

## **Educating to Counter Oppressions Self-Assessment Report**

Completed by ECO Committee Fall 2005 - Spring 2006

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### **Overview of Assessment**

In spring 2005 the Journey Toward Wholeness Transformation Committee (JTWTC) requested a comprehensive report of the process of transformation throughout all of Unitarian Universalism. At Starr King School for the Ministry, the newly formed Educating to Counter Oppressions and Create Just and Sustainable Communities Steering Committee (ECO Steering Committee) embraced and expanded the request, embarking on a complete assessment of the school in relationship to its counter-oppressive (“ECO”) commitments.

In undertaking this process, we began by collecting information from the various working bodies of the school. Using qualitative questions, we solicited and collected information from:

- Student Body (three meeting times provided varied opportunities, plus interviews of student body leaders)

- Staff (the staff as a group, plus individual interviews; work-study students were sent a questionnaire)
- Faculty (the core faculty as a group, plus some individual interviews; associate faculty were sent a questionnaire)
- Chapel Committee
- Admissions Committee (including the scholarship subcommittee)
- Curriculum Committee
- SKSM Board of Trustees

The interview questions were minimally tailored for relevance, but all sets of questions referenced five areas:

- Scope of work, individually and in relation to other working areas of the school
- The ECO considerations that have been discussed or incorporated
- Leadership provided to the school around ECO
- Struggles and Celebrations of the ECO work
- What could be done and what is needed to deepen ECO work

Additional information was collected from:

- All-school conversations pertaining to ECO
- Individual emails, letters, and reports on happenings throughout the school
- Previously written policies and reports from various working areas
- Community Consciousness Raising Weeks (We asked the school community to reflect on the dynamics of gender, race, disability, class, and sexuality for two weeks on each topic. We then provided two weeks for the school community to reflect on how these dynamics intersect with one another. We welcomed input and reflections people wished to share with the ECO committee.)

Overall the school community has been gracious with time and availability, welcoming our questions and offering much support for the reporting process. We intentionally planned the assessment over the length of one semester, collecting information from different time points. While we could not speak to everyone in the community we believe we offered many opportunities for anyone to provide feedback and information. We heard from 31 students individually, and there was another meeting with 21 students from which we failed to record all of the names. This means that our student participation was somewhere between 36% and 60% of the student body—including those who were away on internship. We also heard from 15 current and two former board members (79% participation), four associate faculty members (20%), six core faculty members (86% participation due to a sabbatical), and 10 staff members (100% participation). As a result we received an enormous amount of data, about 200 written pages.

Our goal was to compile a report that would provide reflections on the current workings of the school and reflect back areas of focus, with suggestions to be considered by the different working bodies of the school. The limitation is that the report addresses one

time point, fall 2005, and it is important to recognize that the community is continuing to grow and deepen our ECO work all the time. Our overall areas of focus and the suggestions all came directly from what we heard. The school community contains wonderfully creative and insightful ideas for how to further our ECO commitments and this assessment has simply surfaced a few of them. We recognize that this work is meant for the long haul, and that we often live at the intersection of patience and outrage. At the same time we are excited and impressed by the profound work of the school's commitment to educating to counter oppressions and create just and sustainable communities. We hope this will be expanded upon.

## **PART ONE: SCHOOL-WIDE AREAS OF FOCUS**

In our analysis, we have found six areas that we believe need to be foci for the school-at-large in order to better implement the goals of the ECO document.

### **I. Sustainability**

Throughout this assessment, we found a deep commitment to ECO on the part of individuals and the institution. Students, faculty, staff and trustees in all aspects of Starr King's programs expressed over and over again a desire to "*go deeper with the work,*" to move beyond an introduction to ECO towards sustained, in-depth analysis and action. But while that intention was clear, there was no satisfactory answer to the question: How does an institution *sustain* a commitment to educating to create just communities that counter oppressions? How does an individual *sustain* a commitment to educating to create just communities that counter oppressions?

Throughout this assessment, we found individuals pointing to particular events as proof of our "success." But such events also point to a "failure": they suggest *moments when* the community is countering oppressions, rather than suggesting a community that *consistently* counters oppressions.

In particular, deeper theological and spiritual resources are needed to sustain us during periods of conflict and upheaval, and to help us see that our failures can be as important to our learning as our successes. These theological themes need to be drawn explicitly from the Unitarian, Universalist, and Unitarian Universalist traditions and from the articulations of faith that come out of those traditions. This will also provide resources for spiritual connection for students who are coming to terms with the roles they have played as oppressor and oppressed.

It is a growing edge in this community to understand and critically reflect on how economic factors contribute to lack of sustainability. In particular, we need to increase awareness about workers' justice (pay and workload), expectations on students' free labor in connection with school events, and limitations about the physical space and accessibility of the building.

Additionally, looking at sustainability will require us to examine more deeply the structures of ableism in our community. We have much work to do in examining how ableism affects our ideology—and not just our physical plant. Significantly, expectations and workloads for all members of the community presume an able-bodied-ness (or enabled bodies) and ability and willingness to consistently over-perform, and we know that this does not reflect reality.

Perhaps most importantly, sustainability requires that an infrastructure be put into place that would support, affirm, and demand that the ECO work continue. We need an institutional commitment to ECO that is not dependent on the presence of specific individuals—a commitment that will be sustained even after all of the current “players” have retired or departed from the school. This includes creating deeper economic and labor resources. Staff and faculty responsibilities and workloads need to be adjusted to measure quality as well as quantity.

The various working bodies of the school are making movements in this direction. For our ECO work to be successful, however, more work is needed on sustainability.

## **II. Permeable Walls**

For a school whose pedagogy relies upon eight *thresholds* of knowledge, skill and capacity, we found it ironic that much of the ECO work has taken on an insular, inward-looking characteristic that does not look “beyond the current room.” Using the metaphor of *thresholds* for our educational goals is meant to suggest crossing back and forth between learning at the school and engagement in the broader context of the GTU, UU congregations, and community sites, including the global community. We note that even our ECO document itself says part of our purpose is “to shelter prophetic witness in the world.” As part of that sheltering we must ask ourselves how to *be* a prophetic witness in the world.

Our assessment found that insularity detracted from the school’s ability to counter oppressions in a number of ways. Insularity has detracted from the creative tension between action and reflection, a dynamic that has led some students to focus too much on discovering the “proper language” to talk about ECO, rather than engaging with communities of resistance. Reflecting on our work would include discussing our use of language, discussing the process used, or considering our emotional reaction to the work. Acting on our work would include everything from doing individual interruptions of commentary that supports oppressions to building partnerships in the community.

This insularity has also meant that some students look to Starr King staff and faculty to provide *all* of their needs in an unsustainable and unrealistic way, instead of exploring other resources at the GTU, UC Berkeley, the UUA and opportunities for learning through local communities, national bodies and international study. When students did study away from the school (through internships, CPE, or fieldwork), they often disassociated these activities from “ECO work.”

Similarly, a creative tension exists between the idea of having specific ECO-related classes or events and having ECO be embodied throughout the life of the school. We encourage more work on both of these fronts.

Perhaps the most dangerous detriment of this insular thinking is the perception that the school is doing this work in a vacuum. Without an engagement with our larger context—both within Unitarian Universalism and other religious traditions, and within the United States, North America, the Pacific Rim and the world—students, staff, faculty and trustees fall into two traps: either we cease working for the common good of all people, focusing only upon ourselves or one subset of institutions or groups, or we mistake the school’s attempts “to shelter prophetic witness in the world” and our modest achievements in the areas of gender and racial equality as normative, denying the continued influences of power, privilege, white-supremacy and male-supremacy within our own institution.

We are aware that possibilities for realizing a school of permeable walls abound at SKSM. Free cross-registration at the GTU and UC Berkeley, the desire and willingness of local and national UUMA colleagues and UUA staff to teach students, and opportunities for international travel, cross-cultural immersion, CPE, internships, fieldwork, and learning and growth grants all provide avenues for this work. It is important to recognize that “ECO” is terminology specific to SKSM, while the work itself is relevant to the whole world. We encourage students to take advantage of these opportunities, and for staff, faculty, and trustees to encourage and promote these opportunities.

### **III. The Gifts of ECO**

While ECO is a clear priority commitment of the institution, further work needs to be done to understand the “Gifts of ECO.” It is possible to see ECO work as a gift and an opportunity, instead of a burden.

We recommend more celebrations of how the work is going. These might take the form of chapel services, special events, publications or artwork, and sharing of stories. This does not mean that we ignore the difficulty of the work, but rather that we celebrate that difficulty as part of the process. Such celebration can be a way to sustain us through the difficult times.

We recognize that in order to begin to celebrate ECO, we will need to reverse the patterns of conflict avoidance currently at work in our community. It is important to recognize that disagreement does not equal oppression. There is an element of conflict that is required for change and growth to happen. As conflict is addressed, communities that go through the conflict will have a deeper sense of trust. We recognize that this may continually happen as members of the SKSM community are constantly changing. This is one of the gifts of being an educational institution.

