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Response to BC Racial Climate Survey
Suggestions for Action

These suggestions were created after consulting current research and local practices to humbly suggest to the BC Academic Senate next steps.

I. *BC Academic Senate Acknowledge Poor Racial Climate*

Racism needs to be addressed in our campus culture and by faculty leadership. A clear stance as a governing body allows us to stop shifting the blame onto individuals and be held accountable when some blame should be on the campus wide approach. The BC Academic Senate should supply a statement or resolution to boldly commit to supporting anti-racism and support work to make our classrooms more effective for all students.

Other BC leadership groups have taken strong stances on the racial climate of the BC campus. The Bakersfield College Student Government Association both in 2020 and 2022 has passed resolutions in support of anti-racism work. The Kern Community College District EODAC committee has taken a stance on anti-racism and equity. However, outside of the related EODAC faculty committees legally required documentation, the Bakersfield College Academic Senate has not taken a clear leadership stance on issues of race and equity.

II. *Faculty Conversation*

Faculty and staff are often the first touchpoint for students and play a significant role in shaping their experience. To enact meaningful change to our racial climate we need to have courageous conversations. Brene Brown says that being clear is kind and this is no exception and these conversations should be respectful. Although broader goals are at play, ensuring buy-in from faculty is on board with the culture shift is a process that requires focus and dedication. There have been workshops/talks of equity by the KCCD Chancellor and Bakersfield College President. However, these trainings are often one directional and do not allow the faculty to engage in interdisciplinary conversations that relate specifically back to the classroom. Furthermore, initial conversations should focus on andragogy and praxis that can be applied immediately in BC classrooms.

Some faculty have a less complex understanding of racial consciousness and tend to view racism and cultural diversity as a polarizing issue (Haynes, 2017). People should try to not be defensive regarding conversations of racial identity and asking people to consider potential implications of skin color; people that feel targeted, often try to downplay racial concerns and advocate for

neutrality of “colorblindness” which will ultimately fail. The conversation is not about getting people to assume guilt but to empower our students and faculty of color.

III. *Continue to Support Events for BC Students & Community*

As aforementioned, the Bakersfield College Student Government Association has shown tremendous leadership on issues of race and equity. According to Raygoza et al. (2022), teachers should view students as change makers; schools should be viewed as a community space for excellence. Teachers’ narratives and lived experiences are a vital part of creating an environment of transformation. As we consider spaces for conversation we should acknowledge the fatigue of diverse faculty leaders that are often tokenized and targeted in anti-racism work (Gorski, 2019). We as educators create learning communities in our classrooms, we should acknowledge as senators and support the college in building a racially conscious community with ongoing events for our students and community.

IV. *Anti-Racism Professional Development:*

The Bakersfield College Academic Senate needs to clearly acknowledge the importance of equity and race-consciousness. Senate President Strobel highlighted, as an example of how we address this issue as considering race in program review campus wide. However, Haynes, (2017) argues to create a positive racial climate all faculty must be involved in the anti-racism work and goes on to say that the faculty with, “expansive views on equality believed that all disciplines had race implications” (p. 98). The same article explained that most faculty are not prepared to have racially, socially, or emotionally charged issues in their classroom, therefore the professional development training should be considered by everyone. These conversations will be difficult because we all have varied levels of proficiency. Ash et. al (2020) challenges us as educational leaders that in order to dismantle racist systems in higher education, we must work together with our colleagues who resist these conversations. Ash goes on to say that, “Some leaders will need remedial education that focuses on systems of whiteness, power, and oppression rather than training on embracing individual tolerance and inclusive excellence” (Ash et. al, 2020, p. 4). These trainings will be uncomfortable and difficult to implement but based on previous examples here are some considerations of how to implement.

First, consider the collective bargaining agreements (CBA) and initiate the meet and confer process to ensure the scope of these workshops does not create undo workload. This is a good first step in signaling to faculty and staff of color that the institution is serious about tackling the systemic issues within the college. In addition, it will send a strong message to the unions on the commitment the college has to addressing systemic racism within the institution. As all CCA has committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion this conversation is aligned with their current values.

Next, training for faculty could start within departments on how to have difficult conversations with each other. This will allow faculty and staff to learn and practice some strategies that they will need in order to tackle policy development. Working with more trusted colleagues can help ease the strain of these conversations. It is notable that departments could also provide a needs assessment and self-identify who needs reminders on race-consciousness practices. According to Raygoza et al. (2021), “there is a power of liberation from a lived experience.” In some departments it is more likely faculty would self-disclose relevant insights with those they work with closely. However, departments should be provided with guidance and professional trainers upon request.

Then, the faculty and staff would need to attend training that centered on the history of systemic racism and its effect on higher education. Faculty could learn how existing structures are problematic, who has benefitted from these systems, how these systems are harming our students, and the importance of their role in dismantling them. These trainings should be administered by experts from outside the district and campus. It is notable that affinity groups for junior faculty, adjunct faculty or different racial groups could provide safe spaces for more challenging conversations (Gorski, 2019).

Finally, the last approach would be offering ongoing opportunities through FLEX and faculty forums for training and consideration. From 2016-2018 Kern High School District mandated race consciousness training asynchronously for individuals on their own time. They modeled this modular approach on their sexual harassment program and as part of their program “Encounters with Racial Stress.” Ideally, like Title 9 training on anti-racism should be compulsory and ongoing. Paid training opportunities modeled like the BC teaching certificate program and Kegley Institute Ethics across the curriculum models provide practical and actionable ways for faculty to engage.

References

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