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#Resist: Utilizing Racial Justice Teach-ins to Challenge Anti-Black Racism

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ABSTRACT

Across the United States, racist, hate-filled rhetoric, attitudes, and behaviors are daily occurrences. Events like officer-involved shootings of unarmed Black men, women, and non-binary individuals, along with the increase in white supremacist and nationalist groups, have cumulatively created a climate of fear and mistrust. This fear and mistrust are exacerbated when police officers operate with impunity in predominantly Black communities and constitutional rights to peaceful protest are being maligned as unpatriotic or denied through violence. In response to these and related events, a BSW program, situated within a predominantly white rural setting in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States, developed and implemented a racial justice teach-in grounded in critical race and postcolonial theories. The goals of the teach-ins are to provide experiential educational activities, opportunities for in-depth discussion beyond the classroom, and exposure to anti-racist practice tools in order to help students identify, and combat, racial injustice and white supremacy. This article will explore the social work department's development and implementation of racial justice teach-ins as a supplemental opportunity for faculty to more meaningfully demonstrate their commitment to diversity and difference in the BSW program and to support the department's goal of incorporating anti-racist practice throughout both the implicit and explicit curriculum.

KEYWORDS

BSW education; racial justice teach-in; anti-black racism; white supremacy; critical theories & praxis

The social work profession is rooted in grassroots practice, and the concept of a social justice or racial justice teach-in is not new (Sahlins, 2009, 2017); however, there is limited literature focused on the use of such teach-ins as a response to anti-Black racism in education or practice, as well as an innovative method for teaching baccalaureate students anti-racist social work practice in a predominantly white, rural college setting. This article highlights a BSW program's development and implementation of racial justice teach-ins as an active effort to shift students' thinking and actions to a more comprehensive understanding, and ultimately, implementation of anti-racist practice. We will expand on how these racial justice teach-ins evolved from a grassroots response to a fully institutionalized annual program within this social work department, and represents an example of how

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the implicit curriculum supports the goal of integrating such practice within the program's explicit curriculum. As a department, we frame anti-racist social work practice as naming and unlearning interpersonal bias along with changing department structures, policies, and practices that uphold white supremacy.

Implicit curriculum & social work education

According to the Council on Social Work Education, "The implicit curriculum refers to the learning environment in which the explicit curriculum is presented" (EPAS, 2015, p. 14). In recent years, the implicit curriculum has had gained attention within social work education (Bogo & Wayne, 2013; Bowie et al., 2018; Deepak et al., 2015; Dyson & Brice Smith, 2016; O'Neill & Miller, 2015). One reason for this increased attention is the mounting criticism of academia and the field of social work with respect to integrating racial justice in teaching and practice (Bogo & Wayne, 2013; Bowie et al., 2018; Deepak et al., 2015; Dyson & Brice Smith, 2016; O'Neill & Miller, 2015). Through the CSWE accreditation process, social work programs are required to describe their commitment to diversity within the learning environment throughout...

> ...the program's institutional setting; selection of field education settings and their clientele; composition of program advisory or field committees; educational and social resources; resource allocation; program leadership; speaker series, seminars, and special programs; support groups; research and other initiatives; and the demographic make-up of its faculty, staff, and student body. (EPAS, 2015, p. 14)

However, the teach-in also seeks to fill the gaps within the more explicit content. In addressing the implicit aspects of social work education, this includes adopting a mindfulness in teaching pedagogy and textbook selections, but even more so, finding meaningful ways to address what may not directly be stated in a typical classroom experience or in navigating departmental and campus culture (O'Neill & Miller, 2015). For students of color, particularly Black students, this commitment includes the professor's ability to decenter whiteness, facilitate the content without further marginalizing their experience, and to shift priorities from the established agenda to make space for connections to and reflections upon real time racial injustices. It requires a complete overhaul of both institutional and departmental systems, disrupting the status quo, and intentionally focusing on race and anti-Black racism (O'Neill & Miller, 2015).

