

Institutionalizing Consciousness-Raising as a Strategy to Address Structural Racism and Implicit Bias on Campus

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Today's Learning Outcomes

Like many universities in rural Pennsylvania, Clarion University is a small, Predominantly White Institution (PWI) set within a small, predominately white town. We strive for a more informed, more equitable campus. What deliberate steps can we take to raise consciousness and promote intercultural awareness across campus? How can we promote the risk-taking that is necessary to engage in difficult conversations about race inside and outside the classroom? Learn today about three different type of institutionalized, consciousness-raising models. Strategize with us about how to incorporate these models onto your campuses and into your classrooms.

Three Campus Initiatives

The national disparity that exists between white students and students of color who graduate from a college or university within six years is well-documented. In an effort to influence classroom performance, improve student retention and graduation rates, and most importantly, create a campus climate that is inclusive, our campus has employed three initiatives to help faculty, staff, and administrators understand how structural racism and implicit bias influence classroom performance.

- 1. Online training:** A seven-module course entitled "Race Equity Training" was offered to faculty and staff during Summer 2018. Participants noted that it was rigorous, informative, and eye-opening and that it helped them to think about their actions in the classroom and the changes they can make to help students succeed.
- 2. Building Bridges:** Small group discussions led by students trained in talking about race with their peers. For 26 years, teams of Clarion University students have been visiting classrooms to engage their peers in conversations about issues related to race, ethnicity, and diversity.
- 3. Bi-monthly newsletter:** A diverse team collaborated to provide the campus community with concrete action steps to address implicit bias in themselves, their classrooms, and in their communities.

Background in Consciousness-Raising and its Effectiveness:

Consciousness-raising works to redefine the (potential) emotions of pity and sympathy into the emotions of moral outrage and collective injustice with the goal of making concrete change by incorporating an inclusive ally base.

It is most frequently associated with Paolo Freire and his influential work, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). Consciousness-raising leads to the delegitimization of the status quo and systems of inequality. The process of consciousness-raising begins with reflection as participants reflect upon concrete experiences and perspectives. Participants then take action and further reflect upon these new experiences (praxis). This process reinforces "ideas of egalitarianism and collective action," thereby fostering a commitment "to action [and] the promotion of justice" (Levine, 1988).



Initiative 1: Race Equity Training

- Rigorous, free, online training available for Clarion University faculty and staff during the summer of 2019
- Seven self-paced modules, available from June 4 - July 31, 2018.
- Enrollment capped at 20 participants, 9 participants completed all seven modules.

Modules

- 1: Talking about Race & Ethnicity
- 2: Social Construction of Race
- 3: Institutional Racism
- 4: Color Blind Racism
- 5: White Privilege & Microaggressions
- 6: Racialized Social Control
- 7: The New Jim Crow

Sample assignments

Roughly four assignments per module, including TED talks, documentaries, selected readings from books, peer-reviewed papers and magazine articles. For example:

- *The New Jim Crow* by Michelle Alexander
- *Racism Without Racists* by Eduardo Bonilla-Silva
- *Race: The Power of an Illusion* (three part series)
- *The Souls of Black Folks* by W.E.B. DuBois

- For each assignment, participants used the discussion board to respond to specific questions for each assignment. Participants were also asked to respond to at least one of their colleagues' posts per assignment.
- At least one of the facilitators read and responded to each of the posts within 48 hours.

Course Learning Objectives:

- Participants will talk about race and ethnicity through asking questions, sharing experiences, and discussing current issues openly and honestly.
- Understand how social forces shape race and ethnic relations as well as how intergroup relations influence social institutions and the everyday life experiences of individuals.
- View race and ethnic relations from a historical perspective.
- Identify needed areas of social change for race equity to become a reality.

Definitely a rewarding experience...An awareness course like this plays a big role in bringing about the commencement of a peaceful tomorrow.

...I will use my voice in a larger way than I have before. The videos and readings were well chosen and thought-provoking.

As much as I knew, I still learned a lot. I'm looking forward to going back into this course frequently to review and find materials that I can use in my classroom.

One of my primary "jobs" has to be how I educate my own children. ...This course has really helped me to think about the complexity of race in daily life. I will not shy away from such conversations.

Every module taught me something new and I really liked that. I also enjoyed the journey of self-awareness, self-assessment and self-learning.

The course points could have been made with pared down readings and assignments.

It seemed as if you were preaching to the choir (we were self selected).



Initiative 2: The Building Bridges Program

- The program's primary goal is to facilitate communication and collaboration between university students of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds.
- Students are selected through an interview process and receive ongoing training on effective listening, non-defensive communication of feelings, creating an open and supportive atmosphere, and handling difficult group members.
- These teams of student associates have been visiting classrooms or organizations and facilitating conversations about race and ethnicity with their peers for more than 25 years.
- Survey data exists for 333 separate workshops. The feedback has been overwhelmingly positive.
- Selected comments through the years:

The openness of the group was really helpful and informative. It allowed us to become comfortable talking about issues that are not always discussed.

I feel that everyone should know what Building Bridges is and what they do.

This really opened my eyes to how the world is. We don't say anything, but we want to see change. How will change happen without taking the first step?

The session helped spark my own thinking of how to incorporate diversity in my own teaching.

Presenters were welcoming, engaging, and organized.

The fact that this class was only about black people was pretty pitiful. I am not racist at all... Very unnecessary.

Initiative 3: Newsletter entitled A Better Place

- A newsletter distributed by hard copy to all faculty and staff twice a semester.
- The goal is to build awareness among staff and faculty about issues regarding race and ethnicity so as to create a supportive and more equitable environment for our students and employees.
- Each newsletter provides readers with concrete action steps that he/she can take to address issues that they see in themselves or others. For example, we have addressed implicit bias, stereotype threat, and what to say when your friends or family members make a racist comment.



References:

Freire, P. (1970). *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York : Herder and Herder.
 Levine, D. (1988). *The Review of Politics*, 50 (2), 241.