#### **IV. Intersecting Oppressions and Privileges**

Our ECO document states that “as a theological school, educating in a world blessed with resources of beauty, grace, resistance, and transformation and marked by intersecting forms of violence and injustice, we have made Educating to Create Just Communities that Counter Oppression a priority.” Yet our assessment found that quite often, students, trustees, staff and faculty have a tendency to separate out different forms of oppression, rather than exploring the intersecting forms of oppression.

The habit of not looking at intersecting oppressions and privileges leads to several dynamics that we found present at the school. When we are talking about one oppression, we cannot forget to talk about the others. When we do, it ends up dividing us.

1. There is a dynamic of competing oppressions, such as when students say that we focus too much on racism and not enough on animal rights or environmentalism, instead of looking at how people of color, the environment, and animals are all constructed as “too natural,” or examining the dynamics of environmental racism.
2. There is a dynamic of pitting women against transgender people, instead of looking at the whole system of sexism and genderism as having different impacts on different people.
3. There is a dynamic of people from privileged groups claiming that they are being oppressed *as men, as whites, etc.*, instead of recognizing the institutional, systemic dynamics of the construction of privilege and the internalized manifestations of resistance to change.
4. There is a dynamic of choosing one person from an oppressed group to hold up as the “good oppressed person,” and demonizing the other members of that group for not acting like she or he does.

We need to examine the ways that the “most talked about oppressions” are constitutive factors in other forms of oppressions. For example, how do issues of sexism play out differently for large or small women? For large or small men? How do classism and ableism contribute to the notion of what race is “supposed” to be?

Despite our location in California, we are too stuck in a black and white model of race. Our outreach to Hispanic communities has been haphazard and minimal, and our historical ties to Asia have been conducted in an orientalizing fashion. Often, a habit of orientalizing and eroticizing ethnic groups stems from a fear of mixity, and can create a situation where members of those groups living locally are seen as “less authentic” than members residing overseas. This dynamic ignores the diversity of ethnic heritage that exists within our congregations, as well as discrediting members of historically marginalized racial and ethnic groups within the United States. We wonder if perhaps this represents a desire not to have to look at our own racist histories.

We need to understand the construction of multiple privileged identities as well as multiple oppressed identities. This may mean breaking up the singular identity of being a

“straight white man,” for example, and realizing that this is already a plural identity: as a straight person, as a white person, as a man. More work is needed on how to use the privileges of class and/or whiteness to build just and sustainable communities that counter oppressions. This includes reaching out to business leaders, policy makers, and those in power as well as to marginalized communities.

We believe that understanding the construction of white identity is particularly important for the school at this time. We have found that even in those areas of ECO work where the school and the Unitarian Universalist movement have been relatively successful (i.e. women’s issues, gay and lesbian issues), success has been achieved because white privilege was able to accommodate those changes within itself. In those areas where we have been less successful (race and ethnicity issues, class issues, disability issues, bisexual and transgender issues), we are finding that it is because white identity and white privilege are less able to accommodate those concerns.

### **V. Conversation Stoppers/Conversation Starters**

Throughout our assessment, we found that there were a number of issues that arose over and over and tended to stop the ECO conversation and work. These statements can also be conversation starters. We see a need to encourage conversation to open up rather than shut down when statements such as the following are made. Asking questions in response might be a way to invite the conversation to unfold further.

1. *“The work is too political.”* Should religious people stay out of politics? Why? Or why not? Is there an effective way to address issues of oppression and privilege without becoming involved in politics?
2. *“The work is too emotional.”* Are oppression and privilege merely rational concepts to deconstruct? Is there a place for emotion in the work? What would it take for people to allow or even welcome emotion in our educational work without trying to “fix” difficult feelings of pain, anger, shame, upset, etc.?
3. *“I don’t feel safe speaking out as a person with some privilege.”* How can those with some privilege take into account the life and death safety issues encountered by oppressed people? How can we encourage and support the risk-taking and courage necessary for counter-oppressive work? What are the resources in and around us that allow us to be bold in our commitments to compassion and justice when it is not safe to do so? Who is at risk if those with privilege avoid doing counter-oppressive work?
4. *“I’d rather talk about creating a beloved community than countering oppressions.”* Is one possible without the other?
5. *“I can’t hear you when you speak in that way.”* Can you listen to the content of what is being said, even if the way I’m saying it makes you uncomfortable?
6. *“I can’t express myself because there is so much pressure to be politically correct.”* or *“The thought police are going to jump on me if I say this wrong, so I’d rather keep my mouth shut.”* Would you be willing to see the expression of your thoughts as a way to connect to others? Is “getting it perfect” really more important than participating in the conversation?

7. “*Countering oppressions is extra work that competes with or distracts from the school’s mission—preparing people for UU ministry and religious leadership.*” Are there forms of ministry that truly have nothing to do with wholeness and liberation? Aren’t issues of justice, equity, and compassion core to our Unitarian Universalist heritage and values?

We recognize that these issues come up on a regular basis. They can leave us in a reflective state and become excuses for not engaging in ECO work. As these discussions become repetitive “stopping places” or “stuck points,” we as an institution need a plan to be better prepared to deal with these issues. The plan may be as simple as naming that these comments often lead to disengagement from going further with ECO work, and naming that we aren’t going to let that happen because we have a calling and a commitment to this work as Unitarian Universalists and progressive people of faith.

## **VI. Evolving our ECO/Educational Philosophy**

In analyzing all that we learned through this assessment it became clear that the school’s educational philosophy needs to evolve in order to more fully embody our ECO commitments. Key issues are captured in the following topics and questions:

*1. Individually designed courses of study.* We need to recognize that individually designed courses of study can *support* **and** can *inhibit* counter-oppressive learning. On the positive side, our student-centered approach calls forth the exercise of agency and responsibility by students. It counters dehumanizing “banking” models of education that regard students as empty vessels to be filled or passive subjects who receive rather than construct knowledge. Also, this practice allows the distinctive realities of each student’s life to generate learning goals rather than requiring that all students conform to curricular requirements that may not be relevant to their lives or their communities. It expresses the sacred worth of every person, disrupts internalized oppressions that lead to passivity, and provides space for educational projects and work at Starr King constantly to be created out of the lived realities that students bring to the school and to their hopes for ministry and religious leadership.

On the other hand, individually designed courses of study can reinforce white narcissism and upper-class privilege. Our assessment revealed that faculty and staff have been troubled that students sometimes express entitlements that look and feel like “white privilege” and “class privilege” – expecting that faculty and staff are to be at the beck and call of whatever students want. Students can easily end up believing—because of the school’s educational practice—that “it’s all about me and my needs.” We need to recognize that our educational practice can inadvertently teach that the needs of individual selves take precedence over all other matters. Can we be doing effective counter oppressive education for ministry and religious leadership if we are not placing an equal or even greater emphasis on right relationships and

responding to the realities of others' lives? Can we critique white narcissism in our explicit curriculum, while reinforcing it in our implicit curriculum?

We recommend that the school give sustained attention to this question: How might Starr King's educational practices around "individually designed courses of study" and "student-centered learning" need to be revised to guard against self-absorption, insularity, and narcissism? What aspects of "student centered learning" are key and need to be preserved? Are there new or additional ways the school's educational practices can be developed to foster agency, wholeness, creativity, self-awareness and self-worth, the ethics of right relationship, responsibility, and recovery from internalized oppression? The faculty should take a fresh look at emerging pedagogical theories and practices that are oriented to interactive, communal learning that fosters capacities of right relationship to others. We should consider how new pedagogical attention to group learning, rather than individual achievement, might inform and transform our educational work at Starr King.

The Covenant Groups and new teaching tools such as the weekly "Accountability and Solidarity" practice used in our ECO/Threshold Seminar hold promise for an educational approach that builds just and sustainable community and fosters creative interchange in the midst of diversity.

2. *The role of faculty.* When Josiah Bartlett first introduced individually designed courses of study at Starr King nearly 50 years ago, he shaped the school around a reconceived role for seminary faculty. Teachers were to be counselors and guides to students, facilitating their learning. This definition of faculty, which was introduced at a time when all faculty members were straight, white men, needs to be re-examined. Fifty years ago, Starr King's progressive educators relinquished traditional aspects of male professorial power and privilege in order to be allies to students in their learning. But as our faculty has evolved to be comprised almost entirely of historically marginalized people – women, queers, people of color, and religious minorities or "others" – the role of faculty members as guides and helpers to students has changed in meaning. As seen through the lens of socialized roles for women and people of color, our faculty members are too easily regarded as caregivers and servants who are expected to be nurturing, compassionate, always available and responsive. Those who are queer and/or religiously "other" are sometimes seen as exotic but not authoritative. This has compromised the capacity of faculty to exercise their responsibility to challenge, disrupt, and evaluate students, leading to instances in which faculty members were regarded by some students as abusive or oppressive when faculty were doing something beyond offering comfort and support.

