

Race and Social Justice Initiatives

School of Criminology and Criminal Justice

Background

In 2020, the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice (SCCJ) convened a Racial Justice Committee (RJC). The RJC is currently chaired by Professor Kevin Drakulich and includes two additional faculty members with two additional faculty serving as consultants to the committee on an ad hoc basis. The RJC began by outlining a series of broad goals including the promotion of anti-racism across our faculty, staff and students, working toward a more diverse faculty, staff and student body, increasing attention to racial justice throughout the SCCJ curriculum, and supporting accessible and actionable research that advances racial justice. Beginning in 2020, members of the SCCJ leadership team have held listening sessions with graduate students and staff to better understand their experiences and identify concerns relative to racial inequality in our community, discipline and unit.

Curricular Review and Planning

During the fall of 2020 the RJC and SCCJ faculty undertook a systematic review of our undergraduate and graduate curriculum. This process included reviewing syllabi to identify learning goals specific to race and racial justice, assignments or weekly topic areas addressing issues of race or racial justice, and readings addressing race and racial justice. In addition to the systematic review of syllabi, we reviewed course descriptions and talked with faculty and students about existing course content. In response to the review, we added a curricular learning goal to our BS, MS, and PhD degrees, and also course learning goals for required courses within the degrees, as well as adding language to the course catalog descriptions that clarifies course attention to issues of racial justice. Our new goal is that students at all levels should be able to explain the role of systemic racism and intersecting dimensions of oppression in the historical development of and current policies and practices in the criminal justice system, as well as in crime and justice theory and research. Additionally, the RJC, with the help of a team of undergraduate assistants, began planning the creation of resources to assist instructors in elevating racial justice throughout their courses. The SCCJ has hired a PhD student for the summer of 2022 to help turn these ideas into a concrete set of resources and make them accessible to instructors. Resources will include sample syllabi and modules, and curated, annotated lists of publications on key race and justice issues that particularly highlight work by scholars of color (a revised disciplinary canon).

Initiatives and Events

During the summer of 2020 the Institute on Race and Justice (IRJ) convened a group of graduate students and staff to develop a statement and action plan relative to IRJ's work on race and justice. This statement identifies three areas of focus—academics, community and practitioners—and includes specific action steps to promote anti-racism and more purposefully address racial injustice in each of these areas through the work of IRJ and the Violence and Justice Research Lab (see: <https://cssh.northeastern.edu/irj/statement-on-racial-justice/>). The statement was discussed and reviewed in partnership with the IRJ community advisory board (CAB). The VJRL has worked throughout the 21-22 academic year to advance specific steps identified in the statement, sometimes in collaboration with members of the CAB. One of the outgrowths of this work was the development of the IRJ dialogue series on race, policing and the community. The

dialogue series includes four talks per year featuring panels of scholars, practitioners and community stakeholders that are convened throughout the academic year. The first dialogue series in AY 20-21 was extremely successful, bringing stakeholders and audience members from NU and beyond into four critical conversations about issues of justice. During this academic year the dialogue series has hosted three sessions, with a fourth planned for the early summer. These sessions included “Race and Returning to Work in a Pandemic Economy”, Race, Youth, and Police Relationships: A Strategy to Build Trust, Part II” and “Forum on Race and Corrections: The Impact of Covid-19.” These sessions averaged 50-70 attendees each and brought local and regional stakeholders and audience members to engage with faculty, students and panelists to advance critical conversations about race and justice. Additionally, the IRJ Schulman lecture series provides an opportunity to bring top scholars in the field of racial justice to campus. Schulman lecturers engage our students, faculty, and our community partners in important conversations about issues of race, inequality and justice within various aspects of the criminal justice system. Past lecturers have included Ruth Peterson (Ohio State), Rod Brunson (Rutgers), Nancy Rodriguez (UC Irvine). In 2021, we utilized the modality of remote engagements to have two Schulman lecturers who are both doing cutting edge research on race, inequality and justice—Jennifer Cobbina (Michigan State University) and Alexis Harris (University of Washington). In the interest of returning the lecture to an in-person event, we have scheduled our next lecture for October of 2022 and are very pleased that Kathryn Russell-Brown (University of Florida School of Law) will be our next Schulman lecturer.

SCCJ faculty continue to be engaged in important research on race and justice issues within the context of policing and justice system processes. In addition to ongoing scholarship centered on critical race and justice issues such as victimization, biased justice enforcement, and police violence, faculty have contributed to public conversations about race and justice through a variety of speaking engagements and op-eds. Additionally, faculty are involved numerous system reform efforts. During this academic year, Professor Jack McDevitt led a team of faculty and doctoral students worked with the Massachusetts Executive Office of Public Safety to develop a resource guide on identifying and responding to hate crimes in schools (see: <https://www.mass.gov/doc/school-hate-crime-resource-guide/download>). The guide will inform practices for schools across the commonwealth who received funding to combat bias events in schools.