida (2012) also used those studies to detail examples of implicit bias. They indicated that employers did not purposefully deny job opportunities to underrepresented populations but were more flexible and offered grace to White candidates. In addition, racial discrimination has been evident by the fewer interviews and job offers for qualified candidates of color than those provided to qualified White candidates (Fisher & Borgida, 2012).

Research has shown that a pitfall in blind hiring is that making applications anonymous can also have the reverse effect on underrepresented groups—as the blinding process can block the efforts made by affirmative action (Åslund & Skans, 2012; Krause et al., 2012). Another pitfall is that if job descriptions are written in a manner biased toward one group over another, the blind hiring process may not be effective in helping to reach the organizational goal or to be a substitute for a more inclusive job posting. Although blind hiring has been shown to increase diversity in many higher education institutions, further research is needed to understand the processes required to create a precise diverse hiring strategy (Åslund & Skans, 2012; Krause et al., 2012).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theories of implicit bias with identity ascription and race inequality (Steinmetz, 2020) created a framework for my study. These theories were essential to discovering and dismantling practices that keep higher education's workforce homogenous. The theoretical framework of implicit bias related to identity ascription examines how people ascribe others' identities on paper (i.e., names and memberships). This tendency for stereotype-confirming thoughts to pass spontaneously through human minds is what psychologists call implicit bias (K. Payne et al., 2018). This concept allows people to overgeneralize, sometimes leading to discrimination even when they feel they are being fair. van Heelsum and Koomen (2016) affirmed that in identity formation, ascription is the manner in which outsiders define groups and place a value or groupness on categories. This helps explain how a search committee member can view a candidate's identity and feel biased based on their opinion or perceived belief about a member of an ethnic group. This notion can also correlate to a search committee member's bias

when viewing the candidate's resume to ascertain if they "fit" with their perceived organizational culture.

Another relevant theory to blind resume screening is interest convergence, a term coined by the late Derek Bell (Lynn et al., 2013). Interest convergence occurs when Whites have substantial benefits that can be aligned with those of people of color. White search committee members may think that supporting Blacks in the hiring process is a political gesture not to be deemed racist but viewed as fair and equitable in a social justice context as Western promotes inclusive excellence. The problem is that search committees are not usually diverse. White search committee members who are decision makers may benefit from interest convergence in efforts to promote racial diversity in their staff, to support university diversity strategies, and to align with governmental and regional commitments to provide funding for diversity and inclusive initiatives that increase employee and student diversity. They may also be regarded as the search committee member who garners a reputation for diversity advocacy, which could be used for professional advancement. For example, Ndemanu (2017, as cited in Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) stated: "The interest-convergence mindset that led to the passing and sustenance of the Affirmative Action Act because it benefits White women more than it benefits Black people" (p. 240). However, decades after passing the Affirmative Action Act, women and people of color remain significantly underrepresented in university workforces.

Tate and Page (2018) maintained, often, the focus on implicit bias has become an easy and comfortable way for universities to deal with racism by demonstrating their good faith and willingness to address racism while keeping the status quo of Whiteness. Unfortunately, focusing predominantly on implicit bias to remedy a hostile campus climate can perpetuate rather than disrupt social injustice by serving as "an alibi to diminish the recognition, analysis, and salience



of white supremacy to maintain it” (Tate & Page, 2018, p. 143). Race inequality is frequently discussed as separate from other disparities based on gender, class, sexuality, or immigrant status (Steinmetz, 2020). Often missing from that conversation is how some people are subject to all of these; the experience is not just the sum of its parts. Even though institutions proclaim diversity as an institutional priority, administrators should be cognizant of unconditional biases related to redaction as well. Reviewing institutional commitments to diversity does not ensure fair and equitable processes throughout the university.

### **A Local Context: WCU**

WCU embraces “Inclusive Excellence” as a strategic goal and an ideal for all university personnel. The university has adopted inclusive excellence as a framework to organize, articulate, and integrate diversity and inclusion into the institution’s priorities. Just as WCU intentionally endeavors to recruit a more diverse student body, the university should also parallel its efforts to make gains in employing and retaining faculty and staff of color to stay true to its strategic goal. In fact, the diversification of students without the diversification of faculty and staff can be more harmful than helpful (O’Meara et al., 2020).

The University of North Carolina (UNC, n.d.-a) system is the state’s premier public higher education system. The multicampus system encompasses 16 universities and the North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics. WCU, a comprehensive 4-year regional university, is the UNC system’s westernmost university. With an enrollment of 11,600, it attracts students worldwide to explore the region’s vast natural diversity.

The surrounding community is rural; however, several major metropolitan cities are within 3 hours of the campus. WCU is a predominately White institution of higher education located in the mountains of North Carolina. At the time of the study, the university employed

approximately 1,589 full-time employees, of which 10.7% were faculty and staff of color (EEO Report WCU, 2022).

WCU is the only UNC system institution located in an unincorporated town. WCU's home, Cullowhee, is in Jackson County. Cullowhee's population estimate from the U.S. Census Bureau (n.d.) for the year 2020 was 43,109, with over 85% of the residents reporting their race as White, 9.1% as American Indian, 2.4% as Black, 6.2% as Hispanic, and 1.1% as Asian.

In the Fall of 2018, WCU became a North Carolina Promise campus to address college affordability by reducing the cost of tuition with funding from North Carolina. As a result, tuition for all undergraduate students at WCU was reduced to \$500 per fall and spring semesters for in-state students and \$2,500 for out-of-state students (UNC System, 2022b). In addition, according to the 2022 fall semester data, approximately 70% of WCU students received financial aid (WCU, n.d.-c).

After the inception of North Carolina Promise, student enrollment has increased along with the profile of prospective students, as indicated by higher GPAs and standardized test scores of the student applicants (WCU, n.d.-c). The percentage of students of color attending has remained steady, with a slight uptick in enrollment (as a percentage of the population) in 2021 and again in 2022, as shown in Table 1. The increase in enrollment can be attributed to special requirements being in place during and post-COVID-19 global pandemic. The UNC Board of Governors permitted WCU to waive the application fee to help offset the cost for families that experienced financial constraints due to the pandemic. They also allowed WCU to remain test-optional, which removed the standardized test barrier to the admission process that prevented some students, especially students of color, from applying and being accepted. The UNC system's strategic plan aims to get more rural, low-income, underrepresented, and first-

generation students to earn college degrees or credentials. North Carolina Promise was the initiative to help achieve this goal. Diversity enriches the college experience, and students learn to communicate and build relationships with people of varied racial and ethnic backgrounds when in a diverse educational environment. WCU’s strategic plan affirms the educational, cultural, and civic necessity of a comprehensive approach to diversity that provides equal opportunity for all individuals to succeed (WCU, n.d).

**Table 1**

*WCU Student Enrollment*

Race/ethnicity	2022 (%)	2021 (%)	2020 (%)	2019 (%)
Native American	0.9	1.0	0.9	0.8
Asian	1.3	1.3	1.3	1.1
Black or African American	6.4	6.1	5.5	5.5
Hispanic	7.7	7.5	7.5	7.1
Multiple race/ethnicity	3.5	3.3	3.3	3.6
Native Hawaiian	0.1	>0.1	>0.1	0.0
White	76.5	77.7	78.5	78.6
Unknown/international	3.6	3.1	2.9	3.3
Total race/ethnic min	23.5	22.1	21.5	21.4

*Note.* In 2022, there were 11,635 students. In 2021, there were 11,877 students. In 2020, there were 12,233 students. In 2019, there were 12,167.

Table 2 shows the dataset for WCU’s total employees of color from 2019–2021. Between 2019 and 2021, there was an increase in students of color enrolling in WCU. In 2019, 21.4% of the enrolled student population comprised students of color compared to the 9.9% of employees from underrepresented racial/ethnic backgrounds. The data indicated there have been twice as many students of color as a percentage of the population as there are employees, suggesting a need to increase employee workforce diversity.

**Table 2***WCU Employees of Color 2019–2022*

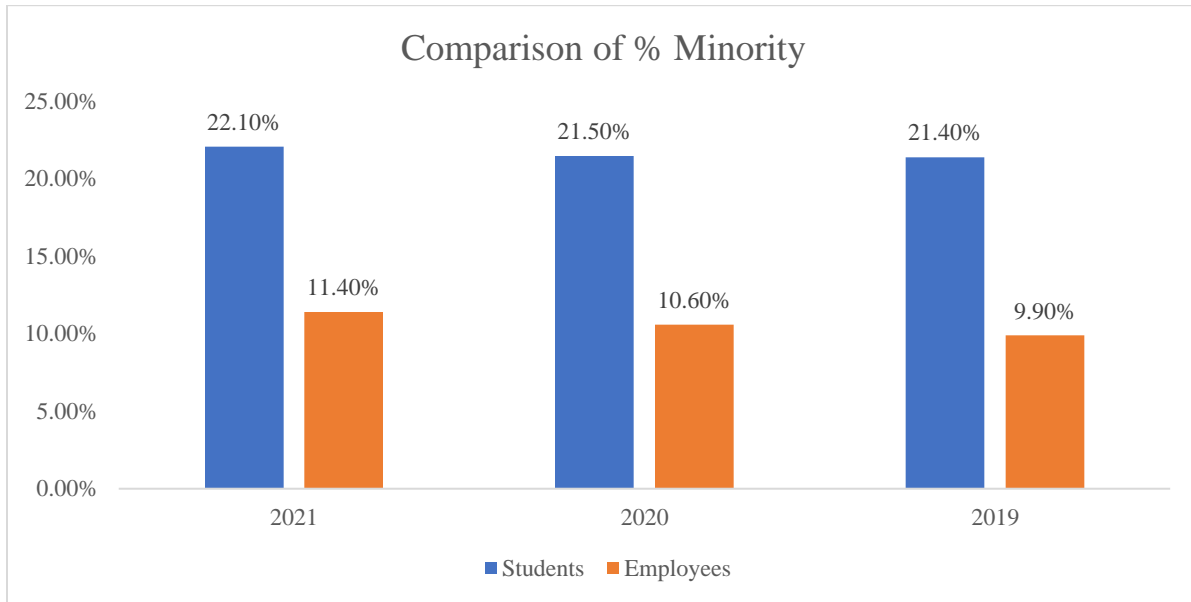
Race/ethnicity	2022 (%)	2021 (%)	2020 (%)	2019 (%)
Black	3.3	3.6	3.3	2.6
Hispanic	2.3	2.3	1.9	2.7
Asian	2.8	3.0	2.6	2.2
Native American	0.8	0.8	0.7	0.9
Two or more	1.4	1.8	2.1	1.5
Total race/eth. min	10.77	11.4	10.6	9.9

*Note.* In 2022, there were 1,589 employees. In 2021, there were 1,586 employees. In 2020, there were 1,603 employees. In 2019, there were 1,582 employees.

In 2021, enrollment of students of color was 22.1% of the total student population, and employees of color increased to 11.4% of the employee population (from 10.6% the previous year). That meant employees of color were almost half of the students of color enrolled as a percentage of the population. During that same time, the overall racial diversity demographic of employees increased by less than 1% annually (EEO Report WCU, 2022; see Figure 1).

