Engaging in Institutional Change:
Training Faculty, Staff, and Students to Create a
New Campus Climate through Understanding Racism

SUNY Potsdam’s Proposal to
SUNY Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion’s
2015-16 Explorations in Diversity and Academic Excellence Program

Enthusiastically endorsed by

Dr. Margaret Madden, SUNY Potsdam Provost
4/9/15
Date

Dr. Susan Stebbins, Special Assistant to the
President on Diversity
4/7/15
Date
Abstract: The purpose of the project is to improve the campus climate through increasing faculty members’, staff members’, and students’ recognition of racism and tools, motivation, and ownership to respond to it. We propose a yearlong series of training events and sustained discussion groups, which will intersect with other activities offered outside the grant.

Project Narrative

a. Purpose of the project

The purpose of the project is to improve the campus climate through increasing faculty members’, staff members’, and students’ understandings of racism and responsible responses to it.

b. The project’s contribution to promoting diversity and academic excellence

This project will advance faculty and staff members’ understanding of racial issues in a majority-white college, helping them to develop a common language and awareness of strategies for facilitating discussion of racism and for intervening in everyday racism. The goal is that faculty and staff will take a more active role in mediating discussions about race among students -- in the classroom, in extra-curricular activities and employment sites, and in informal interaction in the residence halls, dining halls, library, etc. The project will also include work with students.

Current students of color at SUNY Potsdam have demanded such training for faculty. At a Campus Forum on Race in December 2014, students of color organized themselves to ask our President explicitly, “What is the college going to do to train faculty to better handle discussions of race in the classroom?” At the same forum, white students asked, “I want to be an ally to people of color, but I don’t know what to do; I don’t know where to learn about race and racism.”

The goal of the proposed project is to create a dispersed sense of ownership and responsibility for issues of race and racism, as well as new skills for recognizing and responding to it. The long term goal is institutional change. The proposed project includes a professional presentation for all faculty, followed by more intensive training for faculty and staff who will work in discussion groups to develop a deeper understanding of these issues. These individuals will assume a leadership role to continue steering organizational change for diversity, inclusion, and excellence. In addition, the project includes some focused work with students to engage them on the same question of how to recognize and respond to racism or bias.

This project will support academic excellence by creating a significant shift in climate. The major goal is to increase understanding among faculty and staff, with the explicit intention that they will mediate more honest and responsible communication among students about race in all settings. This shift would enhance classroom learning but also improve the larger campus environment in which students learn and interact. Faculty will become more able to integrate issues of race, diversity, and power into their curricula, bringing relevant aspects of their field into their classes with more skill and confidence. Thus, faculty will become better teachers through deliberate experiential and guided learning. Students may become better able to hear and engage diverse speakers and perspectives with respect, rigor, and honesty.
Smaller efforts are already underway on our campus. In response to students’ demands at the Campus Forum on Race, the college’s Diversity in Action Coalition (DIAC) is conducting a Campus Climate Survey and focus groups. It is sponsoring three structured discussions of race, racism, white privilege, and microaggressions. Students’ written responses to these events will be used, with permission, in creating a large mural/poster to express students’ hopes and pain around race and racism. In addition, our Department of Theater and Dance will create a short play to represent typical scenarios (drawn from focus groups) of interracial conflict in classrooms and residence halls. This play will become a short video to use in all trainings, and the videography will be paid for through the campus’s contribution to the grant project.

Thus, the Potsdam College community has a strong desire to work on issues of interracial conflicts, as well as a strong need for change in our institutional culture. We have engaged in many discussions already this year. We are gathering data to serve as a foundation for next year’s work. We need the support of this grant to bring a large-scale training program which can help to fuel institutional change.

Climate on SUNY Potsdam campus

In 2010-12, Potsdam’s curriculum benefitted from an ODEI grant. 50 faculty met in disciplinary groups for eight workshops with visiting experts on diversifying curriculum. Since then, the percentage of US students of color here has grown from 12% in 2010 (a jump up from 8% in previous years) to 24% of our student body. Of 249 full-time faculty and 108 adjunct faculty, only 35 faculty self-identify as members of minority groups. Only four of those are typically overtly involved in current efforts to address racism publicly on campus. While our campus is known as a friendly one, the campus culture is not entirely prepared to facilitate responsible discussions of race among such a diverse student body. There is a definite need for all faculty/staff to have the opportunity to develop a stronger understanding and shared commitment to address race and racism. At least three dozen faculty and staff have already expressed strong interest in these efforts.

White students come from a wide range of rural, suburban, and urban high schools across the state, and they bring an equally wide array of preparation in interracial communication. This has become clear in the residence halls and in classrooms, where misunderstandings, ignorance, and defensiveness have caused verbal conflicts. There are also quieter tensions between Blacks and Hispanics. Sometimes, white students, faculty, and staff show naivete, defensiveness, or aggression. As at Binghamton and several other campuses, Potsdam students, faculty, and staff protesting the non-indictment of Darren Wilson experienced racist harassment through anonymous social media; that incident led to the Campus Forum on Race mentioned above.