An additional problem with an exclusive image of faculty members as guides and helpers is that it minimizes any expectation that faculty will be experts, scholars, or researchers. As the school works to more fully affirm and support

the presence of those who have been historically marginalized from academic circles, it must reconceive what it expects from and how it supports faculty. Specifically, the school needs to devote more resources to enabling faculty to research, write, and participate in professional academic conferences and associations. This needs to be seen as part of sheltering and supporting the prophetic witness of those we have called to be our professors.

*3. The role of student-taught classes.* This practice is to be affirmed for empowering students to bring their knowledge and experience into the setting of the school. At the same time the practice has sometimes reinforced the notion that “anyone can teach,” devaluing the kind of skill, intentionality, and professional experience that good teaching requires—especially counter-oppressive teaching. We recommend that the school explore ways that student-teachers can more effectively be expected and supported to develop their capacity and professional skill as educators. We recommend that particular attention be given to offering more ways for students at Starr King to study educational philosophies and pedagogies that foster wholeness and liberation, with attention to how such philosophies and pedagogies can be applied to religious education in congregations and community education on behalf of justice and social change, as well as theological education.

*4. Sequencing courses.* Starr King has had a long practice of listing all its courses at the 4000 level, without identifying any sequencing of courses as appropriate to the beginning, middle, or end of a degree program. We recommend that the faculty re-examine the educational values behind such a practice and consider that there is indeed “beginning,” “intermediate” and “advanced” work in countering oppressions. The ECO/Threshold Seminar is a beginning course. Identifiable courses are needed that specifically build on the foundations students gain in this first semester seminar. This year, some first year students have designed an ECO 201 course to follow up on what they began together in what they have called ECO 101.

*5. Explicit Grounding for our Educational Commitments.* There is a need for the theological foundations of our ECO work and our educational philosophy to be more widely understood and developed. The UUA’s first and seventh principles are increasingly mentioned as grounding for our ECO work: 1) the inherent worth and dignity of every person and 7) the interdependent web of existence of which we are a part. We would benefit from an explicit exploration of how our educational practices can hold these two values together. Education can be understood as a spiritual practice that “unfolds the powers of the soul” (—William Ellery Channing). At the same time it is a relational and justice seeking practice that reverences the connectedness of all life. Continually developing our educational work with these religious values in mind can strengthen our work and guard against the critique that ECO work is extraneous to our core mission.

Section 4 of our ECO document, “To Work for the Common Good,” lists a number of educational goals and pedagogical practices that need to be continually lifted up and applied. It is important to provide ongoing opportunities for core faculty, associate faculty, and student-teachers to critically reflect with one another about the educational philosophies and practices that truly enable education to foster wholeness and liberation. We also need to deepen our understanding of how our practices at Starr King are part of an evolving tradition of progressive, humanistic education rooted in our religious values and theological perspectives that include two centuries of Unitarian and Universalist educational vision, beginning with William Ellery Channing and Elizabeth Palmer Peabody. Our work needs to include a commitment to intentionally document our evolving educational philosophy. Starr King is a laboratory for developing educational practices that embody Unitarian Universalist commitments to justice, wholeness, and liberation.

## **PART TWO: SPECIFIC WORKING BODIES**

### **I. Student Body**

The members of the student body who agreed to participate in this assessment were by and large in support of the school’s work to create just communities that intentionally counter oppressions. Several students reported that the school’s ECO work was the reason that they chose SKSM. Others were surprised by the work, but welcome it.

We note that students’ experience of ECO work is currently divided by year in the program, largely because of the recent institution of the required ECO/Threshold Seminar class (fall 2004). Students report that the school is taking their recommendations about the class seriously, and that the ECO experience is getting better each year as a result of implementing these recommendations. At the same time, we remind students that the ECO/Threshold Seminar is a place to build common language for the next few years of their program, and encourage them to seek out classes and projects that will allow for deeper study throughout their programs and their lives as religious leaders.

In particular, we want to affirm the work that the Small Group Ministries have been doing this semester. These student-initiated and student-run groups provide a valuable way for students to support each other’s commitments. As an institution that values students’ agency in their own learning, there were many suggestions that lend themselves to becoming student-led initiatives, including the creation of a white allies group, theological discussion groups, and meetings to discuss the intersection of differing oppressions.

Overall, we encourage the student body to look at ways that they can provide leadership to the school’s ECO commitments. In particular, we recommend that the job descriptions and roles of Student Body Officers be more accessible and accountable for helping ECO-related programs succeed. Such opportunities provide ways to move beyond

defensiveness and conflict aversion, towards assuming a shared responsibility and accountability.

The school has been more intentional this year about providing places for people to deal with the emotional aspects of this work, including the intense feelings that people have when they first discover themselves in both roles of oppressor and oppressed. Visiting Ministers, Small Group Ministries, Evolving Dialogues, Academic Advisors and SKSM staff are all available for this task. However, we have found that some students hesitate to take advantage of these opportunities.

Additionally, it will be important for students to remember that the school does not exist in a vacuum. Several students lamented the absence of “straight white males” on the permanent core faculty. The fact that these same students did not lament the absence of Asian, Asian-American, Hispanic or Native American core faculty of any gender, or of transgender faculty of any race or ethnicity, suggests that we have much to learn about how to shelter prophetic witness in the world. Moreover, by ignoring the abundance of white male role models available to work with students as CPE advisors, intern supervisors, fieldwork supervisors, UUMA ministerial colleagues, Associate Faculty, Visiting Professors, and GTU and UC Berkeley faculty members, these statements perpetuate a culture of white supremacy.

Finally, students need to become more aware of their interactions with staff and faculty so that they do not replicate sexist, classist, racist or ableist trends.

## **II. Staff**

Throughout all the interviews with staff one theme that we want to highlight is the staff’s appreciation for each other. This is something to celebrate. We heard: *“Staff have a sense of cohesion and solidarity with each other. There is a lot of trust within the staff. There is mutual respect and staff seems good at hearing each other’s points of view, dialoguing about touchy topics. The environment that has been cultivated is that people can individually bounce stuff off each other. The valuing of all the voices is ‘incredible.’ Commendable, especially in the quality of the listening.”*

Another important reflection was the staff’s clear commitment to ECO work. The entire staff and faculty all come from places where people were “never meant to be in charge.” The leadership of the staff, all located in marginalized places, creating an environment of respect for each other, is a huge success that we want to highlight and applaud. We heard: *“ECO is one of top reasons I work here. The other is the staff I work with, which is connected to ECO. It’s very meaningful on that level. Staff gain knowledge about new ECO issues while working at school. It requires I take leadership in diversity work because so many things need to take place with a small staff. I want to make community. It is what keeps me getting up and coming to work. I think this priority emphasis is what the world needs to heal. We are in process of having a substantial and effective change in the world that is needed and profound.”*

The clearest and most consistent theme we heard from staff centered on issues of creating a sustainable workplace. This was one of the most articulated things shared with us, not just from the staff, but also from the faculty and students. We heard that people are tired, having recently gone through some really hard times at the school. Given the amount of feedback we have about creating a more livable work environment, we have made sustainability the primary suggestion as an area of focus for the staff. We also recognize that positive shifts have already been made since our interviews and we hope that commitment will continue. From what we heard, topics deserving attention include:

- **Wages, Time, and Benefits**  
As one person said, *“People who work 40 hours should be paid for 40 hours, and not be expected to put in a lot more time.”* A close look at wages, health care, and benefit needs is important. This might include honoring “comp.” time, so people who work late or on the weekend can get that time off during the week without feeling that they are burdening someone else.
- **Job Descriptions**  
Update job descriptions to reflect current workloads. This is more than asking each person to write their current job description. Instead, over a sample of two weeks’ time, folks can track what they are working on. Then add annual projects that might not have been reflected in those two weeks. From there, create a detailed description, including time for growth to incorporate ECO into their work. As it is, ECO work can feel like an add-on, rather than an integral part of the job.
- **Workloads**  
Do an assessment with staff input on their own jobs about, for example, half time jobs that should be full time, and full time jobs that need workloads split up. Part of this may point to a need for more work-study help to carry some of the staff, faculty, and committee support work.
- Attached to the two above items is looking closely at the prioritizing of workloads. While more can be added to work loads, who sets the priorities and how that is decided is unclear. It is important to think about what might not be a priority whenever something is added.
- Look at the possibility for cross training so that people feel they can take medical, vacation, or comp time without leaving the school in the lurch.