**Figure 1**

*Racial and Ethnic Group Comparisons*



In 2020, enrollment of students of color increased by .1% from 2019 to 21.5%, and employees of color increased by .7% to 10.6% during the same time. Students of color enrollment as a percentage of the population was twice as high as the percentage of employees of color that year. However, the .7% increase in the number of employees of color indicated progress as it was an uptick in diversifying the employee population.

The Office of Human Resources has documentation for Exempt from the Human Resource Act (EHRA) and the Subject to Human Resource Act (SHRA) for faculty and nonfaculty positions that provide search committee guidance and equal employment guidelines. This information is shared with search committee members during their first meeting. As a resource toward mitigating bias, in 2020, the WCU Office of Human Resources acquired access to an implicit bias video as a supplement to their search committee training and a 1-hour online training on implicit bias. In providing this training, the WCU Office of Human Resources offered

this guidance, “All of us have our own unconscious biases, and it is essential to identify and keep these at the forefront of our minds when reviewing and selecting candidates” (personal communication, June 29, 2021).

Even though the university has implicit bias resources (i.e., video and a training module), there is no university-wide mandate to engage with the training. To increase the education of search committees, members should be required to watch the implicit bias video and have an involved dialogue to understand the purpose and content of implicit bias training and the importance of recognizing and mitigating bias in faculty and staff searches. Additionally, exploring and recognizing bias is necessary when building an inclusive culture by identifying subtle beliefs and actions that exclude potential candidates.

### **Positionality**

At the time of the study, I was a Black female administrator at WCU and served as an associate vice chancellor for student affairs administration. I approached this work using a Black feminist lens because it aligned with my personal and professional experiences. My leadership has always underpinned diversity, equity, access, and inclusion. I am conscious that I have worked in a structure deeply rooted in racial disparities for over 30 years. My entire career has been spent working at predominantly White institutions, and I have worked with only a few colleagues of color in executive leadership positions. My work in a siloed, predominantly White institution, and a primarily White town, has lent itself to experiencing the permanence of racism and racialized privilege, also referred to as Whiteness as a property (Capper, 2018). Those situations have allowed me to gain experience in navigating difficult situations and to be supportive of others who may experience racism. I have observed preferential treatment in

hiring, internal promotions, and the lack of professional development opportunities since I began my career in higher education.

In my professional career, I started as a director of multicultural affairs; my lens to mitigate bias and ensure that organizational processes are equitable continues to provide purpose and direction for my work. Bias exists in my workplace, and it is unavoidable in research. I am aware of the bias I brought to this improvement initiative because I want to see a more diverse workforce at WCU. Higher education is a system of privilege and power based on race and White male dominance. This intervention was meaningful because diversity and representation matter. Representation validates the lives of those marginalized by racism and discrimination and helps to dispel stereotypes and biases. It also affords the opportunity for more voices to be heard and leadership to be shared from multiple cultural perspectives. Racism is embedded in the fabric of WCU. It is the silent killer of creativity and advancement. The work to remove barriers of systemic racism and oppression will always exist. These reasons are why I was qualified to implement an intervention in which I sought to improve the diversification of the workforce in student affairs.

### **Theory of Change**

Blind hiring is a common topic among companies as they work to increase candidate diversification in their selection process. The blind hiring concept can be traced back to the 1970s when symphony orchestras were mostly made up of White men, and they began conducting auditions behind a curtain (Åslund & Skans, 2012; Krause et al., 2012). This practice, used also in human resources, is called blinding applications or blind resume screening. This theory of change suggests that removing racial/ethnic identifiers from resumes and cover

letters would result in more qualified applicants of color being selected for interviews at WCU. In this study, racial/ethnic identifiers were names, addresses, college(s) attended, and affiliations.

Through this intervention, I tried to improve the sparse number of applicants of color seriously considered and selected for an interview during the search process using a blind resume screening protocol to mitigate bias in the hiring process. The protocol redacted ethnic and racial identifiers in the applicants' resumes and cover letters at the initial phase of the candidate screening process to see if removing these identifiers increased the number of qualified applicants of color interviewed at WCU.

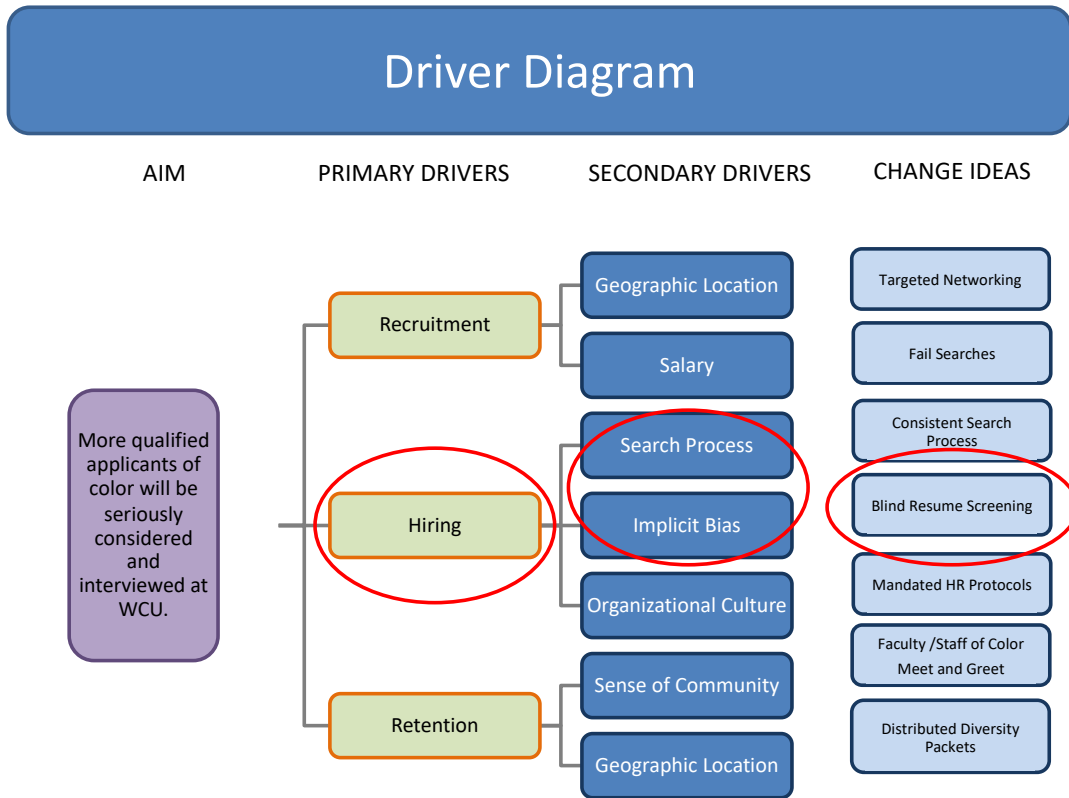
The focus of this study was rooted in implicit bias centered on cultural fit, stereotyping of applicants, and organizational culture being a deterrent for diverse candidates matriculating to the next phase in the interview process. According to Bonilla-Silva (2009), unfortunately, Asian, Black, Latinx, and Indigenous groups experience the injustice of racialized hiring structures through higher education institutions' normative hiring routines that discriminate against these groups because of their race. This reinforces the importance of implicit bias training for search committee members.

WCU's employment availability of faculty and staff of color has been significantly higher than those hired. Figure 2 is a driver diagram, a tenant borrowed from improvement science methodology. The driver diagram illustrates the relationship between the aim of the improvement, ideas, and outcomes as essential to increasing the number of qualified applicants of color interviewed for employment (Bryk et al., 2015; Langley, 2009).



**Figure 2**

*Driver Diagram*



*Note.* This diagram illustrates the relationship between the aim, the drivers, and the change idea.

The aim of this intervention was to increase the number of applicants of color interviewed. For the intervention, the hiring process was examined as a primary driver for causes that may prevent applicants of color from progressing through the hiring process. Within the hiring process, the focus was on the search process and implicit bias because it was core to this intervention. The change idea for the driver was blind resume screening. Information was redacted in the application screening process to see if more applicants of color would advance through the hiring process.

For this intervention, a *blind resume* referred to an applicant's resume and accompanying cover letter. In theory, implementation of this intervention should have allowed for more applicants of color to progress through the hiring process to the interview stage, which should lead to a higher probability of more applicants of color being hired—contributing to the university's stated goal of inclusive excellence.

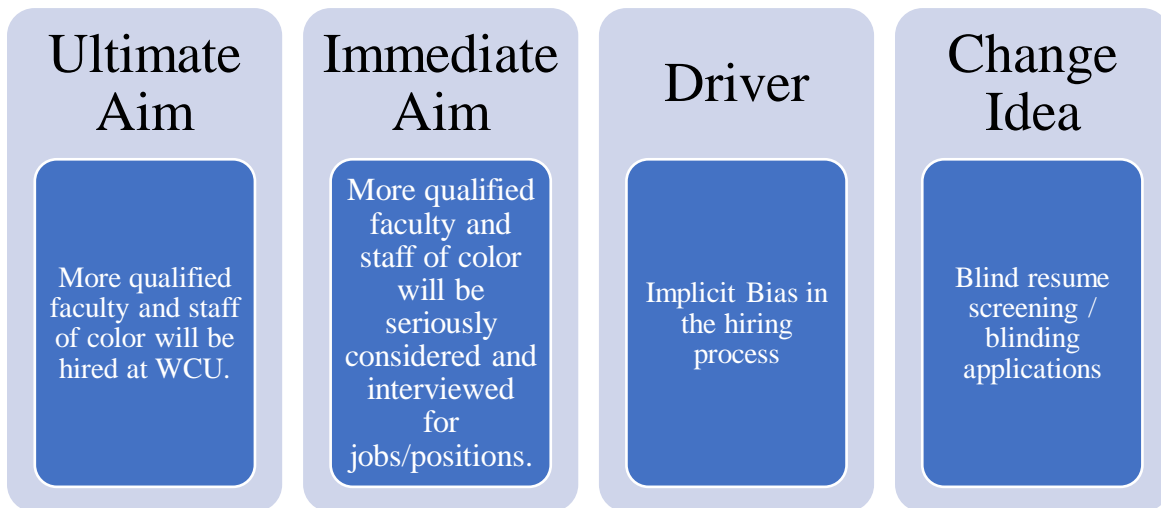
I presupposed that reducing the effects of implicit bias in the early hiring process would lead to more applicants of color moving to the interview stage. The initial discarding of applicants of color has likely been steeped in implicit bias and should be mitigated (Railey et al., 2016). Scholars and human resource professionals have noted that implicit bias cannot be cured or fixed; they refer instead to mitigating or reducing their own bias. A less biased search committee (i.e., educated on bias and how to mitigate bias) is more likely to enhance equity and diversity in the workplace (Railey et al., 2016).

Missteps can occur when institutions do not have an integrated structured process for managing the search process. Search committee members can present bias when reviewing a candidate's information when no human resources protocol is established and hiring policies are not communicated. Lee and Chun (2014) stated the search process is essential to higher education success because the search for talent is a continuous process that requires a strategic and systematic approach. When evaluating candidate materials, meritocracy is a vital idea to be mindful of due to the preconceived beliefs of the search committee members, which can undermine the evaluation process (Lee & Chun, 2014). During this intervention, I was intentional in my efforts to redact the applicant's name, address, university attended, and professional affiliation, which can potentially trigger bias during the search process.