This environment affects academic excellence. While most faculty and staff are caring and generally very supportive of diversity on campus, they do not necessarily have the skills to lead and educate on these issues. In the social environment just described, they may struggle to manage emotional discussions on important issues. Some concerned faculty/staff worry that students of color’s experiences and perspectives will be suppressed if students or the teacher raise issues of racism. Some white students react against faculty who do raise the issues, but
those faculty are not prepared to respond or to design more effective learning experiences. A few faculty/staff simply do not recognize the issues very well at all, and thus do not understand how they might play into stereotype threat or microaggressions themselves.

c. How the project engages diverse campus communities

The project proposes to engage a large group of 200-300 faculty and staff in a presentation with two professional trainers. It will then deeply engage 50 faculty and staff in two intensive professional trainings (in October and April) on addressing racism as well as year-long discussion groups. Finally, the project engages students in two meetings with professional trainers. The grant will fund the trainers’ fees and the purchase of a common book and films for discussion groups and other events. **Grant-funded items are bolded in the timeline below.** Other supporting activities are not funded by the grant, but are listed here to show the scope of our plans.

- Summer:
  - Form a steering committee for the project
  - Summer visit to Syracuse University’s Intergroup Dialogue Program to learn more about their approach and to explore a visit to Potsdam by Gretchen Lopez.
  - Summer visit to Binghamton University’s MRC to learn about their workshop program.
  - Reading group settle on a book for discussion groups.
  - Transcribe focus groups with students of color, and write a report for faculty/staff to demonstrate problems. Edited transcripts will be shared with Dr. Jay Pecora to prepare for development of play.
  - Inventory of books, videos, and other materials held by faculty and staff who might be willing to share them. Inventory of faculty/staff training and expertise.

- Early fall:
  - Recruitment of faculty and staff participation in trainers’ large-group presentation and sustained discussion groups.
  - Creation of short play representing classroom/dorm situations drawn from focus groups with students of color. Process will be led by Dr. Jay Pecora of our Department of Theater and Dance, working with student actors.
  - **Videography and editing** completed by mid-October. Work to be done by Doyle Dean, a skilled videographer.
  - **Creation of a large mural/poster** of students’ expressions of hope and pain around race and racism, drawn with students’ permission from responses to spring 2015 film, workshops, and discussions.
• Mid-fall (between October 15 and November 14):
  o Two days of training for faculty, staff, and students with professional trainers Jean Fei and Frankie Condon (resumés available on request).
  o Thursday 4pm: Public presentation by trainers for 200-300 faculty and staff on topic of recognizing and responding to racism in classroom and extra-curricular settings.
    ▪ Includes video of dramatic performance based on focus groups.
    ▪ Trainers will integrate other identities/power issues such as gender, sexual orientation and gender identity, religion.
    ▪ Refer to Moodle online course management system for articles, videos, resources.
  o Friday 10am: Trainers meet with students, probably in two distinct caucuses of white students and students of color.
  o Friday 1pm: Workshop for faculty and staff: Topic is being part of institutional change against racism. Discussion groups will be launched here.

• Late fall and winter:
  Faculty/staff discussion groups will meet:
  Groups of 4-5 who share available time and perhaps disciplinary area
  o Meet four times for 1.5-2 hours each to discuss
  o White Like Me: Race, Racism, and White Privilege with Tim Wise and If These Halls Could Talk, a documentary of authentic conversations about race and racism among college students, by director Lee Mun Wah (dir., The Color of Fear). Public screenings will be offered and DVDs and streaming access will be available.
  o Common reading, a book purchased through the grant. We are considering several, especially “When Race Breaks Out” : Conversations about Race and Racism in College Classrooms; The Everyday Language of White Racism; and Race in the College Classroom: Pedagogy and Politics.
  o Articles and short videos available on Moodle online course management system.
  o Participants’ experiments and efforts to address race responsibly in class and extra-curricular activities.
  o Complete a joint evaluation and participate in April plenary.
• Other speakers, outside of the grant, could be scheduled and open to faculty, staff, and students. They might include Aja Martinez of Binghamton University and Tamika L. Carey of University at Albany on critical race theory and rhetoric; Kevin Railey of Buffalo State; Jennifer Ball of Clarkson University on bystander intervention; and Gretchen Lopez of Syracuse University on intergroup dialogue. These are also speakers we would like to convene in the future for a North Country SUNY conference on race and academic excellence.

• Other events will include films with discussion and Diversity in Action Workshops open to faculty, staff, and students.