Because the major focus of this section is on the sustainability of work we are only listing a few suggestions of other ways to better integrate the work of countering oppressions:

- The staff and faculty training that occurred in the beginning of fall 2005 was widely appreciated and referred to throughout many of the interviews. Consistent all-staff trainings specifically about ECO goals are encouraged. Training will help with a sense of cohesion around ECO and frustration with learning what ECO is. More training will also help create common language encouraging more discussion.
- **New hire training:** When new staff members are brought on it is important that ECO is explained so that questions are encouraged, rather than simply reading the

document. Sometimes we forget the “ECO” terminology is specific to Starr King. As one person said, *“Around the ECO work, there is a tendency to have a few people in the center, and a number of staff members feel like they are on the periphery. Find ways to incorporate people into the work from the beginning.”*

- We heard a sentiment that some people learn about what is going on and are allowed more input while others only hear bits and never get involved in the ECO work of the school. This is something to pay attention to. There are barriers to identify and address. Everyone will not be working in every niche of ECO, but each can consider what stands out for us individually and in the job.
- As part of the above area of focus we heard that many of the ECO related topics or collaboration happen between staff on an individual basis. While we do not want to limit those discussions, it is also important to make this part of the staff-wide discussions. Notions that some are more “advanced” than others, or rumors about what other people think, or areas of growth that some people get access to and others don’t all happen in the work environment. When people are talking about ECO information, projects, events, or just insight, it is helpful to make room for that with the staff as a whole and make sure everyone is in the loop. This might require some risk on the part of the individual, but it is clear that the staff will hold respect for people well. Part of the staff discussion may be about articulating many of the common places of resistance that students face.
- Celebrations: it is important to celebrate the work of the staff on a regular basis. Part of this celebration should be recognition for the ECO dedication, work, and leadership the staff does provide the school.

There are other insightful reflections we heard that we want to lift up:

- *I’d like to see us in a place where the ECO committee is doing less because people in the SKSM community are doing more.*
- *The organization is full of leaders.*
- *The school wants students to be who they are. With that as a basis then everyone acts as individuals.*
- *As a predominantly white school in a predominantly white movement, trying to create a multicultural environment, it’s a lot of work and effort.*
- *It is a difficult thing to watch students of color coming into the school with high levels of hope and excitement, and then having other people’s growth happen on their shoulders.*
- *With so few people of color in the school at the moment, there is a danger of taking the few and making them into “poster children” at events and in publications.*
- *Sometimes staff isn’t seen as part of the ECO action. The reality is that in some ways, the staff is the most diverse group in the school, and is living ECO daily.*
- *We should consider ECO as a verb, an action concept, not just “hugs and kisses.”*

### **III. Admissions and Scholarship Committee**

The Admissions Committee's dedication to the school and integrity in their scope of work is clear. Due to the level of confidentiality, we understand the committee cannot be as integrated into the school as others. The Admissions Committee has an affirming process of decision making for each application. The rolling application deadline is a built-in process by which the sustainability of the workload seems to be manageable. The seriousness with which the committee takes the work, trying to balance looking for people who would succeed both as a student at SK and as they enter the ministry, is to be commended.

We heard that the Admissions Committee positively focuses on each individual applicant. Thinking about the diversity of the entire class as a whole is only done unofficially, by individual members of the committee. We encourage the committee to institute group discussions on issues of diversity, beginning with what members are individually thinking and what the committee might need to consider. Once a class is accepted, the committee might consider looking at the group to provide some insight as to the ECO work and commitment of the incoming class. Beginning an intentional discussion about ECO with the committee, and reflecting on the work together, would deepen an engagement with the school's ECO commitments.

So often when thinking about the incoming class people tend to gravitate towards numbers. The committee has a process of looking at the strengths of each applicant individually, which wards off the totally numeric end game. However, the focus on diversity often comes down to how many of (fill in the blank) are there. This is a hard thing to balance. The committee can help provide leadership by thinking about what this conversation or need is really about and how it might be addressed. We know that the committee is thinking about changing some of the application questions and we encourage asking a question about one's commitments to addressing oppression. This could also contribute to engaging in a conversation that is more than numbers.

We would also encourage the committee to look beyond the individual school, at the voices that are dominating the religious leadership education and conversation at the GTU and in any given community. It is important to look at the impact of Starr King on its community.

We also suggest asking incoming students to offer feedback on the admissions process. This may provide some insight on the ECO work of the admissions committee. It is important for the committee to know that some, not all, students of color hear the message, in many different forms, that the school accepted them solely because they were a person of color. (These messages are also spoken about the scholarships.) In both cases it is a simple conclusion to a complicated process, and the committee might consider providing leadership in addressing these issues.

We understand that recruitment is not in the committee's direct scope of work, but it is in the scope of student services and this committee works with those staff members. We

have included it here in the section of the report focused on the Admission Committee as recruitment is closely related to admissions. This Committee could certainly help with creativity in and the breadth of recruitment.

Some questions to consider, which we heard from you, are:

- If alumni are our main recruiters, how does that maintain the status quo?
- What are we looking for in prospective students, and how does that fit our ECO commitments? An example from the committee is: a good fit is being able to be challenged and to challenge the institution.
- What are new places where we can recruit? A few suggestions of places to recruit might be sending brochures and/or people to DRUUMM conferences (including APIC, African Descent, Multicultural, and Queers of Color caucuses of DRUUMM), LUUNA conferences, various religious studies departments, GLBT centers, social change/justice/service organizations. (We recognize that this will take time to build a database of locations.) These are simply some suggestions; further brainstorming will provide a deeper plan.
- Would it be helpful to frame ECO work as part of the school's pedagogy in recruitment? Consider making statements about the fact that we understand that our society struggles with certain kinds of people in leadership and as a school we want to affirm that leadership by encouraging folks to apply.

#### Scholarships, a subcommittee of admissions:

The scholarship subcommittee has a difficult task with \$1 million in annual identified need and about \$100,000 *at most* to give out. There is also a perception that the diversity grants are bigger than what they are. The subcommittee is working with a minimal amount of resources, trying to address a huge need.

The school's scholarship process is unclear to many students. The decision-making process has integrity and we suggest that it should be outlined and shared with the student body. In addition, we suggest sharing information about the money that comes in and goes out with the student body (for example the Shelter Rock scholarship money). This transparency in process will hopefully deepen the conversation about money and financial aid.

#### **IV. Chapel Committee**

The Chapel Committee has a clear commitment to the school's ECO goals. The committee's guideline packet for worship leaders, the chapel leadership workshops, the chapel reflection process built on the appreciative inquiry model, and the implementation of chapel liaisons all contribute to the ECO commitment. The committee has a strong connection with the school community and is providing leadership in educating to counter oppressions.

In discussion with the committee we heard several descriptions of the relationship between the committee's work, worship life of the school, and ECO. Publicly articulating this connection is important to understand the gift of ECO. We encourage the committee to create a statement about how ECO and worship are connected, to be shared with the school. Pieces we heard were: *"Any community can go deeper in consciousness in AR/ECO if we have a worship life that allows us to hold it. If we are doing a deconstruction of our core being, the community has to hold that. Religious life is fundamental to the success of ECO work. The deeper we go in terms of worship life, relating to something bigger, centering and prayer, it all makes liberating and resisting oppression possible."*

Due to the committee's visibility and level of contact with the rest of school, there is room for community leadership growth, pushing for conversations about the relationship to personal needs and ECO needs in worship. The committee might also consider sponsoring or facilitating annual school conversations about the relationship of ECO and worship. This leadership could provide a place to both think about the gifts of ECO in worship and the purpose of worship in relationship to ECO.

The committee is integrated into the school in meaningful ways, and the committee's ECO focus is vital to long term sustainability. We encourage the committee to discuss how ECO can be made more institutionalized. A few ways to do this might be:

- Ask about the ECO considerations on the chapel proposals.
- Consider whether there is a way to more directly discuss ECO messages and modeling of worship in the chapel reflection process.
- Consider conducting a yearly survey of the community's accessibility needs. As needs shift, both the committee's attention and the information given to worship leaders might shift.
- Share with the school reports such as the recent green audit of our chapel services.

We heard from the Chapel Committee that in previous semesters they reflected on their own work process and results. Out of these reflections the guidelines document was created. We encourage this to continue. The liaisons have direct contact with the questions that worship leaders are asking and issues they are considering. This could be compiled to become part of the committee's internal reflection to understand further manifestation of ECO and worship.

The Chapel Committee should consider publicizing our chapel services throughout the rest of the GTU, welcoming more students from other schools. The committee might also consider ways to encourage SKSM students to go to other services, breaching the insular walls of worship life at the GTU.

## **V. Curriculum Committee**

The Curriculum Committee's dedication to ECO was articulated and reinforced by many areas of the school. There have been some very positive ECO considerations the

committee has reinforced over the last couple of years. These include implementation of the first-year student ECO class and communication of the school's ECO commitments to associate faculty. The committee is working hard at making the ECO considerations more standardized and institutionalized to maintain long-term sustainability. We celebrate that the student body reports positively on classes that address ECO, which reflects on the committee's work. We heard and affirm that the committee works hard to bring classes that offer a mix of teachers reflecting varying experiences and voices. This is not just an asset to SKSM but to the entire GTU.

