



Presidential Task Force on
Accompaniment, Safety and Belonging

**Work Groups Spring Progress
Summary Report**

May 15, 2026

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Task Force Charge and Members

President Katia Passerini launched the Presidential Task Force on Accompaniment, Safety and Belonging in early March 2026. The task force is charged with:

- Providing immediate and ongoing care, communication, and safety support to students impacted by racial harm.
- Partnering with leadership of our Black Student Union (BSU) to address concerns and priorities articulated by students.
- Identifying and remediating systemic gaps in how the University responds to bias, hate, and racialized harm.
- Translating commitments into policies, practices, and accountability structures that endure beyond individual incidents or personnel.

The Task Force is comprised of representatives from many areas of the University, as shown below. It has been engaging students, faculty, and alumni and community leaders to offer perspective and advance this important work.

- Katia Passerini, Ph.D., President
- Kent Porterfield, Vice Provost for Student Affairs (Task Force Chair)
- Nichole Barta, Acting Associate Provost for Faculty Affairs
- Mia Bertagnolli, Interim Provost
- Jenn Crowder, Student Affairs Administration and Operations Officer
- Jeffrey Dennison, Senior Director of Strategic Communications
- Joan Iva Fawcett, Dean, Social Justice Leadership & Community Empowerment
- Jennifer Fountain, Dean of Student Wellbeing
- Emily Harper, Associate General Counsel
- Kurt Heimbigner, Interim Chief Marketing & Communications Officer
- Robin Kelley, Chief Diversity Officer
- Ray Kliewer, Vice President for Human Resources
- Ellen Maccarone, Vice President of Mission Integration
- Devon Thomas, Sr. Associate Athletic Director DEI/EO
- Phillip Tyler, Interim Director, Campus Security and Public Safety
- Borre Ulrichsen, Chief Information Officer
- Nicholas Wright, Assistant Vice President of Diversity
- Brice Yates, Director, Harassment and Discrimination Prevention and Title IX Coordinator

Executive Summary

The Presidential Task Force on Accompaniment, Safety and Belonging was convened to respond to reports of racist incidents occurring on the Gonzaga campus during the Spring 2026 semester and to advance Gonzaga University's commitment to fostering a campus environment grounded in dignity, accountability, and care. Grounded in our Jesuit, Catholic Mission, the Task Force was charged with translating student concerns into institutional action through a structured and coordinated review of policies, practices, and systems. Through its work, the Task Force engaged in comprehensive analysis that included document review, stakeholder engagement, and the synthesis of climate-related insights drawn from multiple institutional surveys (including the National Survey of Student Engagement [NSSE], residential, and senior surveys), along with cross functional evaluation. The work reflects both the urgency of student concerns and the institution's commitment to continuous improvement.

The Task Force finds that Gonzaga University has a strong foundation of Mission-aligned programs, policies, and values. At the same time, the Task Force acknowledges that greater clarity, communication, consistency, and accountability could further strengthen the University's efforts to prevent and respond to acts of racism and other forms of bias or discrimination. Students have indicated that trust in institutional response is shaped not only by the presence of structures, but by the clarity, timeliness, and transparency with which the institution acts.

Across all work groups, consistent themes were identified. These include the need for better communicated accountability systems, strengthening communication practices, better coordination across institutional units, additional training and development opportunities, and more formalized mechanisms to provide for diverse student voices.

The Task Force concludes that meaningful progress will require sustained implementation, institutional capacity, and continued engagement with students. This report presents key findings, a synthesis of common themes, the status of each action item, and next steps to guide institutional action. The work is far from being completed, but it represents a snapshot of a commitment to a journey of continuous improvement which is embodied in our mission of formation of the whole person.

Background

The Task Force was established in response to reports of racist incidents and student advocacy, including formal demands from the Black Student Union and partner student organizations. These demands called for institutional accountability, improved campus climate, and a more visible and effective response to issues of racism, safety, and belonging. Central to these

demands was the expectation that Gonzaga University would acknowledge its role in addressing campus culture, demonstrate transparency in its processes, and commit to concrete changes that would strengthen trust within the campus community.

