

# **Mobilizing White Allies as Institutional Change Agents<sup>1</sup>**

## **Spring 2017 – Final Report for the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion**

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**Project Summary:** This phase of the project had three main objectives. 1) To create a safe space for white-identified allies, 2) To develop anti-racist curriculum for faculty that addresses the place of whiteness in the fight for social justice, and 3) To develop a recruitment and implementation plan for engaging faculty in this Diversity Development Project. I am pleased to report that all three objectives were completed.

### **Objective One: To Create a Safe Space for White-Identified Faculty Allies.**

In consultation with Chief Diversity Officer Dr. Kathleen Wong (Lau), I designed, organized, and implemented four workshops centered on supporting and mobilizing white-identified allies. The workshops centered on White Fragility, White Silence, Adverse Racism, and White Privilege. Workshops were held on February 17<sup>th</sup>, March 10<sup>th</sup>, April 17<sup>th</sup>, and May 5<sup>th</sup>. All workshops were Friday afternoons from 1:00-3:00. There were a total of 36 faculty attendees at the four workshops. Faculty attendees came from the following colleges and divisions: Applied Sciences and Arts, Business, Education, Engineering, Humanities and the Arts, Science, Social Science, Counseling Services, and the MLK Library. There is a description and evaluation of each workshop below.

### **Objective Two: To develop anti-racist curriculum for faculty that addresses the place of whiteness in the fight for social justice.**

In consultation with Chief Diversity officer Dr. Kathleen Wong (Lau) and the Faculty Development Center, I developed an 8-week professional development series on Whiteness and Race for the fall 2017 semester. This series creates the opportunity for SJSU's white-identified faculty to build their racial literacy through participation in a seminar focused on whiteness, white racial identities, white racism, and anti-racist practice. This series is scheduled to meet Fridays from 12:00 – 2:00 on the following dates: September 8 & 22, October 6 & 20, November 3 & 17, and December 1 & 15.

### **Objective Three: To develop a recruitment and implementation plan for engaging faculty in this diversity development project.**

Spring 2017 workshop attendees were recruited through email sent to all SJSU faculty. Recruitment emails contained a registration link for each workshop. Reminder emails were then sent to all registered faculty two days before each workshop. Follow up emails were sent to workshop participants thanking them for participation and encouraging attendance at future workshops.

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<sup>1</sup> This title is credited to Dr. Kathy Obear's online social action group: Mobilizing Whites and Change Agents to Create Social Justice.

A similar plan is in place for recruitment of faculty for the fall 2017 Professional Development Series. The first recruitment email will be sent out just prior to the end of the spring 2017 semester, another will be sent in early August, and a final recruitment email will be sent during the first week of fall classes. This fall series will also take place on Fridays as this is a day when most faculty are not scheduled to teach. Course texts will be provided to participants courtesy of the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

The spring 2017 workshops were designed as “drop in” sessions. Though the curriculum for each workshop did “build” upon previous curriculum, each was also designed to stand alone. For the fall 2017 professional development series, faculty will be asked to commit to all eight sessions. A comparative evaluation of the two formats will be conducted at the end of the fall series to determine “next steps” in this white ally diversity development project.

## **Description and Evaluation of Spring 2017 White-identified Ally Workshops**

As many white scholars argue, most white people live most of their lives in segregated white spaces. It is naïve therefore, to assume that whites can enter multi-racial spaces and proceed with their work without making a multitude of race-based mistakes, errors, and (unintended) adversely racist moves. The underlying sentiment shared in each of the four workshops by white-identified faculty was a sense of relief in being able to break their own silences about the challenges of negotiating multiracial spaces as white people. None of the workshop attendees had ever participated in a white-identified ally group (including the facilitator).

### **Workshop One – February 17, 2017**

**Description:** The central conceptual focus for this workshop was **White Fragility**. Robin DiAngelo defines white fragility as “...a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves” (2016:247). This workshop included several active learning exercises designed to engage participants in discussion and reflection centered on the concept of white fragility and common white fragility triggers. Participants were invited to explore their own white fragility triggers and common defensive moves. Participants were then introduced to Dr. Kathy Obear’s (2017) “PAIRS: Effective Dialogue Skills,” and asked to use these skills to develop responses to case studies centered on issues of white racism in multiracial settings. The final hour of the workshop was devoted to this case study methodology wherein participants had the opportunity to practice responding to racist moments in varied institutional settings.