Impact and social action

In order to discuss the influence of racial injustices, and their impact on a university setting, it is necessary to briefly describe pertinent demographics of the campus and surrounding communities. This public institution is located in a predominantly white, rural community in south central Pennsylvania. In

the fall of 2016, at the time of the first teach-in, total enrollment consisted of 5,912 undergraduate students and an additional 1,077 graduate students. With regard to the racial and ethnic composition of the undergraduate student body, 76.5% were white, 11.1% were Black, 5.3% were Hispanic, 3.3% were multiracial, 1.6% were Asian, 0.2% were American Indian/American Native, 0.1% were Pacific Islander; 1.0% did not respond, and 0.9% were classified as nonresident alien (Shippensburg University Institutional Research and Planning, 2016).

In September 2016, a racist Facebook posting made by a white, undergraduate upperclassman, served as the catalyst for a call to action within the Department of Social Work and Gerontology and the broader campus community. Within hours of the posting, students, faculty, and staff members expressed confusion, anger, frustration, and hurt, which ultimately extended into classrooms. Students of color, in general, and specifically Black students, started to share their frustration and personal experiences of anti-Black racism and microaggressions on campus as well as in the community. Much of what these students were experiencing connects to what Brown et al. (2019) described as Racial Battle Fatigue. In this case, Black students presented as physically, emotionally, and psychologically exhausted from having to live, work, and engage in an educational environment in which racial microaggressions were ever present.

Examples of such microaggressions experienced by Black students within the classroom setting included: The over-assignment of Black individuals and communities within practice scenarios as the primary character(s) or client(s) experiencing poverty (or other types of crises) and seeking services from white social workers; guest speakers, supplemental academic articles, research studies, course textbooks, and video selections primarily written by, and/or presented by white researchers, authors, and speakers; and classroom interactions in which faculty call on a single individual to speak on behalf of an entire race or ethnicity, or to adopt a teaching role, while helping to absolve the guilt of white peers and faculty in their own racial identity developmental processes. These practices reinforce the centering of whiteness in social work by designating white professionals as holding the power to fix societal problems, while at the same time – be it conscious or unconscious, intentional or unintentional (Smith et al., 2006; Sue et al., 2007) –diminishing the contributions of Black persons in the same spaces.

In voicing their outrage at these and other examples of implicit and explicit experiences of racial violence, students asked faculty to disrupt the "business as usual" agenda for the day to make space for them to share and bear witness. As a result, the social work faculty immediately and intentionally designed a racial justice teach-in to serve as an experiential learning initiative for 75% of BSW program students. The teach-in was segmented into four, 75-minute sessions on racism with the aim of engaging students in authentic conversations;

providing deeper racial understanding of historical underpinnings of white supremacy; and examining the pervasive impact of whiteness and white privilege. The detailed breakdown of the day's events was previously reported (Benbow, 2019) but the main components of each racial justice teach-in were an overview of concepts, terms, and context; examination of relevant social policy; micro/mezzo intervention skills; and advocacy campaigns.

As the faculty-coordinated efforts to implement and facilitate this daylong event, one key element was to draft and adopt a Racial Justice Statement (Appendix). This document was written in part to take a stance and commitment toward fighting racial injustice, oppression, discrimination, and colonization. The racial justice statement has since been revised to reflect evolving discussion as well as topics addressed within subsequent teach-ins. The department's racial justice statement did not simply focus on reaffirming this commitment to anti-racist practice but also detailed ways in which the faculty would move forward by means of allyship and activism. In order to circulate this message of solidarity, the statement was shared via the department's social media accounts and hard copies distributed to students and teach-in participants.

