

An Invitation for Antiracist Action for our College, Schools, and Community

Colleagues:

This nation was founded and continues to thrive on and benefit from a history steeped in racism and other intersecting forms of oppression. The killings of Black and Brown people have pervaded history and recent times, yet largely evaded systemic challenge. Racialized violence as well as inequitable treatment exist across social, economic, educational, justice, health, and other systems. As individuals with formal leadership positions in the UNLV College of Education, we are publicly committing ourselves to antiracist action. With this commitment to action, we also commit to shared governance with faculty, staff, and students.

Our College of Education, similar to other Colleges and institutions across the nation, is a microcosm of our nation. Education is not the great equalizer across our communities, and it fails to be so while dominant (i.e., White) societal values such as individualism and the myth of meritocracy (i.e., if one works hard, one will be successful; if one isn't successful, there was not enough individual effort) persist. The children of Nevada should be provided opportunities to thrive, not only survive, in their schools and communities. The faculty, staff, and students in the College of Education are entitled to an environment that allows them to thrive, too. If we as a College community are not committed to directly addressing racism and intersectional oppression, we are enabling it to continue. We see no middle ground for engagement.

There are many examples of how we are failing ourselves and our colleagues, students, and the children our graduates will go on to serve in educational and mental health settings. Public narratives and data regarding PK-20 settings indicate opportunity gaps among racial/ethnic groups, which are particularly widened for individuals with intersecting, oppressed identities (e.g., gender, SES, ability). This is only part of the picture, and we as a College must seek additional narratives and data to fully understand racism and other forms of oppression.

Available data from our own College from focus group discussions, individual conversations, formal evaluations, student feedback, and faculty meetings to date suggest that the climate within the College of Education is faltering. While this is likely an incomplete picture, it is a dominant one we cannot ignore. And, while climate issues are not solely racialized ones, race is an important organizing structure from which to begin to address climate.

These data tell us that there is reported cultural mistrust, fatigue, and a lack of "voice" to meaningfully shape the College of Education and its departments. There is a lack of critical examination (and action) for not only our ways of being, but our curricula, pedagogy, leadership, scholarship, and PK-12/community engagement efforts. ***To begin the conversation, we are asking for faculty, staff, and student input for action in the following areas:***

1. Naming Whiteness and Antiracism and Privileging Other Ways of Being and Knowing;
2. Fostering Culturally-Responsive Communication and Shared Decision-Making;

3. Prioritizing Faculty and Staff of Color Recruitment, Retention, and their Continued Success;
4. Valuing and Incentivizing Faculty and Student Scholarship related to Equity, Inclusivity, and Diversity;
5. Engaging in Affirmative and Antiracist Student-Centered Practices;
6. Developing and Implementing Antiracist Curricula for PK-12 and Higher Education; and
7. Engaging in Antiracist School and Community Efforts.

We open ourselves more deeply to listen to you, and seek your invaluable guidance on the climate issues related to race and inequity. We also encourage our White faculty and staff to engage in deep self-reflection and learning in order to fully participate in inevitable antiracist action within the College.

As an initial step beginning August 1, we will offer- in partnership with interested faculty, staff, and students, several listening sessions regarding the aforementioned themes and client issues. We would like to engage co-facilitators, or independent faculty and staff facilitators. To maximize participation, Hays will distribute a summary of those sessions and develop other opportunities for additional input and feedback through public and confidential means.

As a second phase in early fall 2020, Hays will work with faculty and staff to identify external support to help us further crystallize faculty, staff, and student voice into concrete actions for racial equity to be addressed in the academic year 2020-21.

If you are interested in co-facilitating a listening session, please let us know (via danica.hays@unlv.edu) at your earliest convenience. We look forward to engaging with you in a sustained and meaningful way, developing shared values that benefit our climate and community.

In solidarity,

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