

# Race and Social Justice Initiatives

## Political Science

### **Political Science Justice, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Initiative (JEDI)**

#### **World Crisis**

with murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor: our country is facing a crisis of systemic racism, police brutality, and reckoning with political inequalities in race, gender and class. Furthermore, these inequalities are exacerbated during this time of Covid-19, a global pandemic that has disrupted the world. Political science has a wealth of research and knowledge that speaks to these very questions, especially how they influence the creation and transformation of institutions and policies. Our work is needed even more than ever.

#### **POLS Commitment to Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI)**

In the summer of 2020, the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and other Black Americans inspired us to renew our attention to systemic anti-Black racism in the United States and beyond. Political science has a wealth of research and knowledge that speaks to these very questions, especially how they influence the creation and transformation of institutions and policies. Never has there been a greater need for political science research on the politics of interest groups, institutions, political parties and identities in the United States and in the context of global political movements around anti-Black Racism, racial justice, transformative justice, elections, climate change, global populism, Brexit, the space race and the spread of killer robots.

In this time of great upheaval, the Political Science department responded with concrete actions. We convened a committee, the first of its kind, to do the work of the JEDI - Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion. We align our goals and efforts with those throughout the University, starting with President Aoun's call to action for the university to address systemic racism and to advance our commitment to racial justice. We support the leadership of our dean, Uta Poiger, in the College of Social Sciences and Humanities, in our common goal to center questions of racial justice in our programs, our community work, our curriculum and our course offerings.

In the short term, our committee began to review the kinds of questions we ask in political science research and in our classes at Northeastern. Some of these questions include—how did Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley manage to mobilize her constituents and forge a new path of Massachusetts representation in Washington, DC? Why and how do arcane voting rules lead to such disparities in income and power for some groups and not others? When do transitional justice efforts succeed after civil wars, and how could these insights from Central America apply to other countries, even in the United States?

As we reviewed our questions, we began a campaign to gather information and listen to concerns of faculty, students (grad and undergrad), staff, advisors, coops about the current climate and potential JEDI responses. Our immediate action steps were to draft an anti-Black racism statement on our website, to create a short survey of our courses, and to build in a regular spot in our department meetings for discussion of JEDI themes. Members of our department helped to review our curriculum offerings to examine where we already center racial justice. For example, one comparative politics class (POLS 1155)

analyzed how the United States is “unusually cruel” compared with other democracies like France, Germany and the UK, in terms of mass incarceration and racial violence. Our courses on democratic erosion (POLS 2356) and Revolution, Civil War and Insurrection (POLS 3430) center race and ethnicity at the intersection of politics, democracy and justice. We also noted where we can make revisions, and where we can build our offerings to grow into a connected, justice-focused community. We are excited to reach out beyond our department and college to develop collaborative webs of racial justice.

In the medium term, we will continue to assess our curriculum and appraise our strengths, gaps and needs. We have a list of potential speakers from political science doing cutting-edge research to give talks in our department. Representatives of our department are participating on college- and university-wide cluster searches to build a racial justice community.

For the longer term, in the coming year, we hope to conduct a broader survey of the department and to build out our vision, values and priorities for JEDI work. We have also extended an offer to a specialist in racial and ethnic politics to join our faculty as a junior colleague and hope to recruit this individual in short order. We also aim to develop a potential Post-doc for Politics of Racial Justice – which could be aligned with African-American Studies, Criminal Justice, Women’s Studies, Sociology, PPE, and others.

### **Curricular & Pedagogical Initiatives**

- inventory of current program offerings in political science in BA, MA, PhD programs through a racial justice lens
- inventory of current department classes offered in political science, centered on racial justice
- inventory of synergies with other departments and schools in the area of racial justice (on-going)
- inventory of best practices in core courses in analyzing political science study of racial justice

### **Efforts to Increase Diversity & Create Culture of Inclusion with students**

- new statement on political science website
- formed the JEDI committee for the first time in the history of the department
- started with a survey - will continue with a listening campaign with faculty, staff, students, and others.
- added an ongoing time slot during faculty meetings to discuss JEDI issues and to invite conversations among students, staff and faculty
- will create further channels of dialogue and communication among students, staff, faculty and other stakeholders.