Theoretical foundations

In addition to knowing the background and context of racial justice teach-ins within this department, understanding the theories in which they were rooted is essential to fully comprehend the significance of this teaching method. Teach-ins are a "form of protest involving a contrarian takeover of the premises" (Sahlins, 2017, para. 5), and in their original form "awakened the conscience of the nation" (para. 9); whereas, in today's resistance, teach-ins are putting "national politics into local action" (para.10) with the aim of radical transformation of student perspectives. A critical component to today's protesting is the centering of Black communities and their lived experiences with social injustices – whether they be women's issues, immigration, mass incarceration, police brutality, climate justice, mental health treatment, or voting discrimination – Black communities are targeted and experience higher rates of injustice on all accounts (Alexander, 2012; Khan-Cullors & Bandele, 2018; The Women's March Organizers & Condé Nast, 2018). Therefore, postcolonial and critical race theories frame this article, in conjunction with anti-racist praxis.

Postcolonial theory has evidence in social work (Deepak, 2011, 2018) and most educational settings (Subedi & Daza, 2008). Postcolonialism has its roots confronting the brutal and traumatic process of colonization where nations and peoples were invaded, occupied, and conquered by another people to profit from the land in the name of civilization. Colonization is connected to globalization wherein global North nations benefit from conflict, labor, and production of global South nations (Deepak, 2018). Postcolonialism interrogates knowledge production, the dichotomous representation of social schemas, nationalism, and

reveals the agency of marginalized communities in resisting the dominant discourse of society (Subedi & Daza). Interrogating knowledge production is particularly relevant in educational settings where narrow versions of history are presented erasing contributions from, and minimizing the oppression experienced by, populations historically marginalized by U.S. policy, law, and social norms in order to maintain white supremacy.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Bell, 1995; Crenshaw, 1989; Crenshaw et al., 1996) emerged from critical legal studies and civil rights scholarship and aligns with postcolonial theory in problematizing race and racialization. Drawing its formation from these two fields, CRT adopts a "commitment to being critical, which in this sense means also to be radical [while maintaining] a commitment to a vision of liberation from racism through right reason" (Angela Harris as cited in Bell, 1995, p. 899). Bell (1995) writes that CRT is a form of resistance, not merely in scholarship, but rather to "lay the groundwork for wide-scale resistance ... to attack a legal system, which disempowers people of color" (p. 900). In this regard, Crenshaw (1989) examined a set of unsuccessful anti-discrimination employment lawsuits filed by Black females because the court only examined the complaint on a single factor (either on sex or race) but it was precisely the intersection of the dual identities that these Black female workers held that promoted discrimination where both dynamics of difference and sameness applied. Thus, Crenshaw's work popularized the concept of intersectionality.

Intersectionality recognizes and analyzes the mutual constitutions of social identities instead of merely offering a single axis analysis (Crenshaw, 1991; McCall, 2005). While Crenshaw (1989, 1991) and Hill Collins (1990) are frequently identified as authoring the concept of intersectionality, The Combahee River Collective Statement (1986), written by a group of Black feminist lesbians in 1977, is considered the first publication examining the intersections of racism, classism, and heterosexism. The manifesto states, in part, "we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression, and see as our particular task the development of an integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking" (p. 9). Since the 1990s, the concept of intersectionality has expanded to include gender identity and expression, disability, social class, migration, and indigeneity. Other activist scholars have lent their voice to further developing intersectionality as a theory and methodology (Cho et al., 2013; Choo & Ferree, 2010; Mehrotra, 2010), a praxis for human rights (Minnick & O'Brien, 2018), reflexivity (Mattsson, 2014); and in centering geographies in analysis, along with historical contexts of colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade (Mollett, 2017).

Challenging oppression embedded in structural inequalities is a hallmark of social work given the profession's grounding in social justice and human rights (Abramovitz, 2017; Fox Piven & Cloward, 1993; Gil, 1998). Bent-Goodley (2006) and Carlton-LaNey (2005) have each expanded these conversations and