The Curriculum Committee clearly puts a lot of effort into making sure associate faculty, new and returning, are aware of our ECO goals. We also heard that while some classes are gracefully and artfully rooted in ECO, some classes could integrate ECO more thoroughly. The Curriculum Committee can help articulate the translation from the document to the classroom. One suggestion is to create an informational document of "ECO things to consider in the classroom" that can be given to teachers. One model for this document might be the Chapel's Committee's guide for inclusive worship.

The Curriculum Committee provides considerable direct service and direction for the school. We recognize that the committee is always unofficially listening to students, yet there might be ways to enhance the communication between the committee's good works and the school. There might be a few ways to help with this communication, including a survey of students every year that explicitly mentions the Curriculum Committee's timeline and asks what classes they want and plan to take in the next two to three years. Another communication issue is the course evaluations that students complete. Consider making explicit where they go, who reads them, and how they are used in terms of ECO.

A big part of countering oppression is learning about relationship building and community organizing. We encourage the committee to consider more co-teaching across the GTU and more classes that require community involvement to support the idea of permeable walls.

As the school asks people to look at privilege and power dynamics, is there an educational piece that might be different for students who are coming with a strong analysis compared with students who are starting with finding a common language and understanding? The committee has begun to struggle with this difference in terms of need and we encourage further consideration of an ECO class for those who want to look in more depth at countering oppressions.

When institutionalizing the ECO conversation with student bodies that are revolving it is important to consider the education of students who find themselves in historically marginalized social locations. Questions for this committee, as well as the rest of the school, to consider might be: What does it mean to be a person of color looking towards leading and serving a predominantly white group? What issues will these people face and what skills can help serve their ministerial capacity? How does one build collegial relationships across social power divides? These questions can and should be addressed in each course.

## **VI. ECO Steering Committee**

The ECO Committee is a brand new committee that is still in its process of discovering and communicating its scope of work to the rest of the school community. Topics to be considered in terms of reflecting what we want to see are the process for selecting people to serve on the committee; the committee's responsibility in terms of accountability, guidance, facilitation, and/or providing support and resources to other areas of the school; and the process by which priorities are set. At the time of this report it is not confirmed if the ECO Committee will continue beyond this first year. We hope that any continuation of this committee will contribute to the sustainability of ECO in the school. We affirm the work of the committee in the first year: engaging with the ECO document, facilitating explanations and conversation during orientation, facilitating an all-school discussion, leading a chapel service, beginning community consciousness raising weeks, and conducting an ECO assessment of the school. We also affirm that the committee has included a staff person as a full committee member, rather than "staffing" the committee. We recognize that it is inherently awkward to put together an assessment of the ECO Committee, by the ECO Committee, yet we try. As the committee forms itself, and learns how to articulate its work, there are areas for the committee to consider, for deepening ECO work.

Deepening the theological foundation is needed. Many of us don't know how to articulate the religious reasons for educating to counter oppressions. This came up in several areas of the school, including the ECO Committee discussion. This might be an area for the committee to consider developing and would begin to address issues of intersecting oppressions and privileges.

Building partnerships outside of the school is important for the community to recognize our various social locations. The ECO Committee can consider providing leadership in building these partnerships. This might include similar committees at other GTU schools, with local churches, and other social change organizations in the area. In addition, the ECO Committee can help research and provide resources from other institutions that have effectively done counter-oppressive work.

Accountability is an essential part of both ECO and general anti-oppression work. The committee should grapple with what that means to the school structure. Is the committee a place of accountability? Is the place of accountability the actual ECO document? If so, what does that mean? Accountability is vital and has a close relationship to ally work as well as sheltering prophetic witness. The committee might consider providing leadership in the deepening of these issues in the school.

Interfacing with the school community will be developed over time, and in part is a procedural question. Part of these procedural questions is how the committee can be a place in which conflict about ECO can be held. Can the committee intentionally highlight and address conflicts throughout the school in efforts to deepen our understandings? The committee needs to look at its own level of transparency, receiving

feedback from the community, and should consider how to remain flexible to address spontaneous needs of any given school year.

In addition to addressing conflict, the ECO Committee is also in a prime place to help the school prepare for conversation stoppers/conversation starters referred to above. One way to begin to do this is to provide resources for the school, contacts, facilitation, readings, and audio files. The committee is also in a prime place to remind the school of the gifts of ECO, sponsoring celebrations of ways ECO moves from the page into action.

## **VII. Faculty**

The Core Faculty is firmly committed to the ECO work of the school. Each individual's research and ministry—both within the school and without, supports this work and all members of the faculty want this work to go forward. There has been a consistent understanding in hiring searches and in the work of the faculty that diversity equals excellence. This is an important step for the school, as we realize that historically this has not always been the case.

It is also important to note that the faculty members feel supported by the administration to do this work. *“It is very different to work in a school where the commitment to ECO is not just present in a few faculty, but comes from the whole institution. That kind of institutional support creates an environment of permission and support that is absent in other places.”* However, many new faculty members were surprised by the resistance from students (as expressed for example in the “conversation stopper” comments) and at times the larger UU movement (as expressed for example in objections to the school's choices in faculty hires). The faculty noted that the work required to overcome this resistance often detracts from the ability to go deeper with the work. In addition to balancing pastoral care with the responsibility to challenge students and hold them accountable to ECO work, it may be necessary to implement some advanced seminars in addition to the introductory ones.

Faculty meetings provide a space for faculty to work together on ECO. Faculty reflection times also offer an opportunity for faculty to take risks and make mistakes in a supportive environment. We are pleased that this work is being done collegially, and not just by individuals. Such communal work has also led to important programmatic elements in the school, such as the creation of the MASC degree and support for Islamic Studies. We applaud the decision to have the required ECO/Threshold class be taught by a core faculty member each year.

We believe that it is also important to highlight the leadership and witness on ECO values that the faculty provides to the Graduate Theological Union, both historically and today. We applaud the faculty's work on Islamic Studies, the school's long support of the now defunct Center for Women and Religion and the Center for Urban Black Studies, as well as current efforts to create a Certificate for Women's Studies and to support the academic work of students of color throughout the GTU. It was noted that SKSM is seen as a hospitable and welcoming place.

All of the workload sustainability issues involving staff are also true for the faculty. In the case of faculty, however, there are two additional effects of an unsustainable workload. First, the number of advisees per core faculty member and the amount of time and energy required to truly be present for that task increases the workload of faculty. Second, unsustainable workloads mean that there is not sufficient time for faculty to work on research and publication, meaning that the ECO values of the school are not reaching the largest audience that they can. Additional research time to review the literature would not only support further academic work, but would enhance the bibliographies of the classes taught at the school.

One concern mentioned by every member of the core faculty was the need for living, engaged relationships with more communities and with the larger society and world in order to embrace the call for permeable walls. This includes the need to reach out to Unitarian Universalism in demonstrating the importance of counter-oppressive work to the core history and theology of the movement. How is the school creating curricula that can be used in local churches, supporting community projects in prisons, encouraging experiential learning and global perspective, or producing and encouraging cross-fertilization between the academic world and the community? How do we encourage identification with the multiple communities of the Bay Area?

We recommend that the faculty take the lead in discussing the aspects of this assessment related to educational philosophy, pedagogy and policy as noted in Part One, Section VI.

### **VIII. Board of Trustees**

One of the celebrations of this assessment was discovering the level of commitment that the Board of Trustees has for ECO work. As one professor noted, *“As a member of the faculty, it is key to know that the institution backs up faculty to raise and engage with ECO issues. This is especially important despite student resistance, which can play out as negative critiques on class evaluations.”*

The Board of Trustees was historically one of the key elements in the creation of the ECO document as a priority emphasis of the school, engaging in theological reflection and self-study in the creation of the document. That commitment has been sustained through the work of the Awards Committee in granting honorary degrees, the Nominating Committee in bringing a diversity of perspectives to the board, and the search committees and the board as a whole in making decisions about faculty hires. Moreover, the board has supported the institution, the administration, and the faculty in times of crisis around ECO work. We commend the board for this work.

The Board of Trustees also has a clear understanding that ECO work brings about conflict, that conflict is an important sign that the work is happening. This awareness needs to be felt throughout school.

The Board of Trustees itself noted that in recent years, they have been “*nodding to the importance of ECO, but not engaging it ourselves.*” “*The board needs new ownership of ECO*” through new engagement with the gifts of ECO, including its theological and spiritual aspects. In particular, the board’s committed efforts to go deeper in ECO work would be greatly enhanced if the board would examine issues of racism, white privilege and sexism. We would also include attention to the intersection of these oppressions and privileges. Additional time may need to be added to several board meetings to make this study happen.