To address these concerns, President Passerini established the Presidential Task Force on Accompaniment, Safety and Belonging and organized its work across nine defined action areas that correspond to the demands from BSU. A tenth demand, relating to divestment from certain types of University investments, was deemed out of scope from the Task Force as other departments were already engaged and continue their work on addressing our holistic commitment to sustainability. Divestment work is undertaken by the University through many different offices that have been working together for several years to address students' questions and continue to move a comprehensive Laudato Si' program forward. The priority of the Task Force remains to timely address the students' concerns around accompaniment, safety, and belonging. Each action area was assigned to a work group, tasked with intentional incorporation of student input through listening sessions, focus groups, and engagement with student organizations. The Task Force adopted a framework grounded in accompaniment and discernment, reflecting Gonzaga's Jesuit mission. This framework emphasizes communicating with students through sustained engagement, rather than relying on singular actions or statements. It prioritizes relationships, accountability, and responsiveness through good faith engagement and dialogue.

The work of the Task Force has taken place within a broader institutional and national context. Higher education institutions are navigating increased expectations related to inclusion, expression, and accountability, alongside evolving regulatory and political dynamics. These conditions underscore the importance of clarity, coordination, and integrity in institutional response. This document does not encompass the ongoing full work of the Task Force and the University. This report speaks to the progress of the Task Force work groups during the spring 2026 semester.

Methodology

The Task Force employed a structured and multi-layered methodology to ensure that its analysis and recommendations were grounded in both evidence and lived experience. Work groups conducted document reviews of existing policies, procedures, and governing materials. Institutional data sources and engagement metrics were analyzed to identify patterns related to belonging, safety, and student experience.

Student and other stakeholder engagement was a central component of the process. Work groups facilitated listening sessions, focus groups, and invited an expert to speak to faculty, the Task

Force and administrators, to engage in meetings with students, faculty, and staff. These engagements provided qualitative insight into how institutional systems are experienced in practice. In addition, cross functional SWOT analyses were conducted to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and risks associated with each action area.

This analytical approach allowed the Task Force to assess both current capacity and future potential. Where appropriate, work groups also reviewed peer institution practices to provide context and comparative insight. This approach helped ensure that recommendations were informed by both internal realities and broader trends in higher education.

Themes

Across all nine action areas, several consistent themes emerged that provide a unifying framework for understanding the Task Force findings.

- **Accountability and Clarity** – While accountability systems exist within the University, they are distributed across multiple offices and processes. This system can create challenges to understanding expectations, navigating reporting pathways, and anticipating potential outcomes. Students have expressed a desire for greater clarity in how accountability is defined and enacted upon.
- **Communication and Trust** – Communication plays a central role in shaping perceptions of institutional effectiveness. Some students have expressed concerns that some messages from the administration are perceived to be delayed or unclear. Additionally, there is a perception amongst some on campus that interactions with various administrative offices and some faculty have been inconsistent, which has made it challenging to build a trusting relationship. Timely, transparent, and consistent communication is essential for confidence in institutional response.
- **Coordination Across Systems** – Many of the University’s efforts related to safety and belonging are distributed across units. While this reflects a breadth of commitment, it can result in duplication, gaps, and at times may result in inconsistent implementation. Greater alignment and coordination are helpful for maximizing impact.
- **Student Voice and Engagement** – Students consistently expressed interest in more formal and sustained mechanisms for participation in decision making. While engagement opportunities exist, they are seen more often as informal or inconsistent. Strengthening student voice structures represents an opportunity to build trust and improve outcomes.
- **Capacity and Implementation** – Effective implementation requires adequate staffing, funding, and operational alignment. The Task Force recognizes that competing priorities,

institutional capacity, resources and/or legal constraints will require careful examination of what is achievable and how initiatives are prioritized and implemented.