An intermediary goal of this intervention was to compare the percentage of applicants of color chosen to advance for interviews from the blind resume screening process to the percentage selected from other searches in the specified department. The ultimate aim of this improvement is to increase faculty and staff of color by 10% after a 3-year adoption of blind resume screening in addition to other strategies to mitigate bias (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3**

*Aim Improvement*



## METHODOLOGY

For this descriptive intervention I used quantitative and qualitative data. In addition, I borrowed elements from improvement science (i.e., driver diagrams and design team) to assess whether a blind resume intervention protocol would help to increase the number of diverse candidates for staff and administration positions at WCU to the next phase of the interview process in this intervention.

### **Design Team**

The design team was a group of invested persons with a shared interest in promoting a racially diverse workforce at WCU. They also had a professional responsibility to mitigate implicit bias at WCU. The design team offered suggestions and approved the blind resume screening process and documents listed in the appendices (see Appendices A–J) that supported the intervention. The design team also advised on the implementation timeline and helped to identify departments with pending searches. The team members for this improvement initiative were a diverse cross-section of campus leaders (see Table 3). The former director of intercultural affairs was on the design team but transitioned from WCU in August 2022 to pursue another professional opportunity.

**Table 3***Design Team*

Name	WCU role/job title	Role in improvement initiative
Jane Adams-Dunford	Associate Vice Chancellor	Scholar-Practitioner
Ricardo Nazario-Colon	Chief Diversity Officer	Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Consultant
Nancy Ford	Director of Employee Relations, Talent Acquisition & Development	Search Committee Education
Trisha Ray	Employee Relations Consultant	Search Committee Education
Donna Reynolds	Executive Assistant in Student Affairs	Improvement Initiative Assistant

**Research Questions**

1. Did implementing a blind resume screening process result in an increased percentage of qualified candidates of color matriculating through to the next phase of the interview process?
2. What are the perceptions of the search committee members on the blind resume screening process?
3. Is it feasible to add blind resume screening to the human resources workload?

**Participants**

Participants for this intervention were search committee members and human resources staff. Search committee members were approached about this intervention, and if they did not want to participate in a blind resume screening process, they were excused from being on the search committee. The intervention participants were 10 search committee members, six women and four men, who provided data for the improvement initiative, and one improvement initiative assistant, who provided data on the workload for the initiative.

## **Measures**

Most of the measures used to address the research questions in this intervention were self-created. Extant data, specifically WCU employment data and the human resources EEO search reports, were also used in this intervention. Self-created measures included the search committee member profile survey, search committee postsurvey, virtual debrief interview with search committee chairs, and assistant workload survey.

### **WCU Employment Data**

The WCU employment data reflected the WCU workforce as represented in the university's EEO plan reporting. It was a snapshot in time and was used as an outcome measure in this intervention. The data focused explicitly on categories defined in affirmative action to measure the representation of marginalized groups in the workforce. The employment data was essential to my goals because the report disseminated statistical information relevant to WCU's EEO plan reporting. Human resources shares the information annually with university departments (WCU EEO/Affirmative Action Plan, 2022).

### **Search Committee Member Profile Survey**

A search committee member profile survey (see Appendix C) was used as a process measure to indicate the experience with search committee processes and their awareness of implicit bias and the redaction process. The search committee member profile survey consisted of eight questions. The profile survey was administered to each search committee member via an anonymous Qualtrics link emailed to their work email before beginning the study.

### **Search Committee Postsurvey**

The search committee postsurvey was used as a process measure to gauge learning and feedback on the blind resume screening process. The search committee postsurvey was

administered via Qualtrics at the conclusion of the blind resume screening process. The search committee members were asked six of the same questions from the search committee member profile survey. They were asked two additional questions about learning about implicit bias and the blind resume screening process.

### **Virtual Debrief Interview**

A virtual debrief interview was conducted with each search chair. The interview was a process measure that provided feedback on the blind resume screening process and its impact on the search process. The interview also helped confirm if the blind resume screening initiative worked as expected. The virtual debrief interview was held with each search committee chair via the university-sponsored Zoom platform after each search. The Zoom interview was recorded and lasted approximately 30 minutes.

### **Human Resources EEO Search Reports**

Another outcome measure for this intervention was the human resources EEO report published for each search conducted. Summary reports are generated from the Applicant Tracking System to measure the effectiveness of attracting diverse applicants. The EEO search reports generated make up the comprehensive Affirmative Action Plan report completed on an annual basis. The EEO search report provided by human resources to each search committee chair conveys the applicant pool's demographics for their respective search, indicating gender, veteran, and disability status in addition to the race/ethnicity of applicants in each pool. Race and ethnicity on the summary report are noted as Asian, Black, Hispanic, White, or Two or More (WCU EEO/Affirmative Action Plan, 2022).

For this intervention, the following race/ethnicity categories were used as defined in the WCU Affirmative Action Plan report:

- **White** (Non-Hispanic or Latino) – All persons having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, North Africa, or the Middle East.
- **Black or African American** (Non-Hispanic or Latino) – A person having origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa.
- **Hispanic or Latino** – A person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race.
- **Asian** (Non-Hispanic or Latino) – A person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian Subcontinent, including, for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam.
- **American Indian or Alaska Native** (Non-Hispanic or Latino) – A person having origins in any of the original peoples of North and South America (including Central America) and who maintains tribal affiliation or community attachment.
- **Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander** (Non-Hispanic or Latino) – A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands.
- **Two or More Races** (Non-Hispanic or Latino) – All persons who identify with more than one of the above five races (WCU EEO/ Affirmative Action Report).

### **Timeline**

The intervention followed the hiring policies and search protocol at WCU. The protocol included redacting ethnic and racial identifiers in applicants' resumes and cover letters at the initial phase of the candidate screening process. Specifically, four pieces of data that could identify an applicant's race or ethnicity: (a) the applicant's name, (b) address, (c) university



attended, and (d) professional affiliations, were redacted. This timeline was used to implement the improvement initiative with the understanding that it could change based on the timing of approvals, open searches, availability, and communication among invested persons.

### **Planning Meetings, March – December 2022**

1. Met with Design Team, March
2. Submitted Final Proposal, April
3. Proposal Defense Approved, June
4. Institutional Review Board (IRB) Application Submission, August
5. IRB Approval, September
6. September 15 reviewed open positions.
7. PDSA Cycle 1, Search Process 1 - October
8. Data Review – October – November
9. October 15 reviewed open positions.
10. Search 2 Process began - November
11. Data Review – December – January

### **Implementation Plan**

The implementation phase began with a meeting with the design team. The design team was an advisory group that provided guidance and feedback on the initiative. The design team also reviewed surveys used to gather data from search committee members. I also met with the improvement initiative assistant to discuss the process for identifying vacant job positions, pulling the applicant's materials for the search committee, and the redaction process. The White-identifying female executive assistant was employed in the Student Affairs Office. She has worked at WCU for over 30 years and possessed extensive institutional knowledge. In addition,

as a requirement from IRB, the initiative assistant received CITI certification in order to help with the intervention. The initiative assistant's role was to pull the information from the human resources' Talent Management system and redact the applicant's information once a vacant position was identified for the study.

Next, the vacancy job listing posted by human resources was reviewed. WCU exempt from the Human Resources Act (EHRA) positions are posted on the employment website for at least 10 business days or until the position is filled. Once a vacant position was identified, the hiring manager was contacted for possible participation in the blind resume screening study; it is the responsibility of the recruiting department to review the qualifications for the vacant position, compose the search committee, and name a search chair responsible for ensuring compliance with human resources hiring protocol.

Three vacant positions were identified, and an email explaining the purpose of the blind resume screening initiative was sent to the hiring managers soliciting participation in this study. As a result, two hiring managers responded. In conjunction with identifying vacant searches, I met with the initiative assistant to establish their role and to outline the redaction and blind screening processes. To ensure compliance, a candidate screening checklist and a redaction checklist were developed for use on every candidate's application material. Human resources screened the applicants for each vacant position to ensure they met the qualifications as stated in the job ad. Once the screening concluded, human resources placed the applicant's material in the Talent Management system for the initiative assistant to move to a password-protected OneDrive. The initiative assistant notified me via email that applications were available to review.

After receiving an acknowledgment that the review was complete, the files were pulled, placed in folders, and saved using the password-protected OneDrive account. The initiative assistant redacted the name, address, college/university name, and professional affiliations from each applicant's resume and cover letter. Once the information was redacted, the initiative assistant assigned an alphabet letter to each candidate's file. For instance, Adam Smith became *Candidate A*, Mariah James became *Candidate B*, etc. The initiative assistant entered this information into a table and redacted the information using Adobe software's redacting tool (see Appendix D).

The initiative assistant followed a screening checklist (see Appendix E) that showed the data for each candidate and how the data should be redacted. For example, a university attended was redacted, but a university as a current employer was not redacted. In addition, the name was redacted throughout the resume, including appearances in listed authored publications and grants. The initiative assistant was provided a complete process for redacting the application as a check and balance measure to ensure compliance with the established protocol (see Appendix F). I met daily with the initiative assistant to check for new applications and to ensure all identifiers were redacted before placing them in the search file for review. To provide fidelity, a screening checklist and an applicant redaction checklist were completed and signed off on for each candidate submitting an application (see Appendices E and F). The redaction process checklist and candidate screening candidate checklist ensured that each category on the redaction checklist had been redacted. Also, using the redaction process and candidate screening checklist confirmed that the blind resume screening process occurred. Without the use of these checklists, the improvement initiative could not happen.

## **Data Collection**

This improvement initiative followed the hiring policies and protocol at WCU in an attempt to mitigate the effects of implicit bias in the initial stages of the hiring process. The protocol included redacting ethnic and racial identifiers in applicants' resumes and cover letters at the initial phase of the candidate screening process. Four specific ethnic and racial identifiers were redacted: (a) the applicant's name, (b) address, (c) university attended, and (d) professional affiliations.

Once the hiring manager identified the search committee, all of the search committee members completed a consent for participation and the search committee member profile survey prior to the beginning of the blind screening process. A post search survey was distributed to all search committee members at the initiative's conclusion. In addition to completing the surveys, the search committee chairs completed a virtual debrief interview with me to provide feedback about the blind resume screening process. The improvement initiative assistant provided data for the assistant workload survey distributed when the improvement initiative process finished.

## **Candidates**

The implementation process began with a job advertisement that instructed candidates to apply through the institution's online applicant tracking system called Talent Management, a component of PeopleAdmin. A candidate meeting the minimum qualifications listed in the job announcement was marked as "Qualified" in Talent Management by a human resources representative. Once the timeline for accepting applications ended, a human resources representative would download each "Qualified" candidate's materials. The candidate materials were reviewed, and all racial and ethnic identifiers outlined in the intervention were redacted. Once all "Qualified" candidate materials had been downloaded and redacted, the redacted files

were made available to the hiring manager, search committee chair, and search committee members.

