Overcoming Systemic Racism in Higher Education: Toward Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

2020 Board of Visitors Orientation

Public Institution Governance in Unprecedented Times:
An Educational Program for Recent Board Appointees
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4:15PM – 5:15PM

ALIGN. ADVOCATE. ADVANCE.

Overcoming Systemic Racism in Higher Education

The steps are simple:

1. **Acknowledgement**
2. **Awareness**
3. **Alliance**
4. **Advocacy**
5. **Accountability**

Overcoming Systemic Racism in Higher Education

Step

1

Acknowledgement

(History)

Overcoming Systemic Racism in Higher Education

The first step in overcoming systemic racism is to acknowledge that it exists.

However, acknowledging its existence means that you must know what it is.

In this session, we will not only define systemic racism but give examples of how it shows up in higher education.

We will also define, equity, diversity and inclusion as tenets to help us overcome systemic racism in higher education.

Systemic Racism

"A [social structure] in which public policies, institutional practices, cultural representations, and other norms work in various, often reinforcing ways to perpetuate racial group inequity. It identifies dimensions of our history and culture that have allowed privileges associated with "whiteness" and disadvantages associated with "color" to endure and adapt over time. [Systemic] racism is not something that a few people or institutions choose to practice. Instead it has been a feature of the social, economic and political systems in which we all exist."[1]

Systemic racism is enforceable by violence, state-sanctioned and otherwise.

There is and always has been grassroots resistance to systemic racism.

[1]. See "Glossary for Understanding the Dismantling Structural Racism/Promoting Racial Equity Analysis," from The Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change. (https://assets.aspeninstitute.org/content/uploads/files/content/docs/rcc/RCC-Structural-Racism-Glossary.pdf)

Institutional Racism

Institutional racism (also known as systemic racism) is a form of racism that is embedded as normal practice within society or an organization. It can lead to issues such as discrimination in criminal justice, employment, housing, health care, political power and education, among others.

One historic example of institutional racism in education is the barring of African-American students from attending certain public schools, which limited students' educational opportunities and assisted in preventing them from achieving equal opportunities.

Virginia's Historical Context

Sanctioned massive resistance to integration in Virginia education-legislation signed into law on September 29, 1956 "…No child shall be required to enroll in or attend any school where both white and colored children are enrolled." (Acts of Assembly, Chapter 59)

Governor Northam's Commission to Examine Racial Inequity in Virginia Law wrote, "It is clear that Virginia's policymakers engaged in deliberate and coordinated legislative strategies both to deny equal educational opportunities to black students and preserve white students' ability to attend white-only schools." (Interim Report, November 15, 2019, pg. 7)

Overcoming Systemic Racism in Higher Education

The logic of system racism has always been simple.

Systems argue that they do not intend results that disadvantage racial minorities.

They assume that differences along racial lines are inevitable, unrelated to their systemic practices.

But the logic of systemic racism collapses once we discover differing ways of structuring our systems that accomplish the same end results, but without the racial differences.

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Step

2

Awareness

(Diversity)

Diversity Defined

Diversity is the range of human differences, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, social class, physical ability or attributes, religious or ethical values system, national origin, and political beliefs.

Overcoming Systemic Racism in Higher Education

The failure to explore changes to higher education structures that would close racial gaps for success is tied to our lack of awareness of the needs of diverse groups.

These gaps are where systemic racism mostly lives in higher education, gaps born of low expectations for students of color and inadequate support for their success.

Hiring a diversity officer, recruiting more students of colors, nor tinkering with curriculum will resolve these challenges without considering the policies and culture of the institutions.

This is also where implicit bias of policy makers regarding diverse populations surface.

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Step

3

Alliance

(Inclusion)

Inclusion Defined

Inclusion is involvement and empowerment, where the inherent worth and dignity of all people are recognized. An inclusive environment promotes and sustains a sense of belonging; it values and practices respect for the talents, beliefs, backgrounds and ways of living of its members.

Overcoming Systemic Racism in Higher Education

As long as students of color and other marginalized students are not included in success—success of graduating/completing—most all other gestures of inclusion are ineffective.

Looking at our institutional data disaggregated by race should help institutions of higher learning make the structural changes necessary to close the success gap.

However, if we are serious about ending systemic racism, everyone must be intentional and purposeful about creating a space for all which requires a focus on addressing institutional barriers in the culture and climate as well as policies and procedures.

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Step

4

Advocacy

(Equity)

Equity Defined

The University of Southern California, Center for Urban Education defines equity as the acknowledgment of the patterns of imbalance in various structures, policies and practices that affect student outcomes for people of color "and awareness of the social and historical context of exclusionary practices in American higher education." https://cue.susc.edu/equity/equity-mindedness/

The Southern Rural Development Center defines it as equal access to resources and opportunities for all.

The Center for Social Inclusion defines racial equity as both an outcome and a process.

FIGURE 7 | Equality vs. equity in the short and long term

In this first image, it is assumed that everyone benefits from the same support. They are being treated **equally**.

Individuals are given different support to make it possible for them to have equal access to the view. They are being treated **equitably**.

All three can see the view without any support because the cause of inequality was addressed. The systemic barrier has been **removed**.

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As we explore the implications of institutional racism in higher education and raise state discourse and action around advocacy, we must focus on equity and anti-racism to ensure that Virginia's education system is one that maximizes the potential of all students.

This shows up in unwelcoming scholastic cultures; unequal opportunities to participate and succeed; and students not seeing themselves in the fabric of the institution through pedagogy or sheer representation.

Overcoming Systemic Racism in Higher Education

Everyone in academia should acknowledge the role institutions play in perpetuating systemic racism in higher education.

Evidence-based, institution-wide methods concentrated on equity in student learning are fundamental in removing structural racism in higher education.

In order to get to equity, we need strong advocacy.

Strong advocacy requires courageous leadership.

Overcoming Systemic Racism in Higher Education

If you want to be a true advocate in this arena, consider whether you are modeling the 10 traits of courageous leadership:

- Confront reality head-on
- Seek feedback and listen
- Say what needs to be said
- Encourage push-back
- Take action on issues
- Communicate openly and frequently
- Lead change
- Make decisions and move forward
- Give credit to others
- Hold people (and yourself) accountable

Overcoming Systemic Racism in Higher Education

Step

5

Accountability

(Systemic Change)

Overcoming Systemic Racism in Higher Education

- Encompasses changing values and behaviors that contribute to inequities in student success.
- Influences the way people interact, the context within which knowledge is created, the resistance towards certain changes, and ultimately the way we share (or the way we do not share) knowledge regarding barriers to systemic change.
- Represents the collective values, beliefs and principles of its members to eradicate systemic racism through diversity, equity and inclusion.
- Includes ensuring that an institution's vision, values, norms, systems, symbols, language, assumptions, environment, location, beliefs and habits are congruent with being an anti-racist organization.

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The work is hard!!!

Reflections

Thank You

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