As the Board of Trustees begins the process of creating a new long-range plan, there are some specific dynamics that we feel need to be addressed. We note that when ECO work started back in the 1990s there was a goal of first diversifying the Board of Trustees, then the faculty, and finally the student body. The new long-range plan needs to examine our progress on these issues and to address how we could move forward in creating a diverse learning environment. Our sense is that earlier long-range plans have been based on a simplistic hope in the power of the “Welcome Table,” instead of looking at what dynamics need to change in order to get everyone at the table. What value do we place on transformation? For the ECO work to go deeper, the board needs to make up its mind about whether it is ready for Unitarian Universalism to be more than an ethnic church for white folks. Is the board ready to provide the leadership that will be needed to separate Unitarian Universalist identity from white privilege? Do we believe that Unitarian Universalism has something to say to the world around ECO work, and if so, how do we get that message out to the world?

As part of creating an institution with permeable walls, there is a need for the board to take an active role in making ECO work known throughout Unitarian Universalism and the larger community. In conversations with constituents, the board needs to be able to represent, explain and defend all aspects of the school’s life and work, including those commitments based on ECO.

There is a need for the Personnel Policies Committee of the board to reexamine its role in policies regarding wages, health insurance, benefits and the evaluation policies for staff and faculty. Are we adequately supporting the people who support the work of the school?

Finally, there is a need to reexamine the makeup of the board itself. We recommend that the Nominating Committee of the board look beyond the “designated hitters” of people of color in Unitarian Universalism in order to expand the base of people that we are drawing from. We also recommend implementing exit interviews for people leaving the Board of Trustees, particularly those who are people of color and others from traditionally marginalized communities.

### PART THREE: SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

This section restates in one place all the recommendations that have been noted above within the body of the text.

#### Whole School

1. That *the school community as a whole* focus on sustainability, through identifying spiritual, theological, and economic resources for the work, examining patterns of ableism and perfectionism, and creating an infrastructure that will support, affirm, and demand that the ECO work continue.
2. That *the school community as a whole* become a place of permeable walls, looking to resources beyond ourselves that will help to sustain a creative tension between reflection and action.
3. That *the school community as a whole* focus on the gifts of ECO, through celebrations of the work and instilling a healthy attitude towards conflict.
4. That *the school community as a whole* focus on understanding the intersection of privileges and oppressions, including those specifically related to white identity.
5. That *the school community as a whole* focus on ways to turn “conversation stoppers” into “conversation starters” by identifying those places where change stops but could begin.
6. That *the school community as a whole* examine the ways that our educational philosophy and pedagogy supports and hinders the work of ECO.

#### Student Body

7. That *the student body* seek out classes and projects that will allow for deeper study of ECO throughout their programs and their lives as religious leaders.
8. That *the student body* look at ways that they can provide leadership to the school’s ECO commitments, including the creation of a white allies group, theological discussion groups, or meetings to discuss the intersection of differing oppressions.
9. That *the student body* make use of the resources available for dealing with emotional aspects of this work.
10. That *the student body* utilize all the resources available to them through CPE advisors, intern advisors, fieldwork supervisors, UUMA ministerial colleagues, Associate Faculty, Visiting Professors, and GTU and UC Berkeley faculty members, who can be role models in the work.
11. That *the student body* become more aware of their interactions with staff and faculty so that they do not replicate sexist, classist, racist or ableist trends.
12. That *the student body officers* be more accessible and accountable for helping ECO-related programs.

#### Administration

13. That *the administration* take a close look at wages, health care, and benefit needs, including honoring “comp.” time.
14. That *the administration* update job descriptions to reflect current workloads.

15. That *the administration* do an assessment with staff input on their own jobs and workloads, and bring in work-study positions as needed.
16. That *the administration* celebrate the ECO leadership that the staff provides.
17. That *the staff* engage in cross-training.
18. That *the staff* make ECO part of the staff-wide discussions, allowing all members of the staff to participate and be informed.
19. That *the staff and faculty* undergo more training on ECO issues, including explicit ECO training for new hires.

#### Admissions and Scholarship Committee

20. That *the admissions and scholarship committee* institute group discussions on issues of diversity.
21. That *the admissions and scholarship committee* revise the application process to gain more insight into each prospective student's ECO work.
22. That *the admissions and scholarship committee* consider the role of a diverse student body not only for SKSM but for the GTU and UUA.
23. That *the admissions and scholarship committee* ask incoming students to offer feedback on the admissions process.
24. That *the admissions and scholarship committee* examine ways in which the school's recruitment efforts can better reflect ECO.
25. That *the admissions and scholarship committee* outline the process by which scholarship decisions are made and what money is available, and share this with the student body.

#### Chapel Committee

26. That *the chapel committee* publicly articulate the connection between the committee's work, worship life of the school, and ECO.
27. That *the chapel committee* make its ECO work more institutionalized, by asking for ECO considerations on the chapel proposals and finding ways to directly discuss ECO messages and modeling of worship in the chapel reflection process.
28. That *the chapel committee* conduct annual surveys, and share results with the school at large.
29. That *the chapel committee* encourage GTU students to attend SKSM chapel, and encourage SKSM students to attend GTU chapels.

#### Curriculum Committee

30. That *the curriculum committee* articulate the translation from the ECO document to the classroom by giving concrete suggestions to instructors.
31. That *the curriculum committee* increase its communication with students through yearly surveys and more information on how course evaluations are used.
32. That *the curriculum committee* consider more co-teaching across the GTU and more classes that require community involvement to support the idea of permeable walls.
33. That *the curriculum committee* consider instituting both introductory and in-depth courses around ECO.

34. That *the curriculum committee* give special attention to the education of folks who find themselves in historically marginalized social locations.

#### ECO Steering Committee

35. That *the ECO steering committee* help articulate the theological foundation for ECO work.
36. That *the ECO steering committee* provide leadership in building partnerships outside of the school.
37. That *the ECO steering committee* provide leadership in terms of accountability and ally work.
38. That *the ECO steering committee* examine how it is interfacing with the school at large.
39. That *the ECO steering committee* assemble and provide resources for turning “conversation stoppers” into “conversation starters.”
40. That *the ECO steering committee* host celebrations of the school’s ECO work.

#### Faculty

41. That *the faculty* continue to teach the required ECO/Threshold Seminar.
42. That *the faculty* be given adequate time for advising and research so their prophetic witness can be enhanced within and beyond the school.
43. That *the faculty* support, encourage and build the relationships with diverse communities and develop the school’s educational model to allow for permeable walls.
44. That *the faculty* take the lead in discussing the aspects of this assessment related to educational policy, philosophy and pedagogy.
45. That *the faculty* engage in sustained collegial reflection on their teaching, scholarship, and research in light of the ECO goals, and consider documenting the evolution of the school’s educational philosophy and practices.

#### Board of Trustees

46. That *the board of trustees* engage in ECO training and theological reflection, particularly on issues of racism, white privilege, sexism and the intersection of these oppressions and privileges.
47. That *the board of trustees* make in-depth ECO work central in the creation of the next long-range plan.
48. That *the board of trustees* take an active role in making ECO work known throughout Unitarian Universalism and the larger community.
49. That *the personnel committee of the board of trustees* reexamine its role in looking at wages, health insurance, benefits and the evaluation policies for staff and faculty.
50. That *the nominating committee of the board of trustees* reexamine the makeup of the board itself and institute exit interviews for departing trustees.

**ADDENDUM**  
**FOR THE JOURNEY TOWARD WHOLENESS TRANSFORMATION COMMITTEE**

The Journey Toward Wholeness Transformation Committee asked us to specifically answer the following questions in our report.

1. Name of institution completing the survey?

Starr King School for the Ministry  
 2441 Le Conte Ave.  
 Berkeley, CA 94610  
 510.845.6232  
[www.skism.edu](http://www.skism.edu)

2. Anti-Oppressive, Anti-Racist, Multi-Cultural goals of the school?

The school has four major goals as an anti-oppressive, anti-racist, multi-cultural learning community:

- To be the change we want to see
- To shelter prophetic witness
- To counter white supremacy
- To work for the common good

These goals are laid out in detail in “Educating to Counter Oppressions and Create Just Communities,” a.k.a. the “ECO Document” attached to this report.

3. When were these goals established?

The groundwork for these goals was done by the Starr King Board of Trustees during a 1992-1995 project of theological education for the board led by the Long Range Educational Planning Committee. During that project, students, faculty, trustees, graduates, invited guests and consultants considered the mission and vision of the school. In 1996, Rebecca Parker, President of Starr King School, prepared the ECO document as a summary of the work done by the board. Subsequent public statements of the school, as well as the board and faculty conversations, informed the document. The faculty and the board reviewed and reflected on the document during the 1996-1997 year. During fall 1998, the faculty formally voted to establish the “Educating to Counter Oppressions Committee” with the ECO document as “the working document to which we hold ourselves accountable.” The major themes of the document were integrated into the faculty handbook. In 2000, a new catalog was prepared that integrated significant sections of the ECO document into the text of the school’s catalog. In spring 2004, working groups led by the faculty reviewed the four goals and identified further specific ideas on how to implement them. The review and recommendations were published in all subsequent editions of the Student Handbook. In fall 2005, the ECO Steering Committee edited the ECO document further.

