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New PSU report finds Multnomah County 'uniquely toxic' for people of color -- and getting worse

By Janie Har, The Oregonian

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Multnomah County is a "uniquely toxic place" for people of color — be they of Asian, African or Native descent — according to a new report authored by faculty at Portland State University.

The report was commissioned by a **coalition of minority groups** and its findings will be presented to the **Portland City Council tomorrow at 2 p.m.** The lead researcher is Ann Curry-Stevens, an assistant professor at the **Graduate School of Social Work** who moved to Portland from Toronto three years ago.

She said she was stunned by the size of the achievement gap between minorities and whites.

"I suspected that the general experience between rich and the poor, and the growing inequalities were likely to be more deeply felt by communities of color, but the common rhetoric is how wonderful and progressive Portland is," she said.

"By no stretch did I imagine the breadth of disparity."

The 152-page report is the first of seven research documents to come. The others will drill down into specific communities, including Slavic immigrants and refugees in the county.

People of color make up 26 percent of the county, and 45 percent of **Portland Public Schools**. Among the findings, which cover health, housing, education, occupation, and income:

About 7 percent of whites drop out of high school, compared with 30 percent of minorities.

Some 62 percent of whites own homes, while only 45 percent of minorities do.

The child poverty rate for Native Americans is 45 percent, for African Americans 41 percent, and for whites, 12.5 percent.

People of color earn about one-half that of whites, about \$16,636 a year compared with \$33,095 for white workers.

Individual income for Latinos is about one-third that of whites.

Minorities in Multnomah County fare worse — about 33 percent worse — than minorities in King County.

Asian Americans, she said, tend to perform the same as or better than whites in education and occupation nationally. Not so in Multnomah County.

"What has been profound to realize is the Asian Pacific Islander communities look a lot like other communities of color," she said.

The city of Portland contributed \$50,000 and Multnomah County kicked in \$100,000 in fiscal year 2009 to help pay for the research. The Communities of Color Coalition (including NAYA, Urban League, Asian Family Center, Latino Network and others), Portland State and the **Northwest Health Foundation** provided money too.

The report demands an accurate count of people of color now. It also recommends more money for culturally specific solutions to help with schooling, jobs, housing and health. That will be difficult since Mayor Sam Adams is scheduled to release -- any day now -- a proposed one-year budget heavy with cuts.

The Oregonian will have more tomorrow, from the council meeting, and a [link to the report](#).

-- Janie Har

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