

Learning from this Moment: Understanding Privilege & Advancing Racial Equity

The staff was engaged in a webinar “Learning from this Moment: Understanding Privilege and Advancing Racial Equity.” The goal of the webinar was to identify ways we can be actively anti-racist in our professional work and daily lives, with a focus on self-reflection and actionable steps.

The Dean of Libraries opened this meeting with the “sheep parable” where ninety-nine sheep in the story are chewing their grass, doing what the shepherd is asking them to do. But there’s this one sheep who has left the flock. We don’t know if the sheep looked up from the plentiful grasses that the shepherd had faithfully guided it towards and something caught its eye, and decided to go investigate. The sheep might have left willingly if that were the case. Or perhaps, the sheep had wandered off by accident, a wrong turn here, miss-judgement there, until it looks up one day and – no flock. The shepherd never let the sheep go so far that it could not return. So the shepherd seeks out this one lost sheep and brings it back to the flock. We must look out for the lost, hurt, and misguided one and show compassion and understanding.

The Ground Rules for discussion were presented as follows:

- Listen to each other
- Speak your truth, share your experiences
- Respect others’ experiences
- Confidentiality
- Understand there is no quick fix

What is happening today in regards to racial equity is not a short-term problem. There is pain and trauma that has to be recognized and addressed. Living while black is something white people do not inherently understand. White people take for granted that they can go to the bank, a park, or the grocery store and not encounter a situation where someone will call the police if they believe they are acting suspiciously. People of color leave the house to do the same activities as white people, but they are consciously aware that their presence may create a biased reaction to people they interact with.

The following are questions that were discussed within the library staff –

1. How this unique moment in history has affected you? How do you think this moment in history has affected BIPOC students, colleagues and community members?

We have to think about how our own racial identity and the current events in our country affects us and how this moment is impacting the BIPOC member with who you interact with. This type of thinking requires self-reflection.

2. If you have experienced micro-aggressions at work or observed others being the target of micro-aggressions, how did it make you feel?

Micro-inequities or micro-aggressions are power, privilege, and everyday life acts done with little conscious awareness of their meanings and effects. This type of behavior adds up over time making communication and awareness particularly difficult. These micro-aggressions are difficult to address since they are rarely done with malicious intent. When you call someone out for this type of behavior they will act surprised that someone is taking offense. But, this does not excuse it.

3. What are some ways that implicit bias can show up in our workplace?

Implicit/unconscious/unexamined bias is a form of stereotyping that is often unintentional, automatic, and outside of our awareness. Often contradicting to our own consciousness.

In the final minutes the library staff broke out into groups to discuss the following question-

What are some steps to reduce implicit bias in our workplace?

Upon reconvening, the consensus was that we need to educate ourselves on racial equity and self-reflect. One suggestion was that if you are struggling with something to write it down to get it out of your head. Another is to take a few seconds to think about what you say before you say it and how it will be perceived by others.

Thanks to Kevin Adams, Ellen Bahr, Samantha Dannick, and Mechele Romanchock for developing the plan for this important conversation.

Participants – Kevin Adams, Brett Arno, Ellen Bahr, Sherman Clarke, Amanda Criss, Nic Crosby, Samantha Dannick, Laura Habecker, John Hosford, Laurie Meehan, Deb Rollins, Mechele Romanchock, Natalie Skwarek, Dave Snyder, Becky Stewart, Brian Sullivan.

Meeting Ended: 11:03 AM