• April and May:

  One day of training with for faculty, staff, and students with professional trainers Jean Fei and Frankie Condon.

  o Plenary with trainers: Discussion Group participants will participate in a plenary session in April (Friday, April 1 or 15 at 1pm) with professional trainers. Participants will share some conclusions, insights, and future plans, as well as specific recommendations for the college and community. A plan will be designed to hold discussion group members accountable and to facilitate sharing of their results with other groups.

  o Interested faculty/staff who did not participate in the discussion groups will be welcome to attend.

  o Trainers meet with students in the morning, probably in two distinct caucuses of white students and students of color.

  o Planning for future: Wednesday, May 25, interested faculty/staff will meet to design an action plan for summer and next year.

• Throughout the year: Trainings for students:
  • As we have this year, Center for Diversity (CFD) and Diversity in Action Coalition (DIAC) will co-sponsor discussions, activities, and films about race, including White Like Me: Race, Racism, and White Privilege, If These Halls Could Talk, Latinos Beyond Reel, and Marlon Riggs’ Ethnic Notions and Color Adjustment.

  • Professional trainers will meet with groups of students in October and April.

  • Professional trainers will design a workshop which CFD and DIAC will continue to offer. We hope to make these workshops mandatory for some of these groups: tutors, pre-service teachers, resident assistants, Greek Council members, and Emerging Leaders.
d. The expected long-term impact of the project

The goal of the proposed project is to create a dispersed sense of ownership and responsibility for issues of race and racism, as well as new skills for recognizing and responding to it. The long term goal is institutional change by creating a shared literacy and capacity for action among faculty and staff, while also shifting our conversation with students.

Individuals involved in yearlong discussion groups will be strongly encouraged to assume leadership roles in continuing to steer organizational change for diversity, inclusion, and excellence.

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e. Method for assessing the outcomes of the project. We expect strong rates of participation in each event. We expect participating faculty and staff to recognize racism and plan responsible responses in new ways.

- rates of participation
- evaluation forms for each event, to be completed by faculty, staff, and student participants
- evaluation completed jointly by members of each discussion group specifying both what the group has done and each member’s action plan for improvement in the future
- end of year summary and recommendations for next year’s campus activities, including those developed at May 25 discussion
- reports from trainers: description of events and brief reflections on strengths, weaknesses, growth demonstrated, and recommendations
4. Budget & Budget Narrative

a. Detailed budget

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<th>Item</th>
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**Videography** and editing of short play drawn from focus groups. $2,500 (campus contribution)

**Print a mural/poster** of students’ expressions of hope and pain around race and racism. $300 (campus contribution).

**Fees for Professional Trainers $4,900**
- at $350/trainer/day for 14 days including preparation
- $2,800 Fall session: two days on campus plus two days of preparation for two trainers
- $700 Trainers design workshop for students: one day for two trainers
- $1,400 Spring session: one day on campus plus one day of preparation for two trainers
- Resumés available on request

**Travel/lodging for professional trainers $2,327**

- Jean Fei from Saratoga Springs, NY $979 subtotal
  - Driving 330 miles RT x 2 = $363
  - Hotel $524 ($83 Th. + $179 Friday, in Oct. and April)
  - Food $23 for dinner x4 = $92
- Frankie Condon from Waterloo, ON. $1348 subtotal
  - Travel to airport 120 miles roundtrip = $132
  - Airfare and parking $300 x 2 = $600 minimum
  - Hotel $524 ($83 Th. + $179 Friday, in Oct. and April)
  - Food $23 for dinner x4 = $92
Books for discussion groups $1500
  - One book $30 x 50 participants (after quantity discount from publisher)
  - Also use Moodle for articles and free videos

Video rental and purchase $1,250
  - *White Like Me: Race, Racism, and White privilege*, produced by Media Education Foundation based on Tim Wise’s work. One-year rental for $150 allows multiple parties to access streaming site easily.
  - *If These Halls Could Talk*, directed by Lee Mun Wah (dir., *The Color of Fear*). Purchase for $1,100, as rental is not available.

b. Justification for amount requested.

The campus will pay for videography by a regular consultant to the college. The subject will be a short play created by faculty and students, drawing from focus groups with students of color.

The bulk of the requested funds will pay two professional trainers, Jean Fei of Saratoga Springs and Frankie Condon of the University of Waterloo, Ontario (supporting materials attached). We need outside, professional trainers to inspire and inform a “locally grown” shift in campus culture. We hope to engage them not as “stars” to drop in and do a one-time performance, but as consultants who will work with us twice during the year and who will design a workshop we can offer to students regularly.

Both trainers have extensive experience leading anti-racism trainings. Both have worked for SUNY campuses, and they have collaborated through a small anti-racism training program based in Albany. As a graduate student, Frankie Condon addressed the 20,000+ students who rallied in Albany to save EOP and CUNY/SUNY funding in 1994. Both trainers are well-known to and trusted by one of our longtime faculty members who has been active in this year’s efforts.

The balance of the funds is required to buy books and films for use in public events for faculty, staff, and students as well as by faculty/staff discussion groups. The films will be available to all participants. The books will remain the possession of participating faculty members.

c. Source of the 25% campus support for the project: Provost/Academic Affairs