Status of Action Items

Action Item 1: Institutional Statement on Racism, Accountability, and Respect

Status: In progress
Phase: Draft development and stakeholder refinement
Target Completion: Fall 2026

Completed Work:

- Issued campus-wide communications condemning reported incidents of racism on February 24, March 17, March 27, and May 4
- Established the Presidential Task Force on Accompaniment, Safety and Belonging
- Launched a public website to document Task Force activities and provide transparency
- Conducted a SWOT analysis of institutional messaging
- Facilitated student focus group engagement on social media
- Developed three social media campaign concepts focused on impact, accountability, and future actions
- Wrote a draft institutional statement on racism, accountability, and respect

Key Findings:

- Students reported some previous institutional communications were not perceived as being timely or action-oriented
- Messaging did not consistently communicate accountability or institutional response
- Students also expressed frustration that institutional investigative processes take too long and – outside of those directly involved in an investigation and any disciplinary action – there is no sign of accountability, which creates a perception that nothing is happening
- Concepts for a social media campaign focused on addressing online harassment and bias and encouraging civil/respectful discourse were explored but did not receive strong support from BSU and UACC students and were not advanced

Next Steps:

- Refine and finalize the University's institutional statement with key stakeholders

- Examine process for developing and distributing institutional messages to improve timeliness
- Revisit social media campaign concepts for potential fall development, including a campaign around respectful engagement
- Publish finalized institutional statement by beginning of the fall 2026 semester

Action Item 2: Accountability Framework

Status: In progress
Phase: Framework development
Target Completion: Fall 2026

Completed Work:

- Reviewed existing accountability systems across multiple campus units
- Mapped current conduct, reporting, and governance processes
- Identified areas of overlap and fragmentation

Key Findings:

- Accountability processes are distributed across units which at times can result in limited coordination
- Students, faculty, and staff lack clear understanding of different reporting pathways and options
- Existing systems do not transparently explain the different University processes (conduct, bias, and Harassment/Discrimination) or set expectations for individuals involved whether they be a party to the matter or witnesses

Next Steps:

- Develop a unified institutional accountability framework
- Align conduct and reporting systems
- Ensure clear processes, roles, and communication standards are defined for University's Bias, Harassment and Non-Discrimination, and Student Conduct processes.
- Prepare implementation and communication plan to better communicate and clarify accountability systems and potential outcomes for fall 2026

Action Item 3: Digital Safety and Policy Clarification

Status: Completed
Phase: Evaluation and refinement
Target Completion: Fall 2026

Completed Work:

- The [Information Technology Use Policy](#) (ITUP) updated to include additional language expanding the definition around using a Gonzaga email as an IT resource.
- Confirmed with the Resolution Center and Human Resources that using a Gonzaga email address to authenticate to a third-party site and then proceeding to post inappropriate content explicitly stated is a breach of policy.
- Ensured Gonzaga's IT contracts with third party providers give us full access to our data on their platforms. For Fizz, a third-party social media app where there is no contractual relationship, we have no way of accessing data maintained by Fizz on its platform.
- After receiving reports of inappropriate content on Fizz after the February 21 off-campus incident, Gonzaga began monitoring and reporting to Fizz any known or suspected breaches of Fizz's acceptable use policy when the University becomes aware of them.
- Reviewed student conduct language to confirm that inappropriate or harassing online behavior is subject to the Student Code of Conduct.
- Confirmed that the ITUP contains clear language limiting Gonzaga IT staff use of constituent data for anything other than routine maintenance, incident response, or other university approved activity to ensure that monitoring does not constitute generalized surveillance.

Key Findings:

- Expectations for digital behavior are not consistently understood by the campus community
- Policy language varies across systems and platforms

Next Steps:

- Align digital conduct expectations with institutional standards via communications such as a social media campaign
- Align policy language across systems and platforms.