**Evaluation:** There were a total of nine attendees at this workshop. Each was asked to respond to the following evaluative questions:

1. One acknowledgement: I want to acknowledge \_\_\_\_\_ for their...
2. One takeaway: One new insight I am taking from today’s session...
3. Suggestions for improvement of the sessions.

4. Suggestions of topics/ activities for the next three sessions (can be new ideas, or recommendations for using same process again)

**Summary of Qualitative Responses:** Several people acknowledged specific others in the group for being so willing to be open and honest with their responses. The “takeaway” insights gained from the workshop varied, several were related to the idea of “white fragility,” (which no one in the group had heard of before) and the discussion of the common “triggers” to white fragility. Other referenced a new perspective on, *“the invisibility of whiteness,” “my lack of seeing my white identity,” “seeing how my triggers are linked to my identity.”* A few folks had suggestions for improvement of the sessions: *“have more sessions,” “have a running vocabulary list of relevant concepts,” “assign readings to people who might want to “catch up” on a previous session.”* The Professional Development Series for fall 2017 will actually meet each of these suggestions. As for future session ideas, participant responses included the following: more case studies, managing intersecting identities, responding to (but not alienating) white students who say racist things in class, protesting, Black Lives Matter, and more discussion of triggers and white privilege.

### **Workshop Two – March 10, 2017**

**Description:** The central conceptual focus for this workshop was an exploration of **White Silence in response to white racism**. This workshop included several active learning exercises designed to engage participants in discussion and reflection centered on this central concept. Participants were given a hand out, from Dr. Kathy Obear (2017) on, “Suggested Competencies for White Allies & Change Agents.” Participants were then asked to rate themselves in relation to each competency and participate in a discussion of their strengths and weaknesses regarding competencies. This exercise was followed by a discussion of white silences and the “rationales” whites employ to justify silences in the face of racism. Participants were then introduced to Dr. Kathy Obear’s (2017) “PAIRS: Effective Dialogue Skills,” and asked to use these skills to develop responses to case studies centered on instances of white racism in the context of committee meetings, community events, and other institutional spaces. The final hour of the workshop was devoted to this case study methodology wherein participants had the opportunity to practice responding to racist moments in varied institutional settings.

**Evaluation:** There were a total of eleven attendees at this workshop. Each was asked to respond to the following evaluative questions:

1. One takeaway: One new insight I am taking from today’s session...
2. Suggestions for improvement of the sessions.
3. Suggestions of topics/ activities for the next two sessions (can be new ideas, or recommendations for using same process again).
4. Suggestions of ways the Office of Diversity can further support you?

**Summary of Qualitative Responses:** The insights participants noted were connected to all the pieces of the day’s curriculum. Several participants, however, wrote about the idea (presented in the “ground rules”) of “relate/connect” and “leave nobody behind.” In setting the ground rules for the workshop I asked participants to practice relating and connecting to one another’s “shares” before moving right to solution. If whites want to be better allies to people of color, we must first practice being allies to one

another. There was only one suggestion for improvement of the sessions: Make them longer! There was only one suggestion (made by everyone) for future topics: More case studies!.

Finally, several suggestions were made as to how white-identified faculty can be further supported by the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: *“Keep funding things like this and publicize them widely,” “continue hosting sessions like this and maybe offer a “certification” program to incentivize faculty,” “more sessions like this and at least one open dialogue free form,” “more sessions bringing administrators, faculty, and students together for deeper discussions,” “provide this material and resources for learning at home or sharing with colleagues,” “I don’t know, so far I have been really impressed by what I’ve seen.”*

### **Workshop Three – April 17, 2017**

**Description:** The central conceptual focus for this workshop was **Adverse Racism** and, **“the common patterns of well-meaning white people”**. Adverse racism is defined as “forms of racism which allow well-meaning white people to maintain a positive (non-racist) self-image while still perpetuating racism. (Di Angelo, 2017:132). Common patterns of well meaning whites may include, “Guilt, Seeking Absolution, Feeling Indignant/ Unfairly Accused, Objectifying, Rushing to Prove Ourselves, Ignoring, Assuming People of Color Have the same experience white do, Only Acknowledging Racism in Other Whites, not in Ourselves, Explaining Away/ Justifying/ Minimizing/ Comforting, Insisting that if “they” Won’t teach Us, “We” Can’t Know, and Carefulness” (DiAngelo 2016: 223-244). Participants were invited to explore their own common patterns of adverse racism, to discuss these in dyads, and to develop alternate response patterns. Participants were then introduced to Dr. Kathy Obear’s (2017) “PAIRS: Effective Dialogue Skills” and asked to use these skills to develop responses to case studies centered on issues of white racism in classroom settings. The final hour of the workshop was devoted to this case study methodology wherein participants had the opportunity to practice responding to racist moments in varied institutional settings.