An initial meeting with a human resources representative, the search chair, search committee members, and myself was held to discuss the blind screening and redacting process. The committees were assured that the search chair would be informed when applicants applied, and they could coordinate the review of the candidate's materials the same as other WCU searches. The only deviation to the search process would be redacting the four noted identifiers.

An email was sent to each search committee member with an overview of the blind screening initiative and a consent form for voluntary participation in the intervention. All search committee members were given the option to participate in the intervention (see Appendix A). If the search committee members agreed to participate, they received a memo with background on the blind screening initiative and instructions (see Appendix B). If a search committee member did not consent to participate, they were excused from participating in the search, and the hiring manager was notified to assign another search committee member. Participating members of each search committee for this intervention completed and signed the consent form. Once the consent forms were received, search committee members completed a search committee member profile survey. The survey gathered their experience serving on search committees, their educational awareness of implicit bias, and the blind resume screening process. All surveys were distributed anonymously via Qualtrics (see Appendix C).

### **Search Committees**

The supervisor and hiring manager for Search Committees 1 and 2 indicated they were interested in the blind resume screening process. The hiring manager was the person who supervises the person filling the vacant position, and the search committee chair was the staff

member responsible for coordinating the hiring process to find the most qualified applicant for the vacant position. Previous searches for both positions were unsuccessful. Hiring managers were contacted by email to schedule a meeting to discuss the blind resume screening process. After I met with the hiring managers, the names of the search committee chair and committee members participating in the study were shared with human resources. Human resources restricted the hiring manager and search committee members' access to the search pool, preventing the review of the candidate materials before the applications were redacted.

After the conclusion of each search process, a workload survey (see Appendix G) was distributed and collected via Qualtrics to the initiative assistant to determine the amount of time the redaction process took for each search and overall feedback on the blind resume screening process. Search committee members were also sent an anonymous postsurvey via Qualtrics to determine if learning occurred during the process and if there was feedback on the blinding process and implicit bias (see Appendix H). Finally, a virtual debrief meeting was scheduled with each search committee chair to garner additional information about the blind resume screening process and to note if there were any limitations to the search process (see Appendix I).

After each unit hired someone for its position, the Office of Human Resources sent an EEO search report. This report shared the demographics of the applicant pool. If the search contained an applicant on a work visa or green card, the search chair reviewed the information to ensure that the candidate had current hiring credentials as noted on the I-9 acceptable documents form (see Appendix J). Given the sensitive nature involved in a specialized review, the search chair would work directly with human resources.

### *Search Committee 1*

Search Committee 1 included six university staff members: four women, of which three were White and one was Black, and two White men. The search committee members were external to the hiring department. The female search committee chair shared this was her first time chairing a search at WCU.

After the candidate files had been redacted, they were uploaded to a secure folder on OneDrive through the Microsoft cloud service. The search committee chair was notified via email that the redacted candidate files were ready for review. The search committee reviewed 12 applicants for this position and identified six candidates to conduct Zoom interviews. Each application was redacted with 100% accuracy. At this point, the unredacted candidate files for the six candidates were released to the search committee. The search committee chair scheduled the Zoom interviews. The blinding process for those six applicants stopped at this point. This concluded the blinding initiative for Search Committee 1. Once the blinding process ended, human resources removed search committee member restrictions affording full access to the search file in the Talent Management system.

After the six Zoom interviews were held, four of the candidates progressed to seriously considered. Human resources recognizes candidates as seriously considered when the applicant exceeds minimum qualifications demonstrating skills, abilities, and experiences that may have been defined as preferred in the job announcement. The search committee reviewed each applicant's qualifications and moved the candidate to the next phase of the screening process. Three of the four applicants were seriously considered after the Zoom interviews and were extended an on-campus interview. The search committee chair advised that interviews were scheduled for the seriously considered candidates.

## *Search Committee 2*

Search Committee 2 included four university staff members. The search chair, a White woman, and a White male committee member were internal staff members of the hiring department. Two additional members, a White woman and a White man, were external to the department. The search chair had experience chairing several searches at WCU.

The search committee differed from Search Committee 1 in their approach to the applicant review process. Instead of discussing all the candidates after reviewing the redacted files, the search committee reviewed each file and decided whether to proceed with a Zoom interview. The search committee held Zoom interviews with three of the four applicants. After completing the Zoom interviews, the committee invited two applicants to campus for an interview. The blind resume screening process ended once the Zoom interviews were held. The initial process was to have the search committee compare the candidate's resumes and make decisions based on all the candidates in their pool. This was a deviation from the process the initiative assumed searches used.

### **Data Analysis**

In this initiative, I solicited both quantitative and qualitative data. This intervention explored what the participants learned about implicit bias and personal biases, and if there was a benefit to using blind resume screening from a personal perspective. The findings in this intervention were based on the diverse experiences shared by the participants. The participants shared their experience viewing redacted applicant files during the blind resume screening process.

Descriptive statistics allowed for a summarization of the data. Measures of central tendency, variability, and association are all descriptive statistics and can be used to describe



data to make educational decisions (Tanner, 2012). Data were summarized specifically using means, raw numbers, and percentages in this intervention.

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the number of search committees on which the members had served. The data from the WCU EEO employment reports were analyzed and reported in percentages. The gender and demographics of each search pool were used to describe the applicants in the data section.

A thematic analysis was employed to interpret the participant's responses. In vivo coding was used to identify themes and to summarize the responses from the qualitative data on the search committee member profile survey, the postsurvey, and a virtual debrief interview with the search committee chairs.

## RESULTS

In this section, I provide the interpretations and results of the data collected for this initiative. Results are presented by measure for each research question.

### **Research Question 1**

The first research question for this study was: Did implementing a blind resume screening process result in an increased percentage of qualified candidates of color matriculating through to the next phase of the interview hiring process?

The data from the EEO search report, an outcome measure, were used to address this question. The EEO search report generated by human resources illustrated the search demographics. Even though the pool was diverse for Search Committee 1, data from the study did not definitively reveal that the blinding process resulted in increased diversity in the search pool. However, the data conveyed an increased percentage of qualified candidates of color moving to the seriously considered stage of the hiring process and advancing to the interview phase of the search.

The EEO search report for Search Committee 1 consisted of 12 qualified applicants; seven were women, and five were men. Of the seven females, one female was Hispanic and six females were White. Of the five men, two were Hispanic, one was Asian, one was Black, and one was White. This information suggested that this was a diverse applicant pool. As the search progressed, the search committee reviewed the applicants' resumes and cover letters. The screening process began based on qualifications from the job ad and the skill set the hiring manager shared during the initial search committee meeting. The information was used to rank candidates accordingly, and those with preferred skills progressed to the seriously considered

phase of the hiring process based on the feedback during the debrief interview with the search chair.

The committee held six Zoom interviews with the qualified candidates. Demographics for the six qualified candidates were one Hispanic woman, one Hispanic man, one Black man, and three White women. Of the six candidates, four candidates were seriously considered: one a Hispanic woman, one a Hispanic man, one a Black man, and one a White woman. The Hispanic and White women were invited for on-campus interviews. Based on the EEO search report, the applicant pool for Search Committee 1 was diverse because it had applicants identified as a member of one or more of the following racial and ethnic groups - Asian, Black, Hispanic, White, or Two or More races (WCU EEO/Affirmative Action Plan, 2022).

The demographics in the EEO search report suggested that five of the 12 applicants, or 42% of the applicant pool, were underrepresented applicants. With the use of blind screening by Search Committee 1, there was an increase from 42% percent of underrepresented qualified candidates to 75% of seriously considered underrepresented candidates and 50% selected for an on-campus interview.

The EEO search report for Search Committee 2 detailed that of the four qualified applicants, three were women, one was a man, and all of the applicants were White. The search committee members selected three of the four applicants for Zoom interviews. Based on the data provided by the search chair during the process and the debrief interview, all of the candidates were moved to the seriously considered phase of the hiring process before the Zoom interview. Search Committee 2 had a different screening process from Search Committee 1. They held Zoom interviews after screening three of the four applicants. The demographics of the applicants

selected for Zoom were two White females and one White male. From the Zoom interviews, two applicants, one White woman and one White man, were invited for on-campus interviews.

From the EEO data, this was not identified as a diverse search because there were no racial and ethnic underrepresented candidates in the pool. Without racial and ethnic diversity in the pool and with a misstep in the resume blinding protocol, Search Committee 2’s data cannot shed light on the effectiveness or potential for blind screening to mitigate bias in the process. See Table 4 for EEO search report data for both search committees and Figure 4 for a visual representation of Search Committee 1’s data.

**Table 4**

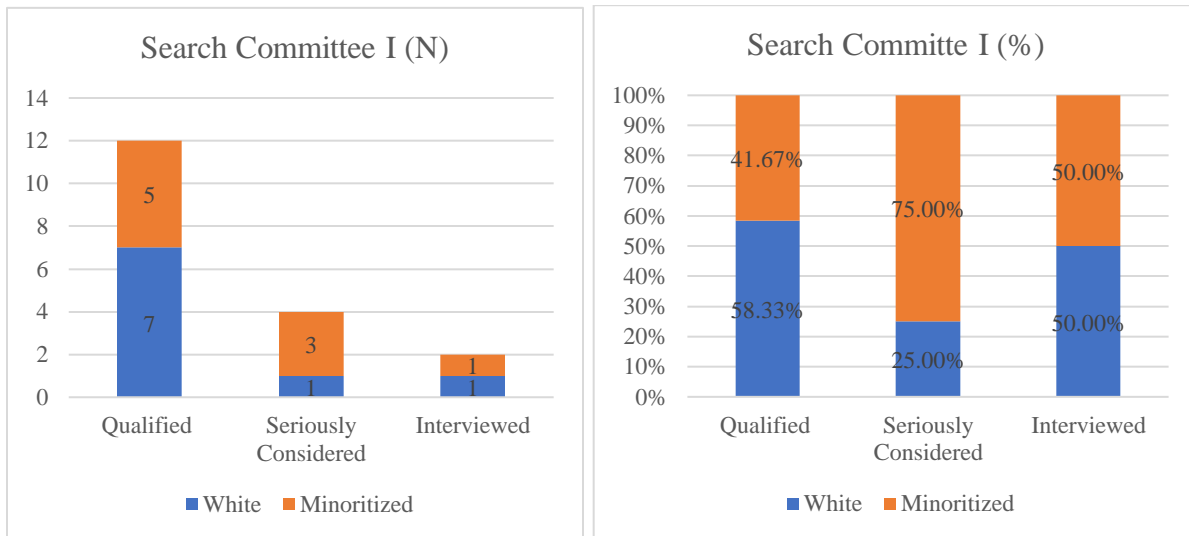
*EEO Search Report*

By race/ ethnicity	Qualified		Seriously considered	
	SC1	SC2	SC1	SC2
White				
Female	6	3	1	1
Male	1	1	0	1
Black				
Male	1	0	1	0
Hispanic				
Female	1	0	1	0
Male	2	0	1	0
Asian				
Male	1	0	0	0
Total	12	4	4	2

*Note.* SC1 is Search Committee 1, and SC2 is Search Committee 2.

