

Diversity and Inclusion Report

Sociology and Anthropology

As it has for academic programs across Northeastern and the country, the past year has been a time of significant introspection, community conversation, and structural reforms in the Sociology and Anthropology Department. In response to the tragic deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor in the summer of 2020 and the ensuing protests and national-level discussions of systemic racism and police violence, long-standing efforts to recognize and redress anti-Blackness in our department, our curriculum, and our classrooms took on new urgency. Beginning in the summer and continuing through the fall, we organized a series of activities, including a departmental retreat, a curriculum review, and an evaluation of core courses and the department climate, all aimed at decentering whiteness in our program. This memo outlines the major activities, noting how they will continue into the Spring of 2021 and beyond.

In June 2021, we sent out a department statement on structural racism in which we outlined three areas in which we plan to target our energies in the medium and longer term: (1) revisit syllabi to ensure that our curriculum includes a wider set of scholars and debates to reflect the experiences and struggles of marginalized peoples; (2) reflect on our biases as educators and our complicity in micro and macro-aggressions within and outside of our classrooms; and (3) revisit the ways we admit students and hire staff and faculty, and support them once they're here, to help create and sustain a diverse community. We invited faculty, students, and staff to contribute to these efforts and to help move this work forward, not as a short-term strategy to address the immediate crisis at hand, but rather as a set of sustained goals that will define the department's agenda for years to come.

Review and Revise Curriculum

In part to accomplish the goals of College-wide curriculum review, and in part to support department-level objectives, we established a new committee called the **Committee on Racial Justice in the Curriculum (CRJC)**. The committee is comprised two graduate student members and three faculty, each of whom represent the department's three main subcommittees: the Undergraduate Committee, the Graduate Committee, and the Intellectual Events Committee. The primary task of the CRJC has been to lead the review of syllabi, discuss with faculty about their approach to teaching and leading discussions of racism and other structures of social exclusion, and the design a survey of student perceptions of course discussions on systemic racism.

In the fall, the CRJC met 4 times and hired 4 work study students to support the work. With the help of the student workers, the committee undertook a systemic review of 8 regularly offered courses:

- the introductory courses for each of the two majors: **SOCL 1101** and **ANTH 1101**;
- one course explicitly focused on anti-Black discrimination in each major: **SOCL 2270** (Race and Ethnic Relations) and **ANTH 4510** (Anthropology of Africa);
- one course in each major in which racism is a major topic and/or perspective but not the exclusive or primary focus: **SOCL 1280** (The Twenty-first century Workplace) and **ANTH 2305** (Global Markets Local Cultures);
- and one course in each major in which racism is not an explicit focus: **SOCL 2321** (Research Methods in Sociology) and **ANTH 3410** (Ethnographic Field Experience)

All of the course syllabi were reviewed and conversations were had with the course instructors. The objective of the review was to understand how diverse the syllabi are with respect to scholars read and ideas introduced, how the topics of race and racism are addressed and integrated in the course material, and the degree to which an intersectional perspective is addressed in the course content. By the end of the fall semester, the reviews of individual courses were completed and the CRJC will be reviewing the results in the beginning of the Spring semester.

The CRJC also designed a survey that we plan to distribute to our sociology and anthropology majors in the early spring semester. The survey asks students to **evaluate how effectively** they perceived topics of race, systemic racism, and intersectionality have been addressed in the courses they have taken for their major. The survey also asks if students have any more information they would like to share about **the department's racial climate**. Students indicating an interest in speaking more will be contacted by student workers who will be noting this information for a final report. By the end of the spring semester, the CRJC plans to issue a report that notes the strengths and weaknesses of the treatment of race, racism, and intersectionality in our curriculum and proposes areas of further work.

Concurrent efforts were also undertaken by the Sociology and Anthropology Department's Graduate Committee and Undergraduate Committees over the fall semester. The primary objectives were to review and propose revisions to the graduate and undergraduate programs' **learning goals**. These revised learning goals were submitted to the College as part of the curriculum review documents.

Finally, our efforts on curriculum reform included the organization of a series of workshops held every few weeks as part of our Intellectual Events Committee (IEC)'s fall **Series on Decentering Whiteness**.