Action Item 4: Mandatory Training and Conduct Enforcement

Status:	In progress
Phase:	Program design and alignment
Target Completion:	Initial rollout Fall 2026

Completed Work:

- Conducted audit of staff and student cultural awareness, bias, DEI, and mandatory training programs such as Title IX
- Compiled a comprehensive inventory of 87 distinct trainings currently offered at Gonzaga, documenting topics, target audiences, and assessment methods
- Identified the need to address gaps between intended outcomes and actual efficacy of trainings as well as in required vs optional trainings
- Analyzed climate data to identify areas of concern
- Completed SWOT analysis of training and conduct systems
- Mapped reporting and referral pathways across offices
- Initiated cross-department coordination practices
- Referred each incident to Spokane Police Department. There is an active case number for February incident.

Key Findings:

- Training programs lack shared learning outcomes and consistent expectations
- Participation is uneven across student populations
- Conduct reporting processes are fragmented and not widely understood
- Limited measurement of long-term training impact

Next Steps:

- Develop standardized learning outcomes across training programs
- Implement hybrid delivery model combining online and in-person training
- Identify student groups that are not currently receiving intercultural development training and integrate mandatory training requirements
- Launch centralized system to track training
- Create assessment to track effectiveness of training programs
- Integrate restorative practices into conduct processes

Action Item 5: Student Governance Framework

Status: In progress
Phase: Policy refinement and alignment
Target Completion: Fall 2026

Completed Work:

- Reviewed GSBA Constitution, Bylaws, and Code of Ethics for GSBA
- Conducted SWOT analysis incorporating student and staff perspectives
- Facilitated listening sessions with student leaders and BSU participants
- Completed a restorative practices workshop with GSBA and UACC student leaders

Key Findings:

- Governance structures are well defined but not widely understood
- Accountability processes are primarily reactive, not proactive
- Students outside of student governance positions lack awareness of GSBA expectations, disciplinary pathways, and reporting mechanisms
- Inconsistent coordination across campus offices increases the risk of confusion and diminished trust

Next Steps:

- Refine governance policies and accountability procedures
- Support GSBA in development of simplified communication and resource materials
- Create centralized student access point for governance information
- Work with GSBA to strengthen coordination with Student Conduct and related offices

Action Item 6: Liaisonship

Status: Advanced planning complete
Phase: Implementation preparation
Target Completion: Launch Fall 2026

Completed Work:

- Conducted engagement with Unity Alliance of Cultural Clubs and student leaders

- Completed infrastructure audit of student voice systems
- Analyzed climate data related to belonging
- Developed a draft liaison role description and scope
- Assessed feasibility and funding structure

Key Findings:

- Existing student representation structures are not fully aligned
- Gaps exist in consistent communication between students and administration
- Students seek sustained and formalized input pathways

Next Steps:

- Finalize within existing structures, governance, role definitions, and funding source for paid, student liaisonship
- Implement student-led hiring process, similar to established student-led hiring processes
- Secure funding and operational support by shifting existing resources
- Develop training and onboarding program
- Launch paid student employment liaison role(s) in Fall 2026

Action Item 7: Student Publications

Status: In development
Phase: Scope definition and research
Target Completion: To be determined

Completed Work:

- Initiated discussions on scope, purpose and limitations of action item ideas

Key Findings:

- Possible to produce a separate publication from the Bulletin but would take an investment in time, capital, labor and equipment
- Unknown if interested student groups would want to put in this effort to see the project through
- Bulletin currently has a diversity editor that reviews each issue for microaggressions
- Bulletin has a DEI tab for online editions, but possibly underutilized

- Bulletin must adhere to journalistic standards as opposed to anonymous publications that are not bound to these standards

Next Steps:

- Determine if there is an interested group of students who would want to take on this project based on interest, estimate, and available resources
- Work with administration and interested groups on further exploring this project

Action Item 8: Recruitment and Retention

STUDENTS

Status: In progress
Phase: Program alignment and visibility
Target Completion: Ongoing

Completed Work:

- Identified existing recruitment and retention programs
- Conducted SWOT analysis across initiatives
- Engaged campus partners in admissions and student support

Key Findings:

- Significant work is already occurring on this action item across campus
- Programs may lack visibility and coordinated messaging
- Opportunities exist to strengthen pathways and long-term support

Next Steps:

- Improve communication and visibility of existing programs
- Expand student support beyond getting students to campus. Need more sustained efforts supporting students throughout their academic journey to create authentic belonging.
- Develop pathway programs to admission for local communities
- Explore long-term, legally-compliant funding strategies to increase recruitment and retention

FACULTY

Status:	In progress
Phase:	Assessment and Engagement
Target Completion:	To be determined

Completed Work:

- Reviewed current hiring practices
- Reviewed workload expectations across academic units and faculty concerns related to transparency, consistency, and invisible labor
- Reviewed literature, institutional models, and research on workload equity, faculty burnout, invisible labor, faculty vitality, and faculty retention
- Conducted conversations with faculty affinity group leaders and participants regarding faculty connection, community, and institutional support needs
- Held faculty input sessions on expanding connection, visibility of affinity groups, and community-building
- Hosted the Equity and Belonging Summit on April 14, 2026, including programming on microaggressions, accessibility, culturally responsive communication, identity, belonging, and classroom dialogue
- Collected participant feedback and assessment data related to continued faculty development needs
- Initiated discussions aligned with the Woodley Institute for Civil Engagement and Humanistic Dialogue
- Conducted faculty input sessions on classroom climate, belonging, communication, and responding to challenging classroom situations
- Reviewed current student feedback and reporting practices
- Reviewed research on student feedback, classroom climate, belonging, bias in perception data, and interpretation practices
- Faculty Senate approved a Structured Student Feedback pilot instrument for Fall 2026, including belonging-related feedback measures
- Conducted conversations with Faculty Senate, faculty, and deans regarding implementation and interpretation
- Reviewed Faculty Handbook expectations related to professional responsibilities to students, classroom climate, and communication
- Reviewed University Policies and Procedures Manual related to coaching, documentation, corrective processes, and response procedures

- Reviewed student concerns related to institutional accountability, communication, and classroom climate
- Initiated discussions on institutional response processes
- Developed draft coaching processes and letter of expectations materials in coordination with relevant departments

Key Findings:

- Faculty recruitment practices are structured and increasingly standardized, though capacity and consistency vary across units
- Faculty workload practices lack consistent transparency and may result in inequities, including invisible labor and disproportionate service responsibilities
- Faculty retention is strongly connected to belonging, community, and visibility of affinity groups
- Faculty development needs are clearly identified, specifically related to classroom climate, civil dialogue, and responding to challenging situations
- Student feedback systems are evolving but require clearer guidance, interpretation frameworks, and consistent implementation
- Institutional response processes related to faculty professional responsibilities are not fully aligned, consistent, or clearly understood across the institution

Next Steps:

- Expand leadership development and faculty search support through implementation of a Faculty Fellow role, strengthening search training, and assessing and expanding Search Advocate capacity
- Continue development of institutional workload principles and guidelines, pilot workload planning templates, and work with deans to create school-level guidance supporting consistency and performance related concerns.
- Implement faculty connection and community-building programming, increase visibility of affinity groups, and integrate engagement opportunities into institutional events, with ongoing faculty feedback
- Expand faculty development programming related to classroom dialogue and engagement, support faculty in responding to challenging situations, identify priority development topics, and implement ongoing programming, assessment, and recognition
- Develop student guidance on constructive feedback, expand mid-semester feedback opportunities, provide faculty guidance on interpretation and response, and pilot, evaluate, and refine structured student feedback processes

- Clarify and align institutional response processes related to professional responsibilities, including coaching, documentation, communication, and follow-up; develop training for department chairs and deans; and pilot and refine response processes with ongoing assessment and feedback