practices through their extensive writings on Black perspectives in social work, including African American social work inventors and African American leadership in social work. Bent-Goodley et al. (2017) describe "critical roles that the Black perspective played in shaping the evolution of the social work profession" (p. 27) and review four Black conceptual models used in social work delineating seven principles of practice among Black social work leaders, the Black perspective central to Howard University School of Social Work's mission statement, the Strengths of African American Families framework, and the Black Experience-Based Approach. These models eventually were adopted broadly, with social work adopting an anti-racist praxis to confront institutional racism (Bent-Goodley et al., 2017) and through cultural competence tenants to challenge racism within oneself via self-awareness and knowledge building (Abrams & Moio, 2009). However, with the ever-expanding social work curriculum, and continuing racism within the United States, it is imperative to utilize Critical Race Theory tenants to maintain a focus of anti-racist praxis in scholarship, teaching, and practice (Abrams & Moio, 2009; Deepak et al., 2015).

Method

An evolving process

These teach-ins have since evolved within the department and moved toward an institutionalization of what was originally a grassroots response to campus and societal racial injustice. Before moving into lessons learned from this experience, it is important to explore why this is significant. As previously mentioned, a key aspect of anti-racist and intersectional practice is moving beyond the theoretical realm to incorporate critical praxis, through challenging systemic, institutionalized and oppressive structures, such as racism (Abrams & Moio, 2009; Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016). In applying this framework to the department's efforts of tackling racial injustice through a daylong experiential, affective learning experience, the faculty understood meaningful, systemic change simply would not happen after one event.

Faculty realized the significance of holding such space as supplemental to the learning taking place in classrooms. The significance of establishing this event was that it offered an opportunity for faculty to model for students the importance of having difficult conversations about racism and white supremacy. As highlighted in the original teach-in movements of the 1960s, the value in part lies in the disruption of business as usual (Sahlins, 2009). In putting this together within a few weeks, the department emphasized the need and urgency to confront these issues through a collective experience outside of the traditional classroom environment. It also challenged the pervasive value of perfectionism within academia, which is essential to dismantling oppressive

systems. Ultimately, quickly coordinating and implementing a teach-in was more valuable in providing space to encourage conversation than focusing on getting it right the first time.

Therefore, in an effort to prioritize racial justice, and to emphasize it as a core aspect of the department's work, while also utilizing a teaching method firmly rooted in the social justice and human rights' tenets of the profession, department faculty unanimously decided to establish the teach-in as a yearly program. In making this transition, they also sought to include a more postcolonial, intersectional lens to racial justice practice. As an example of this commitment, the second annual teach-in focused on the topic of immigration and the human rights of undocumented Black persons in the United States, the third annual teach-in focused on poverty at the intersections of anti-Black racism, and the fourth one focused on the reproductive rights of cisgender and transgender members of the Black community. In 2020, the department, as well, joined the national social work anti-racism virtual summit delivered by the Social Worker Helper, Public Benefit Corporation. (The rationale for this change is discussed later in this paper under lessons learned.) In embracing a postcolonial, intersectional lens in racial justice teach-ins, faculty were clear in their intentions to neither negate nor minimize the significance of race and colorism within discussions and activities, promoting a greater voice to intersectional experiences.

There are benefits to holding this racial justice teach-in annually to continue efforts to center anti-racist practice and reinforce the value of diversity and difference within our program. It also provides an example for students to draw from by extending this learning to other spaces. Clearly, creating opportunities for such conversations to occur beyond the classroom have proven valuable in reinforcing these ideas. Central to this conceptualization of the learning process is utilizing "active learning strategies" such as reflection activities, open discussions, and cooperative problem solving (Dyson & Brice Smith, 2016, p. 110). In setting up the teach-in, faculty utilized several small group activities throughout the day to help facilitate interpersonal interactions to encourage deeper self-reflection and vulnerability. Through these experiences, students are able to engage with faculty and one another toward building on foundational skills for addressing racism and related oppressive structures within their personal and professional relationships. It is also designed to inspire action, attempting to move students beyond awareness and toward advocacy and activism.