- The first event in this series, held on October 22nd (**#RethinkingClassical**), was focused on the question of diversity in the canons of sociological and anthropological theory. This event included a panel discussion of department members (faculty and graduate students) who argued for different approaches to rethinking classical and contemporary theory.
- The second event was an alumni panel held on October 27th, called **"Getting Paid to do Racial Justice Work"** and included 4 recent graduates – 2 undergraduate alums, 1 MA alum, and one Ph.D. alum. The panelists, all of whom are currently working in a professional capacity to address systemic racism and build more just and inclusive communities, all spoke eloquently about how their coursework and extra- and co-curricular activities at Northeastern helped prepare them for the work they are currently doing.
- Our third event, on November 4th (**"Representation on Course Syllabi"**), entailed a discussion of how to construct and revise syllabi to ensure that diverse voices and perspectives are included and that students are exposed to a racially diverse set of scholars working on various topics.
- The fourth event, held on December 3rd, was a talk given by **Amaka Okechukwu**, Associate Professor of Sociology at George Mason University, who spoke on her recently published book [To Fulfill These Rights: Political Struggle Over Affirmative Action and Open Admissions](#). This talk focused on social movements around affirmative action and allowed for a scholarly discussion of **representation and inclusion in higher education**.
- Our fifth and final event, held on December 10th (**"Creating Anti-Racist Classrooms"**) was developed in conversation with CATLR and discussed strategies for establishing an inclusive and supportive classroom, including ways to recognize and avoid micro-aggressions and racial biases in our lectures and interactions with students.

We plan to continue the Series on Decentering Whiteness in the spring semester and having conversations with our students and faculty to move forward the proposed curricular reforms.

Examine and Dismantle Our Biases

Another major set of activities in the fall concerned our efforts to examine and dismantle our own implicit biases as we strive to be an anti-racist department. The first major activity was to begin the year with a two-day departmental retreat, held on September 10th and September 17th, facilitated by two diversity and inclusion consultants, Rev Dr. Jamie Washington and Dr. Becky Martinez. In the two part-session, we discussed our own racial journeys as individuals, our department's racial climate, and what it means to be an anti-racist department. These sessions were attended by about 50 participants each and included both faculty and graduate students. The conversations proved challenging, as there is to a certain extent a lack of trust between faculty and graduate students and a skepticism that everyone shares the same goals. The participation of external facilitators helped create the conditions for honest conversations and an opportunity to rebuild some of the trust needed to pursue our common goals.

Following the two-session department retreat, we held follow-up conversation with faculty and graduate students on October 1st designed to identify a series of concrete goals and action steps on becoming, being, and remaining an **anti-racist department**. The session entailed an open brainstorm session on two questions: 1) what do you think it means to be an anti-racist department? And 2) what steps do you think we should take or activities we should pursue? The ground-rules for the session included that all ideas should be written down and discussed without rejecting any. After this event, a stronger sense of trust seemed to be established and students and faculty seemed to feel heard.

This event was followed by the five events listed above, which, in addition to supporting curricular reform efforts, were organized with the objective of examining and dismantling our biases and striving to be an anti-racist department.

Revisit Admissions, Hiring, and Support for Students and Faculty of Color

Our third set of reforms were undertaken toward revisiting hiring and admissions practices. In our faculty meetings and monthly "brown-bag" open sessions with graduate students we discussed how through the graduate admissions process, as well as our department's participation in cluster searches, we can increase and sustain the diversity of our community.

One of the major themes addressed in these conversations was that our efforts to recruit faculty and students of color depends on how inclusive our community feels to our current students and colleagues of color and how well we support the existing members of our community. As a consequence, we discussed the importance of the curriculum reform efforts and the continual examination and dismantling of anti-Black biases as essential components of recruiting and retaining efforts. Additionally, many of our department members participated in STRIDE workshops designed to expose implicit and unconscious biases that impact hiring practices. In particular, the three members of our department participating on cluster search committees this year (Tiffany Joseph, Phil Brown, and Nina Sylvanus) all participated in STRIDE and are applying these lessons on search committees. Similarly, the Graduate Admissions committee has made a strong effort to acknowledge biases and recruit as diverse a short list of Ph.D. applicants as possible.

The efforts in these three areas comprise the primary activities undertaken over the fall semester to address systemic racism in our department, in our curriculum, and in our classrooms. Meanwhile, individual faculty members undertook a large number of activities in these areas not reflected in this document. We plan to continue these activities going forward and to institutionalize and sustain the conversations and reform efforts begun this semester. One of the themes that ran through all of our activities was the importance of sustaining the momentum we have developed to address these concerns. We all recognized that these activities cannot simply be short term responses to a perceived crisis, but rather a sustained commitment to building a more just, inclusive, and anti-racist department.