**Figure 4**

*EEO Search Committee 1 Report*



**Research Question 2**

The second research question for this intervention was: What are the perceptions of the search committee members on the blind resume screening process?

The search member profile, the postsurvey, and the search chair debrief interviews were process measures that assessed each search committee member’s educational awareness and feedback about the search process, implicit bias, and blind resume screening. The search committee member profile survey (see Appendix C) took approximately 10 minutes to complete. It was distributed to each participant for Search Committees 1 and 2 via an anonymous Qualtrics link before beginning the intervention.

Based on the search member profile survey, the average member served on 7.5 search committees, ranging from 2 to 10 or more committees. Every committee member indicated that they received protocol training from human resources. All search committee members noted they did not have experience with blind resume screening. Every search committee member stated

they were familiar with the concept of implicit bias and defined it. I did not administer an implicit bias test to search committee members to assess their personal biases. Nine of the 10 respondents indicated they had received implicit bias training, but I did not ask where the training occurred. The data suggested the search committee members were knowledgeable about WCU's search process. It was deduced from the search committee member survey responses that they had a learning curve with blind resume screening but were familiar with the concept of implicit bias.

The search chairs' virtual debrief interview was approximately 30 minutes and provided information on the resume redaction and search process. The search committee debrief interview questions (see Appendix I) were used to collect data. Both search chairs were women, with over 10 years of employment at the institution. During the search chair debrief interview, both search committee chairs responded that the process went well and they did not have any challenges or concerns. They stated the applicants' information was received promptly, and each search committee member was engaged in the search process. This information was helpful because the process lends itself to committee members being engaged and noting if there were obstacles to the process that would impact the search process. Search Committee 1's chair thought it would be a good idea to use blind resume screening for all searches. She also thought the process was easy to manage. Search Committee 2's chair thought seeing the process used on a larger search would be interesting and that internal candidates might compromise the blinding process because it is highly probable that a search committee member would be able to identify an applicant based on work employment noted on their resume. Both search chairs stated they would participate in the study if offered the opportunity again.

The purpose of this intervention was to determine if blind resume screening helped to mitigate bias in the hiring process. The members from Search Committees 1 and 2 were asked nine questions in the anonymous post search committee member survey distributed and collected via Qualtrics. Search committee members were asked seven questions identical to the member profile survey, except for two open-ended questions that differed; they were:

- Question 1: Now that you have experience with blinded applications or blind resume screening, do you think it is helpful in the hiring process?

Every search committee member responded yes. They thought the blind screening process was helpful.

- Question 2: The search committee members were asked to explain how the blinding process was helpful.

These responses were coded using in vivo coding (Miles et al., 2014) during the first cycle and descriptive coding during the second cycle. From the coding, three themes emerged about search committee participants' perceptions of the blinding process: (a) education, (b) decision making, and (c) assumptions.

## **Education**

The participants shared their experiences during the blind resume screening process via survey feedback. The descriptive code Education was given to responses where participants spoke about what they learned or recognized what they needed to learn as a part of the blinding process. The participants' responses indicated the blind review process overall was educational. Specifically, during the screening process, emphasis can be placed on the name, degree-granting institution, or other biases that unconsciously can deter the intent of the screening process.

There was consistency across responses; the blinding process made the committee members more aware of implicit bias. Eight of the 10 committee members expressed they now understood implicit bias, which helped them identify their biases and will help them be more cognizant moving forward serving on other searches. The committee responses supported that once members became more aware of their biases, they attempted to use an intentionally unbiased review of the search's materials.

One participant stated, "Understanding implicit bias helped me to identify my own biases, blinding took away distractors, so the focus was on the search's credentials." Another participant acknowledged, "this process helped me to be aware, and from that awareness, I can more easily recognize areas I need to improve upon."

O'Meara et al. (2020) posited that processes for hiring in higher education operate with cognitive and implicit bias. As implicit bias appears to be the most controversial, more exploration should be focused on the search committee chair and their role in preventing bias from coloring decisions (Leske, 2016). Even though the university has implicit bias resources (i.e., video and a training module), there is no university-wide mandate to engage with the training. To increase the education of search committees, members should be required to watch the implicit bias video and have an involved dialogue. This can help increase their understanding of the purpose and content of implicit bias training and the importance of recognizing and mitigating bias in faculty and staff searches.

### **Decision Making**

The blind resume screening process helped participants become aware of their personal biases, which impacted their decision making. Lee and Chun (2014) stated the search process is essential to higher education success because the search for talent is a continuous process that



requires a strategic and systematic approach. When evaluating candidate materials, meritocracy is a vital idea to be mindful of due to the preconceived beliefs of the search committee members, which can undermine the evaluation process (Lee & Chun, 2014). The descriptive code Decision Making was given to this theme because participants stated ways in which the process impacted their decision making. One participant shared, “the blind review removes a variable that is not needed in decision making when screening applicants but may impact decisions unknowingly.”

Another participant noted:

The more objective one can be in evaluating candidates for jobs, the better. Blind review of candidates should give applicants a relatively equal chance of making it to an interview opportunity. It removes a variable that isn't needed in decision making when screening applicants, but may impact the decision unknowingly. It took away any distractors from the person's qualifications, skills, and experiences. I feel that the blind search made you focus on only credentials rather than looking at any other areas that are not relevant to a candidate's ability to function in a position. I think blinded resumes can eliminate more implicit bias.

### **Assumptions**

The descriptive code of Assumptions aligned with the participant's feedback based on their comments and research. Given the assumption of excluding candidates because they do not fit organizational culture, the process of blind screening aims to include individuals on experience and merit rather than privilege. Bauges and Fordyce-Ruff (2019) professed that implicit bias in the hiring process happens when an employment decision is based on the hiring manager's perceived notion about the new employee's ability to work with existing employees. This concept is known as gatekeeper bias, which allows the perceived bias of coworkers to

influence employment decisions even when diversity is allegedly valued in the workplace. It was noted that gatekeepers might not be aware that preconceived notions are influencing their hiring or other employment decisions. Such decisions are not uncommonly considered in the context of who best “fits” the company culture or mission (Bauges & Fordyce-Ruff, 2019). Some participants shared the assumptions they have made. One participant said, “We assume someone doesn’t want to come to WCU from a bigger city, we assume things about applicants based off their resume, experience—when we haven’t asked them for ourselves.” Another participant stated:

Implicit bias is a skill that needs constant training. We do this every day with personal relationships, coworkers, and people we meet in the grocery store. It’s years of accepting our own thoughts for what they are and trying to be open-minded to the given situation of differing opinions.

Another participant said:

As I reviewed resumes, I found myself referring to all candidates with male pronouns. I am a woman and was very surprised to have defaulted to thinking all the candidates were males. I can now address any implicit bias for gender when I am reviewing resumes in the future, but for this search, the blinded study allowed me to view all of the candidates as the same so that any implicit bias I might have did not impact my review process.

Research on implicit bias in hiring has stopped short of covering the progression from application review/resume screening to the interview stage of the hiring process. The research on applicants of color and their matriculation through the hiring process is plentiful, though not always explicit, in noting that implicit bias threatens the hiring process (Kessler et al., 2019). Although some areas of the academy suffer from low availability and a distinct lack of an

established or conventional pipeline, the dearth of research on the subject points to the hiring process as the primary culprit for a less diverse workforce in higher education (O'Meara et al., 2020).

### **Research Question 3**

The third research question was: Is it feasible to add blind resume screening to the human resources workload?

The workload survey (see Appendix G), a balancing measure borrowed from improvement science, provided data on the time the initiative assistant took to redact the applications. I administered a workload survey to the initiative assistant to determine the possibilities of unintended consequences. The survey was a checks and balance measure to ensure adherence to the established protocol and to assess the initiative assistant's workload. The process required 100% compliance, or the redacting improvement would be compromised. The workload survey provided data on the initiative assistant's time to redact the applications. It measured the efficiency of the process and if this task was time-consuming. The survey was disseminated and collected via Qualtrics at the end of each search process. The initiative assistant noted in the survey that redacting each search's materials took less than 10 minutes. The initiative assistant suggested that it would have been helpful to combine the candidate screening checklist and redaction process checklists into one document for clarity and efficiency.

Next, I offer implications for practice, policy, and limitations of intervention, offer recommendations for future research, and draw a conclusion from the findings.

## IMPLICATIONS

The overarching aim of this intervention was, ultimately, to have more faculty and staff of color hired at WCU by increasing the number of applicants of color being seriously considered and moving to the interview stage by redacting racial and ethnic identifiers from resumes and cover letters. The problem of practice was that applicants of color do not progress in the hiring process as far as White applicants do. They usually do not make it past the resume screening. The screening processes for resumes and applications are highly susceptible to implicit bias (Derous & Ryan, 2018). Information on the cover letter or in some other places within the search's submission can allude to the applicant's gender identity, race, religion, or socioeconomic background—potentially influencing a hiring decision.

Several aspects of the literature indicated that implicit bias is often a contributing factor for applications of people of color being discarded early in the hiring process, with these individuals often never proceeding to the interview stage or even being seriously considered (O'Meara et al., 2020). Research has indicated that faculty and staff hiring processes are inherently vulnerable to bias for at least three reasons: (a) explicit or implicit bias, (b) bias due to ingroup preference, and (c) the pressure of decision making (Pager & Western, 2012). This form of discrimination can initiate labor market inequities that block underrepresented populations' opportunities for jobs and careers.

WCU's hiring data showed the current number of employees of color and if blind resume screening can contribute to achieving the aim of increasing a diverse workforce. The WCU employee data (see Table 2) were collected annually for 2019–2022 to inform trends for all employees of color from 2019–2022. Percentages were calculated to describe the employee

makeup by racial group. The overall racial demographic increased by less than 1% yearly. The increase was noted in all ethnic categories except those with two or more ethnicities. The data for 2019–2022 established a baseline to note fluctuation in the WCU workforce. The employment total for WCU in 2019 was 1,582 employees; of those, 157 were employees of color. The total employees for 2020 was 1,603, and 170 were employees of color. In 2021, the total employment was 1,586, and 181 were employees of color. Finally, in 2022, out of 1,589 employees, 170 were employees of color. Even though hiring processes in higher education operate with cognitive and implicit bias (O’Meara et al., 2020), an increase was noted—regardless of significance—to WCU’s workforce (EEO Report WCU, 2022).

Using the EEO data compiled by WCU’s Office of Human Resources, Table 5 shows the discrepancy between the percentage of White applicants and applicants of color moving through the hiring process. The 2022 data indicated applicants of color do not progress through the application process at the same rate as White applicants.

**Table 5**

*WCU 2022 EHRA Applicant Summary*

By race/ethnicity	Qualified		Seriously considered		Interviewed	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
White	1391	73.1	433	78.6	328	80.7
Black	260	13.7	50	9.1	32	7.9
Hispanics	118	6.2	31	5.6	20	4.9
Asian	45	2.4	13	2.4	8	2.0
American Indian	16	0.8	6	1.1	5	1.2
Native Hawaiian or other	5	0.3	1	0.2	0	0.0
Two or more	64	3.3	16	2.8	12	3.0
Unknown	4	0.2	1	0.2	1	0.3
Total	1903	100	551	100	406	100
Total race/ethnic availability*	508	26.7	117	21.2	77	19.0

In Table 5, 26.7% of applicants of color were qualified, and 73.1% of White applicants met the minimum qualifications for a specific position as defined in the job description ad. Qualified applicants are screened by human resources at the beginning of the search process. The qualified applicants are automatically in the search pool, and the search committee meets to discuss candidate skills before they are moved to the next phase of the hiring process as seriously considered.