#### 4. Relationship or connection of these goals to the curricula or coursework?

The ECO goals are integrated throughout Starr King's curricula. Here are some of the key ways:

- Orientation of new students introduces the ECO document.
- First-year students take a semester-long ECO/Threshold seminar. In addition to content and field trips focused on consciousness raising around the intersections of diverse oppressions and strategies for recovery and resistance, the seminar introduces counter-oppressive practices such as covenant building, process observing, giving and receiving constructive criticism, interrupting the conversation, allowing emotion, spiritual disciplines that deepen compassion and concern for one another, and weekly accountability and solidarity actions.
- The M.Div. degree and M.A.S.C. (Master of Arts in Religious Leadership for Social Change) require students to develop competence in eight Threshold Areas, each of which has an ECO dimension and some of which are centered on ECO themes, for example "Educating for Wholeness and Liberation" and "Prophetic Witness and Work." The Thresholds are introduced and explored during the first-semester required ECO course. Students must demonstrate competence in all eight thresholds in order to graduate.
- The Core Faculty includes ECO issues in all courses.
- Courses related to explicit issues of oppression, injustice, and social change are regularly offered. Recent examples: "Race, Religion, and Multiculturalism," "Mental Health and Religion," "Queer Thea/ologies and Beyond," "The Allergy to the Other," "Spirituality and Nonviolent Social Transformation: Gandhi, King and Day," "Islamophobia," etc.
- Students do field work in congregations and communities. Recent examples are students leading "Journey Toward Wholeness" projects in area congregations, students organizing "Seminarians for Worker Justice," students teaching "Our Whole Lives," students working in the community on abortion rights and family planning, students serving as consultants to congregations on transgender issues, students organizing economic development projects in Transylvania, students working with homeless youth, students organizing seminarians for peace, students engaged in CLF's prison pen pal program and prison outreach, including anti-death penalty work, students participating in the "Faithful Fools" street ministry.

#### 5. How these goals relate to the teaching of and research on theology?

- The school's foundational course on "Unitarian Universalist Theologies" gives in-depth attention to the counter-oppressive themes in Unitarian Universalism's theological history and contemporary scene.
- The faculty's research and writing explore issues in race and racism, sexism and gender justice, war and nonviolent resistance, the construction of "the other," queer theory and theologies, religious intolerance/prejudice (especially Islamophobia), and poverty and economic justice.

- The school has intentionally emphasized the hiring of faculty from historically marginalized communities whose voices, questions, and insights have been historically absent or marginalized in theology and theological education.
- The faculty is exploring models such as “The University of the Poor” as an approach to centering theological reflection in the context of oppression.

6. Extent to which these goals include knowledge of or sensitivity to global/international issues?

Global and international issues are addressed through the presence of a faculty member from Italy, a Balázs scholar from Transylvania, and scholarships to a Shinto shrine in Japan. Learning and Growth grants may also be used to help students fund international travel. The interfaith Andalusian M.Div. program currently under development will also have an international component.

We feel more attention needs to be placed on international and global issues, using the model of permeable walls.

One student noted that there is a particular challenge to doing international and global work at a seminary that is similar to issues facing congregations: “International work is seen as being too political, and therefore off limits to churches through the separation of church and state.”

7. Measures of success/progress in reaching the goals (based on previous years)?

We periodically review how we are doing with our goals, using qualitative evaluation methods (interviews, discussions, assessment questions). In spring 2003 we held a series of small group discussions at the school for students, faculty, staff and trustees, and gathered responses to three questions:

- Where and how do people see the ECO goals being successfully lived out?
- Where can we improve, go deeper, or be more successful?
- Are there ways in which our goals need to be reformulated in light of our experience with them?

That same spring we surveyed our graduates from the past five years, asking them a series of questions about how well the school prepared them for Unitarian Universalist ministry and religious leadership. The survey included several questions about counter-oppressive ministry.

The responses were collated and reported to the board for discussion. The following year, working groups were established, to follow up.

The fall 2005 assessment is the most comprehensive we have done.

8. Financial resources invested in Anti-Oppressive, Anti-Racist, Multi-Cultural efforts?

- The Luce Grant provides \$300,000 over the next three years to promote the school's work in Multi-Religious education, particularly around Islamic Studies. This work contributes to a multi-cultural, multi-religious environment and counters oppressions associated with religious discrimination.
- We raise \$25,000 annually to support the work of the Balazs Scholarship Committee, which makes it possible for a minister from Transylvania to study for a year at the school each year, adding an international perspective to our work. The school waives tuition for the Balazs scholar.
- The \$2500 Tsubaki Grand Shrine Scholarship makes it possible for a student to spend time with a Shinto community at Tsubaki Grand Shrine in Japan, contributing to multi-cultural and multi-religious learning.
- Starr King has established the Olympia Brown Scholarship Fund (\$40,000) to provide financial aid for people of color and other historically marginalized groups. There are also endowed scholarships set aside for women. Shelter Rock granted us \$500,000 over the past five years for financial aid. A portion of these funds has been and is used specifically to support students of color.
- The Curriculum Committee funds ECO-related Associate Faculty courses. Total budget: \$60,000 per year.
- The Reinhardt Endowed Professorship (\$500,000 endowment) is reserved for a feminist scholar, and the historical model is that the first Reinhardt Professor was required to be a woman scholar.
- The school posts resources on its website and published *In Their Own Words*, a conversation on the Black Empowerment movement. We will begin podcasting this spring, which will help make our ECO work more audible and more widely accessible. The school invests approximately \$20,000 per year for production of communication materials.
- The school has professional development funds for faculty and staff that we use to hire facilitators such as Paul Kivel, Roberto Almanzan, and Robert Horton who are experts in anti-racism and counter-oppressive work to come in and work with faculty and staff (approximately \$1500 annually).
- The Arthur Vining Davis Foundation has granted us \$150,000 for a Director of Studies in Public Ministry, which has helped us to hire a professor with expertise in liberation theologies and ethics.

#### 9. Challenges encountered in doing the work?

Since beginning this work over ten years ago, the school has been challenged by people within and beyond the school who question its importance and actively oppose the high priority we give to it. Some of the resistance has been ugly. Much of it has shown us that we need greater insight into how white privilege, in particular, "performs itself" in Unitarian Universalism, sometimes in the guise of arguments for greater attention to "Unitarian Universalist identity."

In 1996, when we diversified our faculty to include people of color and a queer activist, a number of donors, including the school's largest contributor, withdrew their financial support protesting that we had succumbed to "political correctness." We received hate mail directed against faculty members. For her support of the school's new faculty, the president of our school was attacked as "unbalanced" and "immoral" in a letter sent to 50 major contributors and the UUA Board of Trustees, prompting the head of the department of ministry to follow up on the letter-writer's accusations.

The school responded to this challenge by endeavoring to speak personally to as many of the naysayers as possible. At one point, the chair of the board drove four hours to talk with one writer of an especially angry letter. She listened to his concerns and defended the school's actions.

The school met the challenge of the loss of financial support by launching a \$7 million campaign for the school in 2002. We have raised \$6.5 million so far. The campaign has brought new donors and foundation support to the school—often because of our commitment to Educating to Counter Oppressions and Create Just Communities.

We've also been challenged in our internal relationships with each other in the student body, faculty and board. Conflicts erupted in the student body in fall 2003 over issues of "safety," "political correctness," and "accountability," emerging in connection with transgender concerns and issues related to the U.S. invasion of Iraq. Faculty and students worked together to air concerns and formulate a context for deeper discussion. At the same time, the president and academic dean asked the faculty to go deeper in their own work, especially their engagement of issues of white privilege, Islamophobia, benevolent paternalism, and the culture of "caretaking."

In winter 2004, a widely distributed letter written by a student divided the faculty into two camps—those who were advocating ECO work (including the president and academic dean who were pictured as motivated by personal gain and lacking in academic credentials) and those who were praised for truly doing good work focused on Unitarian Universalist ministerial education. The letter called on the board to investigate and was timed in connection with a visit from the UUA's Panel on Theological Education as a strategy to bring denominational pressure to bear in order to unseat the president and the dean. The board responded by issuing a letter that affirmed its support for the president and dean. We also held an all-school meeting to allow the concerns to be aired, people's feelings to be expressed, and inaccurate information to be countered and corrected. We were additionally helped by the visiting team from the UUA Panel on Theological Education, who listened to the concerns raised and affirmed the importance of the ECO work, offering us supportive counsel and continuing financial support.