Action Item 9: Dedicated Belonging Spaces

Status:	In progress
Phase:	Assessment and engagement
Target Completion:	Ongoing

Completed Work:

- Developed comprehensive inventory of campus spaces
- Assessed current usage and availability

Key Findings:

- Identified that several spaces supporting belonging currently exist on campus but such spaces do not appear to be fully aligned with student expectations
- Students seek identity-affirming spaces rather than general-use spaces
- Limited awareness of existing space availability

Next Steps:

- Improve communication of available spaces
- Identify short-term opportunities for adaptation
- Continue student engagement to refine requirements
- Explore long-term, legally-compliant planning for any additional belonging-centered spaces

Strengths

The Task Force identified several institutional strengths that provide a strong foundation for continued progress. Gonzaga University demonstrates a clear commitment to its mission and to the principles of accompaniment and community. Existing programs and initiatives provide meaningful support to students and reflect institutional investment in belonging and inclusion. The structure of the Task Force itself represents a strength. The use of defined action areas, cross

functional collaboration, and data informed analysis has created a comprehensive and coordinated approach to addressing complex challenges. Engagement with students throughout the process provided important insight and ensured that recommendations are grounded in lived experience. This approach has strengthened both the quality and relevance of the work.

Opportunities

Significant opportunities exist to build on this foundation and advance institutional priorities. The development of a unified accountability framework represents a critical opportunity to improve clarity and trust across the campus community. Enhancing communication practices will strengthen perceptions and practices of responsiveness and transparency. Formalizing student voice through initiatives such as the liaison program can create sustained pathways for engagement and influence. Improving coordination across units will increase efficiency and effectiveness, while greater visibility of existing programs will enhance utilization and impact. Collectively, these opportunities position Gonzaga University to serve as a leader among peer institutions in advancing mission aligned practice.

Conclusion and Next Steps

The Task Force concludes that Gonzaga University is well positioned and committed to making meaningful and sustained progress in advancing accompaniment, safety, and belonging. The work to date reflects a strong foundation and clear pathways to responding to student concerns. During the summer, Task Force work groups will focus on completing work that can be accomplished while most students and faculty are away from campus. Specifically, summer commitments which were posted previously on the Presidential Task Force website are listed below.

- We will post a clear statement that condemns racism and other forms of discrimination – and reiterates the University’s long-standing policy against them – on an easily accessible Presidential Task Force web page that calls for respectful engagement. (Action Item 1)
- We will make reporting easier for students by developing a “one-stop” reporting location where cases will be routed to the appropriate office(s) for timely follow-up. (Action Item 2)
- We will provide a visual explanation of how accountability works with bias, Title IX, harassment and discrimination reporting, and the range of possible outcomes from Student Code of Conduct violations. (Action Item 2)
- We will reexamine communication protocols to ensure that the parties involved in bias, harassment and discrimination, or Student Code of Conduct cases, are kept informed through each stage of the respective processes. (Action Items 2 and 4)

- We will summarize changes made to the Information Technology Use Policy as they relate to ZagMail email accounts, with an explanation of what happens when the policy is violated. (Action Item 3)
- We will offer student development programs that focus on belonging and community beginning with 2026 New Student Orientation and Fall Welcome Weekend and will assess the effectiveness of these programs. (Action Item 4)

In the fall, Task Force work groups will continue to meet, expand as needed, and engage with faculty, staff, and students to advance recommendations contained in this summary report. Immediate next steps in the fall include continued development of the accountability framework, and further exploration of initiatives such as training enhancements and the liaison program.

Successful implementation will require continued focus, alignment, and accountability. The University must establish clear ownership for each action area and develop mechanisms for ongoing evaluation and reporting. Progress will be communicated regularly to the campus community to reinforce the University's commitment to transparency through regular updates to the University's [webpage](#). Most importantly, this work will remain grounded in the Ignatian value of accompaniment. Sustained engagement with students, combined with consistent institutional action, is essential to achieving long-term impact.