The 26.7% of qualified applicants of color dwindled to 21.2% at the seriously considered search stage. This was a 4.5% decrease from qualified to seriously considered, while the percentage of White applicants increased by 13.3%. The seriously considered applicants met the minimum qualifications, and their application was screened and ranked for further consideration. This might include an initial interview via telephone or virtual mode, depending on the search committee's preference. Sometimes, seriously considered applicants do not make it to the interview phase because the candidate with evidence of a stronger skill set supersedes their application.

The last columns convey that only 19% of the seriously considered applicants of color moved to the interview stage, while the percentage of White applicants increased to 80.7%. The applicants in this category have persisted beyond the initial screening interview and are offered an in-person campus interview. White applicants appear to progress at a higher rate than applicants of color at each stage of the hiring process, which is why this intervention is so important.

For this study, the EEO hiring data were reviewed to see if applicants of color moved through the hiring process and advanced to the interview stage at a greater rate when a blind resume screening process was used. The data from the blind resume screening for Search

Committee 1 showed three applicants of color progressed to the seriously considered phase, and one applicant of color progressed to the interview phase. However, the data did not show if the applicants of color advanced because of the blind resume screening. It is also unknown if the redaction process helped to mitigate bias for Search Committee 2 because the EEO report did not indicate applicants of color applied. The data did not indicate a direct correlation to implicit bias impeding applicants of color from progressing in either search but showed promising potential based on the responses from the search committee member participants responses.

Participants were optimistic the blind resume screening process heightened their awareness of bias and enabled them to be more objective in evaluating candidates. A participant “noted that the blind resume screening helped them focus on the applicant’s credentials rather than areas irrelevant to the candidate’s ability to do the job.” It was assuring to know that the blind resume screening created implicit bias awareness. Even though there were educational benefits of the study, people are still people, bias will still be present, and even when people learn about their own bias, regression in the form of projecting deficit beliefs can still occur. This is why it is important to have long-term bias education and training so there is time to create a cultural shift.

The workload survey results showed the redaction process took under 10 minutes per application. This amount of time to redact an application could impact the office workload, especially if there were numerous searches in that department during a semester or if searches have a large applicant pool. If an office has limited personnel resources, conducting a blind resume screening process could create additional barriers.

If the intervention study was conducted again, the modified initiative would include targeted recruitment to increase the probability of a diverse applicant pool, implicit bias training

for search committee members, and blind resume screening for an integrated approach to improving diversity. In the planning phase, I would suggest specific instructions for the search committee during the blind screening process, including having a process for reviewing the applicant's redacted materials during the first round of virtual interviews. If the materials are reviewed as the applications come in, and first-round virtual interviews are requested, virtual interviews could be held with the cameras on for search committee members and the camera off for the applicant. That way the applicant can see the committee members, but the search committee members cannot see the applicant. If search committees deviate from the established plan, they will not be compliant with the improvement initiative.

There is also a need for more data measures to be used in the intervention. The information was not robust and did not allow me to suggest a conclusion about the impact of bias on the hiring process. The data did not indicate that implicit bias was a factor in the applicants of color progressing through the hiring process; nor did it indicate that the redaction of the applicant's materials increased the diversity of the applicant pool. I would assess the initiative throughout the process—not only at the beginning and end of the improvement initiative.

The search committee member profile recorded the member's experience and their awareness of implicit bias, but the survey did not measure the search committee member's individual implicit bias. Due to the inability to observe discriminatory behavior directly during the search process, research has noted there are tests such as the IAT that can predict implicit bias behaviors. I would suggest using the IAT to help measure the implicit bias of search committee members. The IAT is the most widely used measure of implicit bias that can be implemented to address an organization's various needs (Ziegert & Hanges, 2005). The problem identified at WCU was that applicants of color do not matriculate from seriously considered for



the next phase of the interview process, possibly because of implicit bias. Search committees that demonstrate via the IAT as having no implicit bias would not need to blind their candidates. The focus could be directed to search committee members with higher implicit bias scores.

Search committee profiles, postsurvey, and a virtual debrief interview with the search chair were used to provide feedback on the process. Search committee members did not provide data to suggest changes to the blind resume screening process. The balancing measure used in the intervention was the assistant workload survey. This measure ensured that the process was carried out effectively and on time. This information was beneficial to the intervention because it ensured the blinding process was accurate. However, sometimes blinding can have the opposite effect. A measure should also be created to ensure that the blind resume screening is not inadvertently continuing to matriculate only the privileged whose proximity to Whiteness may have afforded them experiences that qualified candidates of color are often not provided. Crenshaw (1991) addressed the implications of intersectionality within identity politics that can align with critics of blind resume screening. Identity politics categories are often treated as remnants of bias, which can be the source of social empowerment and reconstruction. Some critics claim that identity politics fail to transcend differences because it ignores intragroup differences, which can be compared with blind resume screening because it redacts identifiers unique to the applicant. Crenshaw (1991) was of the opinion that ignoring differences within groups contributes to tension among groups. Crenshaw et al. (2019) also affirmed that colorbound conditions (e.g., merit, market, choice, neutrality) mask and sustain racial domination, which is why this initiative to mitigate bias in the hiring process is important.

It is essential that hiring not be based on a candidate's ability to fit in with people who are already there or who look like them. This intervention is not suggesting a hiring quota or a hiring

preference be given to minorities. It simply suggests a need for an increase in interviews of candidates of color based on the availability of the specific vacancy. Through the blind resume screening process, search committee members can better recognize that implicit bias affects hiring decisions, hinders diversity, and promotes homogenous workplaces instead of the diverse and inclusive institutions desired.

### **Implications for Practice**

Higher education institutions are always searching for the best and brightest talent. Research has shown that foreign or ethnic-sounding names were less likely to get a callback (Derous et al., 2015). Applicants must make it through the resume screening process before moving through to the interview stage. During the screening process, implicit bias can create a barrier to hiring (Derous & Ryan, 2018).

WCU's EEO hiring data pointed out that White applicants have moved through the hiring process at a rate twice that of applicants of color, a phenomenon that could be caused by implicit bias (EEO Report, 2021). WCU does not currently incorporate implicit bias training, blind resume screening, or redaction strategies into the human resources hiring protocol. I recommend that search committee members and hiring managers be required to participate in implicit bias training and receive information about blind resume screening. I also suggest departments educate their staff and faculty on the importance of including implicit bias training annually in their search process protocol.

Scholars and human resource professionals have noted that implicit bias cannot be cured or fixed; they refer instead to mitigating or reducing their own bias (Railey et al., 2016). A less biased search committee (i.e., educated on bias and how to mitigate bias) is more likely to

enhance equity and diversity in the workplace (Railey et al., 2016). A single strategy, such as blind resume screening, may not be successful if only employed committee or department-wide.

The most effective strategy is a holistic approach of an educational intervention. Targeted recruitment, mentoring/retention programs, blind resume screening, and training are strategies that can increase a diverse workforce. In this improvement intervention, strategies were sought to address a historical systemic problem in a short timeframe. Again, there is not one initiative to address the lack of qualified applicants of color advancing to the interview stage. Human resources, with the support of executive leadership, will need to employ a variety of mandated strategic processes to help ensure a more diverse workforce at WCU.

### **Implications for Policy**

As WCU progresses with searches, it is necessary to recognize that intentional or unintentional bias can exist in the hiring process. The search chairs shared the following comments: “make blind resume screening a requirement for all searches” and “I wish we could include other categories to redact.” These statements suggested that search committee members embraced the process and thought it was helpful in mitigating bias in the search process. Human resources should be intentional in helping departments identify resources for targeted recruitment. If a diverse pool of applicants does not apply, there cannot be a diverse pool to seriously consider and/or interview, and there will not be a need to redact resumes.

WCU should make implicit bias training mandatory for search committee members to increase accountability and enhance educational awareness of biases. The blind screening improvement initiative framework, if offered in coordination with implicit bias training, could eventually increase the progression of applicants of color at WCU. Self et al. (2015) examined the impact of identity-blind accountability, which holds decision-makers accountable for making

fair selections, and identity-conscious accountability, which holds decision-makers accountable for the groups selected during the search screening process. Self et al. sought to address how higher education institutions could promote diversity and equity in the candidate selection process. The researchers found participants presented more resentment toward management under identity-conscious accountability than participants under identity-blind accountability. Self et al.'s study's results suggested that having employees accountable for decisions is a preferred foundation for implementing a blind resume screening process.

In this intervention, I did not anticipate the total interviewed pool being applicants of color. However, if the pool is diverse, then a proportionate amount of those interviewed should be applicants of color based on the available pool for that specific position. The more people of color advance to the interview process, the higher the likelihood that a person of color may fill the position to enhance organizational capacity and lead to an increase in a more diverse workforce that aligns with WCU's strategic mission.

Continuous review of local, regional, and national issues and policies that impact an organization's hiring practice should be shared by human resources and university leadership. For example, the UNC System Board of Governors voted to prohibit diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) statements and compelled speech from admission, hiring, promotion, and tenure processes. In addition, the policy prohibits any school from forcing individuals to "affirmatively ascribe to or opine about beliefs, affiliations, ideals, or principles regarding contemporary political debate or social action as a condition to admission, employment, or professional advancement" (Bass, 2023, para. 2). The actions of the board of governors came right after NC State University's reversal of requiring applicants to answer DEI questions. This policy will significantly impact initiatives to enhance diversity and equity efforts on campuses,

including the work of this intervention and its efforts to increase faculty and staff diversity through the hiring process. Alternately, the North Carolina Staff Assembly campus chairs committee submitted a proclamation to the UNC system advocating for the continued DEI efforts on each campus as set forth by the system's Racial Equity Task Force. Discussion is ongoing, but if this policy is not reversed, it can significantly impact initiatives to promote an inclusive university environment.

### **Recommendations for Practitioners**

Practitioners desiring to engage in blind resume screening should be aware that the initiative may not increase the diversity in the hiring process immediately and that blind screening should not be the only strategy used to create a more diverse workforce (Adamovic, 2020; Bendick & Nunes, 2012; Feng et al., 2020; Kenton, 2022; O'Meara et al., 2020; Sidhu, 2013). However, there are resources available to enhance diversity recruitment. Veluchany et al. (2021) suggested that various blind recruiting tools are available, from apps for writing inclusive job descriptions to impartial skill evaluation platforms through tests and writing tasks.

The blind resume screening process will be shared with human resources and the Student Affairs Division. The director of talent acquisition in human resources is familiar with the blind resume screening practice and noted it could benefit the hiring process. In addition, I will offer a professional development workshop on implicit bias and train staff on how to redact and fully engage in blinding applications (i.e., blind resume screening) to anonymize candidates even for the initial interviews so that emphasis is placed on the skills and experience of the candidate.