The format of the social work program teach-in has also evolved to open up to the larger campus community. The first year was exclusive to students taking courses in our department; however, in planning the second teach-in, the department extended an invitation to other campus community members to participate in the event. The department's event posting was circulated via social media and through campus e-mail distribution lists. Opening up the racial justice teach-in to nonsocial work majors, faculty, staff, and community

members offered potential opportunities for larger and more systemic action to occur beyond our department. Furthermore, in an effort to maintain a narrative and focus rooted in social justice, human rights, and anti-racist practice, it was important for the department to share its lens with the rest of the academic community and thereby actively contribute to campus dialog.

Of course, as with any program that moves from a grassroots response to a more institutionalized and embedded commitment, this shift resulted in some challenges. Many of these were expected, especially given the context and setting in which the university is situated. Hence, in order for the department to meaningfully contribute to the conversations on racial justice in social work practice, and to impact students' learning, it became essential to outline and reflect upon areas for growth and insights gained.

Discussion

Moving forward

Over the past five years, the faculty in this department have gained a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges experienced in implementing yearly racial justice teach-ins. Upon institutionalization, faculty and the department administration realized the deep-seated difficulties in decentering whiteness while being set in a rural, historically white university. Historically, white colleges and universities (HWCUs) are "institution[s] ... whose histories, symbols, stories, icons, curriculum, and processes, were designed by whites, for whites, to reproduce whiteness via a white experience at the exclusion of others who, since the [mid-20th century], have been allowed in such spaces" (Brunsma et al., 2013, p. 719). Rurality refers to both the geographical and spatial area in which the institution is located (as well as the associated mind-set) as it relates to the marginalization of anti-racist policy discussion, training, and teaching due to little or no presence of people of color within the surrounding community (Williams & Parrott, 2014).

One of the major barriers also now faced, requiring further consideration, is the issue of combatting what Flynn (2015) labels as "white fatigue." In describing white fatigue, Flynn has stated:

> Simply, white fatigue attempts to name the dynamic of white students who intuitively understand or recognize the moral imperative of antiracism (primarily viewed as individual racism); however, they are not yet situated to fully understand the complexity of racism and how it functions as an institutional and systemic phenomenon. Due to the complexity required of critical (as compared to simplistic) studies of racism, those who are fatigued claim to be 'tired of talking about' racism, despite the intuitive understanding that racism is morally wrong. This phenomenon is further aggravated by students' desire to not be judged as racist. (p. 115)

This department often encounters BSW students who reflect this concept in different ways, such as difficulty in going beyond a superficial understanding of racism and anti-racist practice and fears of being portrayed as racist. With respect to white students, the fears often not only inhibit them from truly reflecting on personal beliefs and biases to fully engage with the material but also in moving beyond themselves in order to understand the larger systemic issues. With the added context of the university's rural geographical location, there are additional challenges to students fully comprehending and integrating anti-racist practice – mainly the limited support for these forms of critical inquiry and praxis.

As noted, the purpose of the teach-ins is to assist our students in evolving both their thinking and actions to become more aligned with anti-racist therapy and practice. Such practices include, but are not limited to, working toward dismantling micro, mezzo, and macro-level instances of racism; challenging implicit biases; and continuous self-examination of behaviors, attitudes, and approaches as they relate to race-based interactions. A tool in the form of a diagram was designed by Ibrahim (n.d.) titled, "Becoming Anti-Racist", and provides an example of ways in which students, faculty, staff members, and administrators can introspectively assess where they are with becoming anti-racist. The diagram identifies three zones that gradually increase in size as the individual moves through the discomfort of "the fear zone" through the "learning zone" and into the "growth zone." The faculty serves as support for students to engage in this critical examination of self and to gradually move beyond the fear zone. Although the work of becoming anti-racist is uncomfortable, as well as challenging, social workers are mandated to act based on adherence to the profession's core values that are codified as service, social justice, dignity, worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2017).