By spring 2004, we were experiencing a crisis in the collegial relationships among our core faculty. The unsustainability of workloads was taking a toll on faculty members who experienced the ECO work as an "add on" to already heavy responsibilities. Trust broke down and efforts to bridge differences among faculty members' understandings of what the work asked of us were to little avail. Faculty divisions grew, mirroring and

perhaps intensifying tensions among students with differing opinions, feelings, and experiences about the ECO work. The president and dean called for greater accountability to the ECO document, which heightened long-standing systemic issues at the school regarding the power and authority of the offices of the president and dean and expectations of the faculty.

It was somewhat difficult to separate ECO issues from other issues of morale, personnel, and financial stress. The school dealt with this challenge by calling on the help of an Alban Institute consultant, who interviewed all the faculty and staff, most of the board, and many of the students and made a report to the board that was transparent about issues at the school. His report was concluded in fall 2004. He coached us to work on communication, conflict avoidance, and appropriate boundaries and offered an assessment of issues the school would need to address to align itself more fully with its mission and values. He especially encouraged the president and board chair to work together to empower the board to take the lead in defining and supporting the mission and values of the school.

In early fall 2004, we received a hate-filled letter that threatened harm to a member of our faculty and his family in connection with his advocacy of counter-oppressive education. We met this challenge, with the help of the Berkeley police, by holding a public rally of support for the school's ECO work. UUA President Bill Sinkford spoke, as well as the President of the Graduate Theological Union. UU ministers, friends and supporters from Bay Area UU congregations, the Muslim community and queer communities, UC Berkeley, and the member schools of the GTU attended the rally.

At the same time, during fall 2004, students were engaged in the first required semester-long ECO seminar, which raised challenging issues around the emotional and psychological effort involved in ECO work—prompting some faculty members to raise concerns that the ECO work was abusive. This became a point of contention among the faculty. The Board of Trustees called a new professor whose ministerial work had been among poor and marginalized communities. She embodied a mixed UU/UCC, African American, and lesbian identity. The school had given its larger constituency reason to believe that this appointment would bring a minister from one of our larger congregations to the school. A trustee resigned in protest, after an angry outburst at the board meeting in which he cited his feeling that the school's president was pushing an agenda that had no room for straight, white men. Other trustees, including several who identified as straight, white men, felt otherwise and reaffirmed their support for the school.

In spring 2005, while many ECO-related issues were at a tense point, the board declared financial exigency at the school, which forced a reduction in faculty and staff. In June, the president recommended and the board approved a retrenchment plan. Among other things, the plan allowed the ECO commitments to remain a high priority. The ensuing layoff and retirement of faculty members left some believing that the ECO conflicts, not financial issues, were the “real reason” for “retrenchment.” This left a cloud of bitterness, disappointment, and moral outrage—especially for faculty whose positions were not continued.

By fall 2005, the school had begun to stabilize, with a reduced faculty and staff, but stronger alignment around the ECO priorities. Revisions in the approach of the ECO/Threshold Seminar, based on recommendations from students, led to a successful, grounding learning experience. Issues of sustainability of faculty workloads, however, remain acute. The school now must chart a future path that will assure its long-term sustainability. Conversations are in process with Meadville/Lombard on how the two schools might combine their efforts on behalf of UU theological education. The SKSM board has identified the commitment to ECO work as a key issue that must inform these conversations and the future path we chart.

While the challenges of dealing with loss of funds, threats, disaffiliated graduates, donors and trustees, attacks on the leadership, and divisions in the faculty have been dramatic, the deeper challenges have been the day-to-day efforts to truly live up to our Unitarian Universalist values of justice, equity and compassion. This has challenged us to continually advance our analysis of systemic injustice, our theological reflection, our grounding in Unitarian Universalist history, polity and theologies, and our progressive, humanistic educational practices.

We feel we have only begun.

10. Ways that people of color, BGLT, people with disabilities, and other traditionally marginalized, underserved groups are engaged as leaders/shapers of the work (including this evaluation)?

We can best respond to this question by reframing it in terms of intersecting oppressions and privileges. Starr King's faculty, staff and student body are largely comprised of people from "traditionally marginalized" groups who simultaneously are often also the "historically privileged." The ECO Steering Committee that conducted this assessment is predominantly female (historically marginalized) and white (historically privileged). Several of us are middle and upper middle class (historically privileged). Some of us come from working class and working poor backgrounds (historically marginalized). The committee of nine includes two women of color (historically marginalized), a variety of folk who identify as queer (historically marginalized) and at least two people living with "hidden" disabilities, i.e. chronic illnesses (historically marginalized). It includes one man (historically privileged as male and white, marginalized as queer). It represents a broad range of age of participants. The committee is predominantly, but not exclusively UU in religious affiliation. It includes immigrants to the U.S. and native-born U.S. citizens. Each of us is aware of being a mix of privileged and oppressed identities.

Overall, the school reflects white privilege and class privilege. Racial and ethnic diversity remains low and issues of racial justice are a particularly high priority. Gender justice that includes transgender realities has been an emerging area of increased consciousness and struggle. Transgender leadership is present on the board through a student trustee. The board's membership includes a diversity of racial-ethnics (Latina,

East Asian American, African American, Lebanese-American, and South-Asian American).

It should be noted that people of color leave Starr King's board, faculty and staff more frequently than those who are white. While there are a variety of individual reasons for this, the overall context of Starr King reflects "white supremacy culture" that affects the sustainability of people of color who strive to be present and whole-heartedly engaged.

10. List of any training that students, faculty and staff may have had regarding levels of internalized oppression or levels of understanding the personal impact of oppression?

All M.Div. and MASC students are now required to attend an ECO/Threshold Seminar during their first year in the program. Many members of our staff and faculty come to the school with previous training in anti-oppressions work, including racism, white supremacy, sexism, planned parenthood, queer and transgender issues, classism, ableism, species-ism and animal rights, etc.

A sampling of the programs and trainings people at Starr King have experienced:

- Journey Toward Wholeness course at Starr King, or elsewhere
- Un-training White Racism Program
- Seminarians for Worker Justice Training
- Welcoming Congregation work
- Robert Horton's "Unlearning White Liberal Racism" six-month course
- Crossroads Ministry
- DRUUM activities
- CUUYAN diversity and counter-oppressive work
- UUA workshops from the BGLT office
- Color of Fear workshops with Roberto Almanzan
- Work with Paul Kivel
- Work with Rita Shimmin
- ECO intensives, workshops and courses at Starr King
- Work with Devorah Greenstein and UUA's disabilities office
- Jubilee Workshops
- Faithful Fools street retreats
- University of the Poor
- Association of Theological Schools conference on Women of Color and White Women as Allies
- National Conference on Community and Justice (NCCJ) trainings
- Planned Parenthood trainings on women's health and reproductive rights
- Anti-racism trainings for the UUA board
- Diversity Works approaches with Victor Lee Lewis
- Retreats on Native culture and history at the En'owkin Center, operated by the Okanagan Nation

- Community Alliance for Respect and Equality
- Courses in Queer theologies and theories, Womanist, Mujerista and Asian Women's Theologies, Race and Racism, Black theologies, Eco-Feminisms, Islamophobia, Ethics and Economics, Congregations and Social Change, Nonviolence and Peacemaking
- GenderPAC

11. What are the structural means by which the school community maintains formal and informal attention to these issues?

The ECO Document provides us with a written statement of our goals and aspirations. We use this document to keep our commitments before us, to guide our decisions, and to evaluate our work.

The ECO document guides our decisions about:

- Selection of course offerings and associate faculty
- Training for staff and faculty
- Recruitment and hiring of core faculty and staff
- Selection of trustees
- Selection of programs to present at General Assembly
- Foundations to approach for financial grants
- Communications to donors, funders, and potential students
- Financial aid awards
- Candidates for honorary degrees
- Contributions to the Graduate Theological Union doctoral program and educational initiatives
- Planning the school's annual budget

We evaluate our work in light of the ECO goals by:

- Including questions about ECO goals on all course evaluations
- Including a question about contributions to ECO in faculty evaluations
- Periodically conducting comprehensive evaluations/assessments of our work (such as this one)
- Sharing evaluations of our ECO work with the Board of Trustees
- Incorporating reflection on ECO work into faculty, staff and board meetings

12. Anything else we should be asking, or which would be helpful for us to know?

As you continue your reflection on where the Journey Toward Wholeness work stands throughout our denomination, we'd encourage you to frame some questions about intersections of oppressions (which we've commented on above). How do we move beyond a binary construction of "oppressors" and "the oppressed" and practice what one

of our recent graduates has termed “voluntary complexity”? Sometimes this makes it harder to get your arms around the work but it is necessary. We’d also encourage you to ask others about what they see as the religious basis for UU involvement in anti-racism and counter-oppressive work. We’d like to see conversation on this point deepen and broaden throughout our movement.

We have been struck by the tendency of some in UUsm to unconsciously and uncritically conflate “UU identity” and “white privilege.” We’ve grappled in our context with the extent to which counter-oppressive work can be labeled as an abandonment of or lack of commitment to “UU identity.” We hope your JTW assessment of our whole denomination will give some attention to this difficult sticking point.