Employees choosing to participate in a blind resume screening process should seek the support of the hiring manager, and they will also be responsible for coordinating the entire screening process. The intervention is sustainable and will help to promote consistency in search

committee review processes and advance qualified applicants of color to the interview stage of the hiring process. Ultimately, it is desired that human resources identify resources to purchase redaction software; in the meantime, the redaction process can be coordinated in individual departments if they are adequately staffed.

### **Directions for Future Research**

Tate and Page (2018) maintained, often, the focus on implicit bias has become an easy and comfortable way for universities to deal with racism by demonstrating their good faith and willingness to address racism while keeping the status quo of Whiteness. Unfortunately, focusing predominantly on implicit bias to remedy a hostile campus climate can perpetuate rather than disrupt social injustice by serving as “an alibi to diminish the recognition, analysis, and salience of white supremacy to maintain it” (Tate & Page, 2018, p. 143).

More research is needed to determine if bias exists in WCU’s hiring process. A larger sample of participants for blind resume screening over a more extended period will likely yield better data results. There is a need to develop a pipeline for departments lacking diverse representation to help build an inclusive staff. Targeted recruitment can be used to increase the likelihood of a diverse search pool. Developing and sharing a list of targeted recruitment resources can benefit departments in the search process as they seek to increase diversity in the search pool. The scarcity of candidates in the search pools, compounded with the remnants of the COVID-19 global pandemic, contributed to smaller search pools. The demand for remote and flexible work schedules can also make filling in-person positions difficult.

The EEO availability report data was pulled from 2010 Census data, representing a longer interval than desired. I would suggest using more current data to inform the process. The lesson learned was that my problem of study was too significant to tackle in the timeframe

allowed to complete the disquisition. The intervention warrants 9 months to a year so that the recruitment periods for each university division can be assessed during their specific recruitment cycle. Each university division has a preferred recruitment season that aligns with their professional association and human resources best practices. Faculty searches were completed when I began my study. Expanding the scope of the project would allow for a faculty intervention. Diversifying the faculty has benefits for students and the campus community. Students can feel a greater sense of belonging by seeing someone who looks like them. Adding a faculty search would increase the diversity of the improvement intervention.

Due to the inability to observe discriminatory behavior directly during the search process, research has noted there are tests such as the IAT that can predict implicit bias behaviors. In addition to being relevant to the organization's health and commitment to reaching a critical mass of faculty and staff of color, this improvement initiative, if pursued further and used with implicit bias testing and other strategic initiatives to enhance diversity, could represent an actionable strategy toward "inclusive excellence."

### **Limitations of the Intervention**

The intervention had several limitations, including the search process, sample size, lack of data instruments, effects of the COVID-19 global pandemic, geographical location, and the scope of the intervention. The intervention was too significant to tackle in the timeframe allowed to complete the disquisition. The size of the search pools impacted the results of this intervention. More departments would have participated in the intervention if there were ample applicants in the search pool to yield a successful search.

The university's location contributes to the quantity and quality of searches. Attention to the geographical location is important. This intervention might have a different outcome if the

university was located in Asheville or Charlotte—a bigger city able to offer a higher salary and more diversity, which might create a higher probability of a more diverse search pool. It is also challenging to recruit international candidates, especially for staff positions, because of the complexity of immigration laws and lack of funding if they do not have H-1B Visa sponsorship.

WCU experienced a high rate of resignations from 2020–2022, and in student affairs, there was a 22% turnover rate (EEO Report WCU, 2022). In addition, WCU was attracting a small talent pool. WCU had several failed searches before and throughout this improvement effort. Not being able to fill positions to support a thinly resourced department was taxing and exhausting for staff.

During the blind resume screening process, the names of the applicants were not reviewed to see if the reviewers would make general assumptions about their race, ethnicity, or membership ascription. The redacting of names along with the address, university attended, and professional affiliation was conducted prior to the search committee review of the application, which could have provided another data point.

Another limitation of the intervention was that the search committee member profile survey looked at the member's experience and their awareness of implicit bias, but the survey did not measure the search committee member's individual implicit bias. A measure should have been created to ensure that the blind resume screening was not inadvertently continuing to matriculate only the privileged whose proximity to Whiteness may have afforded them experiences that qualified candidates of color are often not provided.

### **Conclusion**

This intervention was intentional in its efforts to mitigate bias in the hiring process at WCU to increase diversity. In it, I sought to address the sparse number of applicants of color



seriously considered and selected for an interview during the search process by redacting ethnic and racial identifiers in the applicants' resumes and cover letters at the initial phase of the candidate screening process.

Using the IAT to measure the implicit bias of search committee members is desirable. The IAT is the most widely used measure of implicit bias that can be implemented to address an organization's various needs. Researchers Ziegert and Hanges (2005) used the IAT to explore implicit bias in the hiring process. Although research has documented that implicit bias measures correlate with other attitudes and predict organizational behavior, there is currently limited evidence indicating that implicit attitudes help predict discriminatory hiring decisions (Fisher & Borgida, 2012).

The problem identified at WCU is that applicants of color do not matriculate from seriously considered to the next phase of the interview process likely because of implicit bias. The IAT could be administered to search committee members to measure their implicit bias. Search committees that demonstrate via the IAT as having no implicit bias would not need to blind their candidates. On average, the focus of implicit bias training could be directed to search committee members with higher implicit bias scores.

Despite changing societal norms that reject discrimination and surface-level strategies that espouse commitments to diversity, predominantly White institutions still lack racial and ethnic diversity in their workforce (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Theories and frameworks are essential to discovering and dismantling practices that keep higher education's workforce homogenous. Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality in 1989 to describe how various forms of inequality work together to magnify problems for people with multiple identities (Collins, 2019). Race inequality is frequently discussed as separate from other disparities based on gender,

class, sexuality, or immigrant status (Steinmetz, 2020). Vogel (2005) argued the selection process operates as a hidden curriculum in which the valuing or devaluing of human diversity is communicated.

The searches identified in this intervention were all previously failed, and there needed to be more adherence to a more significant problem related to the need to fill the positions. I sought to address a strategy for a historical systemic problem. The number of candidates in a search pool can affect the process because it limits the opportunity to observe for implicit bias. Based on the EEO availability data, the fewer candidates, the lower the chances of having a diverse pool. The reality remains that there needs to be more diversity among the staff and faculty at WCU.

Regardless of barriers, this improvement initiative will bring awareness to implicit bias in the hiring process. There is not one initiative that could address the lack of qualified applicants of color advancing to the interview stage. There needs to be a variety of strategic processes to ensure a more diverse workforce at WCU. Academic affairs should continue to offer their program designed to enhance diversity to improve the student experience by using faculty diversity officers (FDO) to serve on search committees for faculty positions. The role of the FDO is to advocate for inclusion and provide direction related to legal hiring practices. The intent is to provide an outside perspective for search committees. FDOs are expected to participate in three to four searches annually (personal communication, September 26, 2023). Although it is too soon to assess if this initiative has helped to increase faculty diversity, educators should be cognizant that it is hard to see immediate benefits in equity work. It takes time, and the work must continue. After all, the blind resume screening study did not seek to reach a quota or “balance” the scales regarding racial demographics; it was an attempt to make a step toward achieving a

more diverse workforce at WCU. An integrated approach to include bias training, targeted recruitment, and blind resume screening may increase workforce diversity at WCU because campus diversity enriches the educational experience. Diversity is essential to the student experience. Students are successful when they are holistically supported in a diverse and inclusive campus community that provides a foundation of acceptance and respect (Harwick, 2000). It is aspirational and essential for students of color to see themselves reflected in the faculty and staff.

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APPENDIX A: WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY CONSENT FORM TO  
PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

**Project Title:** Blind Resume Screening to Mitigate Bias in the Hiring Process: The Case of the Western Carolina University Workforce

**This study is being conducted by:** Jane Adams-Dunford.

**Description and Purpose of the Research:** You are invited to participate in a research study to address the sparse number of applicants of color seriously considered and selected for an interview during the search process by proposing a blind resume screening protocol. This protocol includes redacting ethnic and racial identifiers in the applicants' resumes and cover letters at the initial phase of the candidate screening process. By implementing this protocol, we hope to increase the number of applicants of color interviewed and ultimately hired at Western Carolina University.

**What you will be asked to do:** The search committee member will be asked to complete a profile to gauge their familiarity with implicit bias at the beginning and end of the search process, which should take no longer than 15 minutes. They will also be asked to review each search's redacted resume as a part of the Human Resources search protocol. The blind resume screening process will not require any extra effort as a search committee member as they evaluate the candidates for their skills and experience. As the search closes, the initiative assistant will download the search materials from the database in one drive. A simple naming convention will be used to save each search's cover letter and curriculum vitae/resume into a folder. The initiative assistant will redact the name, address, college attended, and search organizational affiliations and send them to the search committee chair for distribution to the search committee.

**Risks and Discomforts:** [Describe the risks and what you will do to minimize these risks. Include all possible physical, psychological, legal, professional, or personal risks and/or hazards for the participants in this section. Any risks listed in the application must be addressed in the consent form.

Example statements: There are no anticipated risks from participating in this research. We anticipate that your participation in this survey presents no greater risk than participation in other university surveys.

Some of the questions we will ask you as part of this study may make you feel uncomfortable. You may refuse to answer any of the questions, take a break, or stop participating in this study at any time.

**Benefits:** There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this research study. The study may help us better understand the level of implicit bias by search committee members.

**Privacy/Confidentiality/Data Security:** [The information included in this section will vary based on the amount of identifying information you are collecting with your data/biospecimens. Listed below are various privacy/confidentiality measures for different types of data. Include only the information relevant to your study and delete the rest.]



The data collected in this study, such as the name, address, college, and organizational affiliation of the search, will be redacted. According to Human Resources protocol, all additional information is confidential in the search process. We will collect information through Human Resources and the hiring supervisor in the recruited department via university email. This information will be stored in our university Outlook email account and a password-protected OneDrive file.

**Voluntary Participation:** Participation is voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. If you choose not to participate or decide to withdraw, there will be no impact on your employment. Individuals may withdraw from this study by submitting in writing that they no longer wish to serve on the search committee.

**Compensation for Participation:** There is no compensation for participation.

**Contact Information:** For questions about this study, please contact Jane Adams-Dunford, the co-principal investigator. You may also contact Dr. Kofi Lomotey, the principal investigator and faculty advisor for this project, at xxxxx@wcu.edu.

If you have questions or concerns about your treatment as a participant in this study, you may contact the Western Carolina University Institutional Review Board through the Office of Research Administration by calling 828-227-7212 or emailing irb@wcu.edu. All reports or correspondence will be kept confidential to the extent possible.

You will be given a copy of this information for your records.

I understand what is expected of me if I participate in this research study. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and understand that participation is voluntary. My signature shows that I agree to participate and am at least 18 years old.

