

Anti-Racism Working Group: Exploring the Results of an Interdisciplinary Partnership at a Large Public University

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Abstract

Higher education institutions fail to address ongoing systemic racism within their classrooms, boardrooms, and commons when university personnel and students are not prepared to discuss racism and structural inequalities within the campus community. To address this at a public, Predominantly White Institution (PWI), a group of students, staff, and faculty developed an action-oriented community to increase awareness and advocacy efforts against systemic and micro-level racism. Founded by faculty in the University's BSW and MSW programs, the Antiracism Working Group (ARWG) comprises faculty, staff, and students from multiple university departments. This paper discusses and disseminates research about ARWG's inaugural year and early assessments of the program. Data includes responses from students who attended ARWG workshops. Students reported that these workshops helped their perception and self-awareness around race, privilege, and taking antiracist actions.

Introduction

- While university racial climate data acknowledges the challenges BIPOC-identifying students experience at West Chester University (WCU), university personnel and students are often not prepared to dialogue about racism and structural inequalities in the campus community.
- Universities have an institutional responsibility to prepare students, staff, and faculty with strategies and knowledge to reduce racism both directly and structurally to navigate challenging discussions and achieve institutional change (Walls & Hall, 2018).
- One such outcome of this commitment was the formation of the WCU's Anti-Racism Working Group (ARWG).



Cohort 1
members -
2019

Study Aim

To evaluate the efficacy of ARWG workshops and group members' experiences.

Word cloud:
What was the most beneficial part of the workshop?



Methods

- Morse's (Morse, 2010) Sequential Qualitative Mixed Methods Design was utilized.
- Data from multiple participants (n=200) and facilitators (n=10) across a year was evaluated.
- A deductive a priori coding in Phase 1 was used to identify areas of success with implementing the principles of anti-racist training.
- In Phase 2, an inductive analysis of the survey results with the qualitative open text responses was conducted.

Results

- Participants found the workshop to be meaningful and useful to their conceptualization and self-awareness around race and privilege.
- Participant feedback revealed a desire for longer workshops and access to more leadership possibilities and opportunities to continue the work.
- Facilitators and ARWG group members (n=10) described how rich and meaningful it was hearing the perspectives and narratives of other workshop participants.
- Both facilitators and participants indicated an increased awareness of and ability to engage in productive discussions related to race, ethnicity, bias, power, and privilege.
- One point of divergence between facilitators and participants was in their reflections on future anti-racist action. Whereas workshop participants focused on individual actions towards anti-racist action, facilitators had a more expansive view of thinking about cross-discipline, cross-campus professional relationships that could move forward anti-racist efforts at the university.

Comments

My experiences with ARWG allowed me to explore opportunities of working towards a goal of inclusion and equality, identifying obstacles to these goals, and presenting them in a way which fosters listening, growth, and change." -Facilitator

Have a class about race be part of general ed! I'm tired of hearing the word diversity thrown around." -Participant



Conclusion

- The American Academy of Social Work & Social Welfare's Grand Challenges for Social Work include a call for creating a just society by eliminating racism in a way that focuses on culturally responsive prevention and interventions (Grand Challenges of Social Work, 2020).
- This call, and the action of ARWG, is bolstered by the tenets of CRT, which guide work in anti-racism through the lens of intersectionality, acknowledging that our socialization into racism, sexism, and classism naturally inhibits our ability to meet such challenges without intentionality (Crenshaw, 2003).
- Analysis of the data from both participants and facilitators during the inaugural year of the ARWG would indicate that this call is being addressed and that we are headed in the right direction in meeting this challenge.

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