**Evaluation:** There were a total of eight attendees at this workshop. Each was asked to respond to the following evaluative questions:

1. One takeaway: One new insight I am taking from today’s session...
2. Suggestions for improvement of the sessions.
3. Suggestions of topics/ activities for the next two sessions (can be new ideas, or recommendations for using same process again).
4. Suggestions of ways the Office of Diversity can further support you?

**Summary of Qualitative Responses:** This was an especially challenging topic for participants as the workshop reveals that the “common patterns of well-meaning whites,” are in fact patterns of adverse racism. Several participants acknowledged this new self-awareness as their main “takeaway” from this session, *“I realize I need to work on my whiteness and how defensive I am,” “I appreciate having the ‘patterns’ spelled out so clearly, it made it easier to identify them in myself,” “I was unaware how privileged I was and how deeply it affected my life. If I don’t know, how do I teach it to my white students?”* There was only one suggestion for improvement of this session: hold them on different days of the week. There were several suggestions for future sessions: Make them longer, use more case

studies, assign some pre-reading, and “provide additional help with developing appropriate language for responding to racist situations in the classroom.”

Finally, several suggestions were made as to how white-identified faculty can be further supported by the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: “Continue to sponsor and support conversation and activities that encourage dialogue and understanding yet embrace all that we are and bring to each other,” “One thing that would be really helpful would be to hear more stories (like the one in the second case study) about the particular challenges our students face with regard to race on campus, so I can think about them in advance and better prepare myself to deal with them if I confront them.” “I really appreciated this session, as well as the dis/ability session from last month, and so these events are great. I would like to see more faculty participate, rather than seeing the usual suspects again and again. I would like to see sessions that specifically address microaggressions and microaffirmations in the classroom and in the university. I really appreciate the university's partnership with the NCFDD; I refer to those resources pretty routinely.”

#### **Workshop Four – May 5, 2017**

**Description:** The central conceptual focus for this workshop was an exploration of **White Privilege**, **White Organizational Privileges**, and the **White Cultural Norms** upholding white supremacy. White privilege was framed, not as special rights or benefits enjoyed by whites, but rather as the, “result of a present social practice and past legal history of excluding nonwhites from the privileges assumed to belong to all citizens’ (Naomi Zack, 1999:80.) Participants were invited to consider a list of “organizational white privileges” in the context of their experiences at SJSU. Okum’s (2001) analysis of the norms of white supremacy culture (and antidotes to this culture) were introduced, and discussed by group members. Participants were then given Dr. Kathy Obear’s (2017) “PAIRS: Effective Dialogue Skills, and asked to use these skills to develop responses to case studies centered on issues of white racism in classroom settings. The final hour of the workshop was devoted to this case study methodology wherein participants had the opportunity to practice responding to racist moments in varied institutional settings.

**Evaluation:** There were a total of eight attendees at this workshop. Each was asked to respond to the following evaluative questions:

1. One takeaway: One new insight I am taking from today’s session...
2. Suggestions for improvement of the sessions.
3. Suggestions of topics/ activities for the fall series.
4. Suggestions of ways the Office of Diversity can further support you?

**Summary of Qualitative Responses:** Most of the participants made some mention of gaining new insight into the concept of white privilege as “the exclusion of people of color.” Several commented on our discussion of white institutional privileges specific to SJSU. Finally, one participant noted, “it’s not Black people’s role to teach whites how to “behave” and speak so that we do not commit micro aggressions or be offensive. We need to educate ourselves to be sensitive in our speech and actions.” Suggestions for improvement and for fall series topics echoed suggestions from previous sessions with one exception. One professor observed, “I see international faculty scared of race in the classroom and

*among their colleagues. Perhaps a session on their perspectives as they come from other countries and are faced with "white" higher ranked professors. I have been misinterpreted by a few of my colleagues for simply giving advice. It has led me to be cautious and not offer help without being asked."*

Finally, only one suggestion was made as to how white-identified faculty can be further supported by the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: *"I think that offering this workshop series again is a great start! I also would love to see the series being offered at different times during the semester."*

## **References**

DiAngelo, Robin. 2016. *What Does it Mean to Be White: Developing White Racial Literacy*. Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.: New York.

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