Participant Name (printed): \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Researcher Obtaining Consent: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

If you would like to receive a summary of the results once the study has been completed, please write your email address (as legibly as possible) here: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX B: MEMO TO SEARCH COMMITTEE

To: Search Committee  
From: Jane Adams-Dunford  
Date: June 22, 2022  
Re: Blinded Applications

The following search has been selected for blind resume screening as a part of an improvement initiative that has been approved by Western Carolina University's Human Resources Office.

As you know, the university has a campus-wide initiative to embrace diversity, equity, and inclusion. Just as WCU makes an intentional effort to recruit a more diverse student body, the University must also parallel its efforts to make gains in employing and retaining faculty and staff of color.

Research shows that a blind resume screening process will reduce biases during the talent acquisition process by removing information like name, gender, religion, or indicators of socioeconomic background. Candidates will be judged based on relevant experience and skills rather than perceptions and assumptions.

Applications will be redacted for four categories of information. In the example below, the strike-through represents the information that will be redacted from the materials you receive for review.

Name: ~~Lakesha Jenkins~~

Street Address: ~~101 Fort Bragg Road~~

Degree-granting institution, but not university worked at: ~~Fayetteville State University~~

Affiliations: ~~Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., Black Caucus of the American Library Association~~

The process will not require any extra effort as you evaluate the candidates for their skills and experience. The executive assistant will play a significant role in assisting with this initiative. The initiative assistant will download the search materials from Talent Management as the search closes. They will use a simple naming convention to save each search's cover letter and curriculum vitae/resume into a folder. They will then redact the materials and distribute them to the search committee chair.

Candidates will be renamed in the following manner, for example:

Candidate Emily Jones becomes Candidate A

Candidate Jamal Griggs becomes Candidate B, and so on...

As you review the materials and decide who needs to be interviewed, you will simply refer to candidates by their alias (Candidate A, B, C...).

Thank you for your participation in this initiative.

## APPENDIX C: SEARCH COMMITTEE MEMBER PROFILE SURVEY

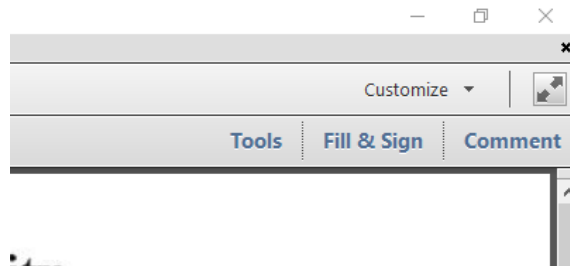
Distributed via Qualtrics Responses submitted anonymously Search Committee Member Profile.

1. How many search committees have you served while employed by Western Carolina University? Numerical answer
2. Have you received any search committee training from WCU's human resources office?
3. Are you familiar with the concept of implicit bias? Yes/No
  - a. If yes, please briefly describe implicit bias as you understand it.
4. Have you participated in any training on implicit bias (from any source)? Yes/No
  - a. If so, did you find it helpful (did it strengthen your understanding of implicit bias)?
5. Do you have any experience with blinded applications or blind resume screening? Yes/No
  - a. If yes, please briefly describe your experience.
6. Please describe any concerns you have with the process. (open-ended)

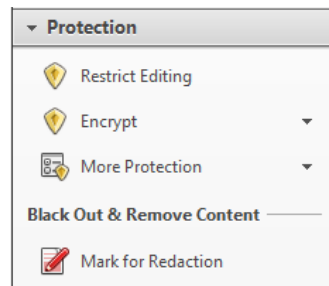
## APPENDIX D: REDACTION TOOL

### Adobe Acrobat XI Pro

- Click on **Tools** in the upper right-hand corner



- Open the **Protection** menu
- Select **Mark for Redaction** (first under Black Out, do not select Mark Pages to Redact)



- Move your cursor over the page and you will get a **+** sign
- Click and hold your mouse button and draw a box around what you want to redact
- When you release the button, a red box will appear
- Go to the next thing you want to redact and draw another box around it, continue this action for the rest of the document
- Once you have drawn boxes around everything you need to redact go to the protection menu and select **Apply Redactions**
- Click **OK** when asked if you want to continue
- A progress menu appears on the left
  - Click the **Remove** button when finished
  - When the green bars reach the right, it is complete
- Close the document
- It will be named the same as the original with **Redacted** after it

APPENDIX E: SCREENING CHECKLIST

<b>Mitigating Bias in Hiring Improvement Initiative Protocol Redaction and Distribution Checklist</b>			
<b>Date</b>	<b>Complete</b>	<b>Task</b>	<b>Procedure</b>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Download Candidate files from Talent Management	
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Create Folders foreach Candidate in the search	Save folders in OneDrive
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Rename each candidate folder and document their new alias in the table.	Place the Candidate identifier in the top right corner of documents. Candidate names become Candidate A, B, C, D...
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Redact the specified information	For each Candidate’s cover letter and resume, redact the Candidate’s name, school attended, and affiliation. If not in PDF format, convert it before sending it to search chair. Open the PDF in Acrobat DC, and then do one of the following: Choose Tools > Redact. On the Edit menu, choose Redact Text & Images. Select the text or image in a PDF, right-click, and select Redact. Select the text or image in a PDF and choose Redact in the floating context menu.
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Store files in OneDrive and give access to search committee members.	Compile in one zip file folder for the position and distribute the link to the candidate files to the Search Chair.
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Email search chair	Greetings [Search Chair]: Attached are the files for the __position for committee review. As explained, we are testing a new initiative to mitigate bias in hiring. The attached candidate files have four pieces of information redacted: Name, School Attended for Degree, Address, and Memberships/Affiliations. Please distribute the link to these files to the search committee. Upon agreement on whom to interview, please send me a listing of the Candidate Identifiers, and we will make arrangements to proceed with the search.

		<p>Search chair emails assistant to inform of the candidates chosen to advance. Assistant emails the scholar-practitioner for approval to move the files</p>	<p>Dear [Assistant]: We would like to move forward with Candidates A, C, D, etc.</p>
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Comments:

X

Name

Date

APPENDIX F: SEARCH REDACTION CHECKLIST

See the Adobe Redact Sheet for instructions on redacting.

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FOR EACH SEARCH REDACT THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION AND PUT YOUR INITIALS IN THE BOX

---

Name  
Search name: \_\_\_\_\_

New Alias: \_\_\_\_\_

Address  
Redact the address of applicants on each application.

Degree Granting Institutions  
Remember to only redact the institution if it was attended, but not if it is a work experience.

Affiliations and Organizations  
Redact the affiliations and organizations on each application. Examples include Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc., the National Society of Black Engineers, etc.

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REVIEW

---

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Scholar-Practitioner

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

# Blind Resume Screening

---

Start of Block: Default Question Block

Q1 How much time did the blind screening process add to your workload?

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---

Q2 Could the process be more efficient?

- No (1)
- Maybe (2)
- Yes (3)

---

Q3 If yes, please explain

---

End of Block: Default Question Block

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## APPENDIX H: SEARCH COMMITTEE POSTSURVEY

Distributed via Qualtrics Responses submitted anonymously Search Committee Member

Postsurvey

1. How many search committees have you served while employed by Western Carolina University? Numerical answer
2. Have you received any search committee training from WCU's human resources office?
3. Are you familiar with the concept of implicit bias? Yes/No
  - a. If yes, please briefly describe implicit bias as you understand it.
4. Have you participated in any training on implicit bias (from any source)? Yes/No
  - a. If so, did you find it helpful (did it strengthen your understanding of implicit bias)?
5. Now that you have experience with blinded applications or blind resume screening, do you think it is helpful in the hiring process? Yes/No
  - a. If yes, please explain.
6. Please describe any concerns or additional feedback you have with the process. (open-ended)

## APPENDIX I: SEARCH COMMITTEE CHAIR DEBRIEF

### Blind Resume Screening Virtual Interview 30 to 45 minutes

- 1 - How do you think the blind resume screening process went?
  
- 2 - Was the blinding process discussed as a part of the search committee debrief? Please explain.  
Potential follow-up: Did you or anyone on the search committee indicate wanting or wishing you had access to any of the redacted information?
  
- 3 - Did search committee members mention the blind screening process? If so, during what phase of the search process? Please share details.
  
- 4 - Did any search committee member feel the blind screening process was unfair to the applicant, them, or the hiring department?
  
- 5 - Were you surprised by any aspect of the candidate's profile once they were interviewed since their information was redacted? If so, how.
  
- 6 - Do you think this process helped ensure equity and diversity in the hiring process? Please elaborate.
  
- 7 - Would you participate in a blind search process again?

**APPENDIX J: I-9 ACCEPTABLE DOCUMENTS**

**LISTS OF ACCEPTABLE DOCUMENTS**  
**All documents must be UNEXPIRED**

Employees may present one selection from List A  
or a combination of one selection from List B and one selection from List C.

LIST A Documents that Establish Both Identity and Employment Authorization	OR	LIST B Documents that Establish Identity	AND	LIST C Documents that Establish Employment Authorization
1. U.S. Passport or U.S. Passport Card		1. Driver's license or ID card issued by a State or outlying possession of the United States provided it contains a photograph or information such as name, date of birth, gender, height, eye color, and address		1. A Social Security Account Number card, unless the card includes one of the following restrictions: (1) NOT VALID FOR EMPLOYMENT (2) VALID FOR WORK ONLY WITH INS AUTHORIZATION (3) VALID FOR WORK ONLY WITH DHS AUTHORIZATION
2. Permanent Resident Card or Alien Registration Receipt Card (Form I-551)		2. ID card issued by federal, state or local government agencies or entities, provided it contains a photograph or information such as name, date of birth, gender, height, eye color, and address		2. Certification of report of birth issued by the Department of State (Forms DS-1350, FS-545, FS-240)
3. Foreign passport that contains a temporary I-551 stamp or temporary I-551 printed notation on a machine-readable immigrant visa		3. School ID card with a photograph		3. Original or certified copy of birth certificate issued by a State, county, municipal authority, or territory of the United States bearing an official seal
4. Employment Authorization Document that contains a photograph (Form I-766)		4. Voter's registration card		4. Native American tribal document
5. For a nonimmigrant alien authorized to work for a specific employer because of his or her status: a. Foreign passport; and b. Form I-94 or Form I-94A that has the following: (1) The same name as the passport, and (2) An endorsement of the alien's nonimmigrant status as long as that period of endorsement has not yet expired and the proposed employment is not in conflict with any restrictions or limitations identified on the form.		5. U.S. Military card or draft record		5. U.S. Citizen ID Card (Form I-197)
		6. Military dependent's ID card		6. Identification Card for Use of Resident Citizen in the United States (Form I-179)
		7. U.S. Coast Guard Merchant Mariner Card		7. Employment authorization document issued by the Department of Homeland Security
		8. Native American tribal document		
		9. Driver's license issued by a Canadian government authority		
	<b>For persons under age 18 who are unable to present a document listed above:</b>			
		10. School record or report card		
		11. Clinic, doctor, or hospital record		
		12. Day-care or nursery school record		
6. Passport from the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) or the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) with Form I-94 or Form I-94A indicating nonimmigrant admission under the Compact of Free Association Between the United States and the FSM or RMI				

Examples of many of these documents appear in Part 13 of the Handbook for Employers (M-274).

Refer to the instructions for more information about acceptable receipts.