Beyond the concept of white fatigue, the teach-ins also have raised questions related to properly engaging students who have directly experienced and been negatively impacted by the topics at hand. Specifically, the department must grapple with the following: How do we provide safe space for Black students whose voices are already marginalized in society and within university classrooms? The concept of safety in the learning experience is challenging in the sense of addressing who should be the recipient of safety and comfort. Bogo and Wayne (2013) highlighted "Many have questioned whether the metaphor of safety is realistic" (p. 8). However, Dyson and Brice Smith (2016) emphasized, in applying an Afrocentric model, the importance of confidentiality and safe space in order to foster optimal conditions for permitting vulnerability and deeper reflection, particularly among Black students. Strategies for navigating toward this goal within a teach-in, as well as within classrooms, must be given particular consideration because the majority of students in this program represent the surrounding white, rural, majority community. Hence, it is important to directly

confront their biases and not inadvertently encourage further avoidance by those with the greatest privilege. The challenge of creating a sense of safety for Black students within these dialogs mainly relates to the space and format of the teach-in. Given that the day-long event took place in our program in one large multipurpose room, there were few ways to create a separate space for Black students to disengage, if and when needed. Therefore, we were left with the question of how we can foster an environment in which students can engage in these discussions in authentic ways without further marginalizing students of color or unintentionally perpetuating anti-Black racism?

Furthermore, in continuing this work the second year, with a focus on immigration, it became apparent that for many students maintaining a focus on anti-racist practice, and the ways in which racism permeates and impacts all areas of social work practice, would prove challenging. Once the focus shifts to a more intersectional lens, then it proves a hurdle for individuals to recognize the significance of anti-Black racism. Some participants were unable to grasp how racism could shift and impact perspectives and experiences of immigrants as well as understand that not all immigrant communities are affected by US immigration policies in the same ways. As such, conversations moved into a more anti-oppression focus rather than on anti-racist practice; yet, the distinction is important. It is not enough to address oppression in broad terms; in order to embody and align with the theme of racial justice, anti-Blackness and white supremacy must be named, especially at the intersections.

Internalized biases of faculty of course impact content and delivery of these teach-ins. Thus, faculty must be willing and able to confront their own anti-Black biases and microaggressions committed. It requires having faculty open to being held accountable when microaggressions occur, recognizing that how faculty teach and facilitate anti-racist education likely is framed by their owned lived experiences, formal and informal education, and willingness to sit in discomfort when confronting their own inadvertent racism and mistakes in order to do better and to be able to expand their own anti-racist praxis.

In addition to grounding our racial justice teach-ins in critical theories, praxis, and human rights, we firmly centered them on the values of the core social work profession, referencing the NASW Code of Ethics (2017) and *Social Work Speaks: 2018–220 NASW Policy Statements* (NASW, 2018). Doing so helped to ward off possible naysayers at the institutional level. Confident in our charge in this regard, the department always invites the Dean of the College, the Director of Social Equity, and university media.

Another lesson learned in planning and implementing racial justice teach-ins was to allow the faculty dyads or triads to have considerable autonomy over content and delivery, with an understanding that the session was to be highly interactive. Working within the capacity of the faculty also is important so that they remain committed to implicit curriculum initiatives. Our minoritized faculty are mid-career and were paired with white mid-career and senior faculty.

We paired untenured faculty with senior-career faculty as well in order to socialize and acculturate them into our department praxis. The structure of pairing, dyad, and triad work encouraged dialog and teamwork in preparation and also buffered our minoritized faculty against racist fallout that might occur.

After planning and implementing four annual racial justice teach-ins (from 2016 to 2019), the Social Work Helper, Public Benefit Corporation fortuitously organized a virtual two-day, national anti-racism summit in the fall 2020, expanded to a three-day anti-racism summit in spring 2021. Recognizing this organization's prominent national platform permitted our department to enroll our BSW students and faculty in a more robust anti-Black racism agenda than had been possible with a faculty of 10. Due to technology challenges experienced by students using the digital platform, some faculty streamed virtual sessions through their Zoom classroom, while other faculty canceled class for the day and processed student experiences of the virtual anti-racism summit during their next class session or through assigned reflection papers. Being situated in rural, white America, with many students coming from other rural areas of our region, participating in this national social work virtual anti-racism summit allowed our students to engage with social work students and faculty from small and large educational institutions, from urban and other rural programs. Through explicit curriculum following implicit curriculum events, students demonstrated they had listened, learned, and engaged with a more diverse population and presenter base than would be possible, given our predominantly white-dominated social work department. After reflection and deliberation, the faculty decided to meld its original teach-in format with the expansive content of the virtual summit by streaming the virtual anti-racism summit to all BSW students present in one shared space the next academic year. This decision came from reflecting on the need of students seeing us modeling anti-racist practice.

Finally, the annual racial-justice teach-in is meant to be a catalyst for overall learning, dialog and change. How do we carry this forward throughout the academic year and try to challenge and change systemic barriers inherent within our program and university? As critical race theorists emphasize, change needs to happen at all levels (Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016). This department now is therefore tasked with further assessing the ways in which teaching pedagogies, curriculum design, and department policies align with and model anti-racist practice, as well as the ways in which the university's policies either inhibit or support such practices. This process has been initiated, and social work faculty have formed working groups focused on critically examining core courses within the BSW curriculum in order to implement changes that align with anti-racist practice. Furthermore, the department also has established an accountability group as a designated space for faculty to share, reflect, unlearn harmful practices, and learn how to more effectively engage in this work.

Conclusion

During prominent periods of social injustice, in which events rooted in anti-Black racism and white supremacy dominate the headlines, acts of resistance are essential to advance the objective of dismantling the oppressive structures that support such environmental realities. As discussed throughout this article, this department intended to not only contribute to the existing conversation on racial justice at local and national levels but also to begin to embody anti-racist, social work practice in a predominantly white, rural setting. By canceling classes for an entire day to hold a racial justice teach-in, as well as write and distribute a racial justice statement, faculty took a small step forward not only in challenging individual beliefs tied to anti-Black racism, but also to addressing larger systemic influences and issues. However, as outlined, there are gaps to fill and room for improvement. Such insights gleaned from the strengths and challenges of developing an annual racial justice teach-in will guide our next steps, as well, we hope, assist other BSW programs seeking to implement similar initiatives to enhance their implicit and explicit curricula in addressing anti-Black racism as they prepare the next generation of students for practice.

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Appendix

Racial Justice Statement

We, the faculty in the Department of Social Work & Gerontology, reaffirm our stance in fighting against racial injustice, oppression, and discrimination. The continuing conversations regarding police brutality and racism occurring on a national level, as well as the recent events taking place on campus, have sparked dialog within our department. As social workers, we are dedicated to the pursuit of social justice in micro, mezzo, and macro levels of practice. Therefore, it is important that we speak about the multi-systemic impacts of racism and take action.

The Black Lives Matter movement has increased our awareness to the ways in which various social systems are broken, leaving many Black and Brown communities to struggle with the real effects of racism. This includes injustices felt in the legal system, workplace, educational settings, and in neighborhoods. As social workers, we are equally committed to understanding our roles in either perpetuating these racial inequalities or in working toward improving access to opportunities, as well as helping foster physically and emotionally safe environments, free from hate and discrimination.

We have recently been made aware of one very public incident of racism on our campus, but we know that there are students, staff, and faculty that endure these experiences in their daily lives and, so often, unacknowledged. As such, we stand against racism. We stand in solidarity to support Black and Brown communities, including students, staff, and faculty.

In order to develop meaningful allyship and activism to undo racism, we will:

· Listen
· Reflect on our values and examine points of privilege
· Speak out, specifically calling out acts of hate and violence rooted in racism
· Foster safe space in the department and classrooms
· Engage in social policy practice to combat implicit and explicit racism
· Engage in social work practice with an equity lens toward racial justice.

Will we always get this right? No, we understand that the path toward racial justice in our field and in society will be filled with growing pains and, at times, met with resistance. However, we are committed to ongoing learning and action in order to fully support community members, students, staff, and faculty of color. We are here, we are listening, and we are taking action.