

One Community Dialogue Executive Summary

March 2, 2020

Feldman Ballroom, Douglass Commons

5 – 7 PM

Executive Summary

Over 220 University of Rochester students, alums, faculty, staff, and administrators joined the One Community Dialogue on Race held on March 2, 2020. Notes were taken on the participants' responses to the following questions: "What do I need to heal?" and "What would I like to see happen?" The responses center on three changes that the University of Rochester could work toward to make clear its stance that it is an anti-racist institution: 1) codifying racism as a violation of the student code of conduct; 2) mandatory, genuine, and ongoing education on racism for all students, administrators, faculty, and staff; and 3) an updated response protocol to racist incidents on campus.

What else is clear from the responses is that we have a lot of work to do to heal the wounds that racism has left on our Black community members and our campus. We need to work to be better allies, take responsibility for our actions, and prioritize the safety of our Black students. With this in mind we will be reviewing all of the recommendations from the One Community Dialogue on Race and using this feedback to help make the University of Rochester Ever Better.

Full Summary

On March 2, 2020, over 220 University of Rochester community members gathered in the Richard Feldman Ballroom in Douglass Commons for a One Community Dialogue on Race ("the Dialogue"). This gathering occurred in response to the image shared on social media of a white student mocking a painting depicting a Black man with hands raised and messages about racism in law enforcement and the movement to keep the Department of Public Safety unarmed ("the Hands Up Don't Shoot Painting"). During this dialogue, the group of students, faculty, staff, administrators, and alums were broken up into eleven restorative circles and asked to respond to the following questions: "What do I need to heal?" and "What would I like to see happen?" Each group took notes and submitted them to Dr. Jessica Guzman-Rea, Director of the Paul J. Burgett Intercultural Center. The summary of the responses to these questions is below.

There were some overarching themes that appeared throughout the responses, and central to each of these themes is a call for the University of Rochester to take a clear stance as an anti-racist institution. Accordingly, there was a great deal of overlap in the responses to the two questions that were asked at the Dialogue. We begin our summary with aspects the participants said that they need to heal and then move into the three major themes that appeared throughout the discussions across groups and in response to both questions: 1) codifying racism as a violation of the student code of conduct, 2) mandatory, genuine, and ongoing education on racism, and 3) an updated response protocol to racist incidents on campus.

What do I Need to Heal?

When asked what was needed to heal, the first theme that emerged was structural change to become an anti-racist institution where the safety of Black students is prioritized. This theme included more representation and retention of people with minoritized identities on campus, particularly people of color and Black people. These changes would include students, faculty, administrators, staff, and even representations in iconography. In addition, participants spoke about transparency around the efforts to arm public safety (and a recognition of the impact on Black students), funding Douglass Leadership House and making it a permanent fixture on campus, taking the Rochester Promise program seriously, and addressing funding to areas on campus that impact students of color.

The second theme is allyship and responsibility. Here participants spoke about the importance of people who are not Black caring about racism, having more of a reaction to racist incidents, and wanting to be educated on race. In regard to this specific incident, participants would like to see a sincere apology and active response from the students involved, someone to check in with the artist who painted the Hands Up Don't Shoot Painting and model depicted in it, and the Hands Up Don't Shoot Painting hung permanently in a public place on campus.

The final theme focused on Black student burnout and exhaustion. Some participants said that coping strategies are needed because it is not possible to heal until they no longer have to encounter racism on campus. Others stated that they just want to feel like they aren't wasting their time and that their concerns are being taken seriously instead of the University just trying to move past the incident. Some participants emphasized that they are burned out because of their participation on committees and task forces, so they want constructive alternatives that do not burden Black students. In this spirit, we now turn to the three major themes that appeared throughout the Dialogue regarding what participants would like to see happen.

What Would I Like to See Happen?

In response to both questions participants stated that while restorative conversations and speaking about racism when it occurs is valuable, there are other actions that they would like to see occur alongside these responses. In particular, participants want an effort for us to live our Meliora Values by creating a safe and equitable campus community that challenges the everyday racism that participants face. They would like the issue of racism dealt with separately and directly outside of a generalized diversity and inclusion umbrella. To these ends, we now discuss the major recommendations that were offered by participants.

1. Codifying Racism as a Violation of the Student Code of Conduct

Participants across all groups indicated that there should be some clear repercussions for racist actions. Specifically, several participants stated that they would like to see racism (and other forms of hate speech) become a violation of the student code of conduct. Furthermore, freedom of speech protections should not apply to racist statements/behaviors on our campus. Logistically, some recommended that it be structured like the Title IX process or academic honesty (i.e., ignorance of the impact of the action should not be a defense). Participants stated that with each of these previous systems, there are clear structures in place and consequences for

negative behavior which act as a deterrent. Participants also indicated that repercussions could include suspension from student organizations and an educational requirement in addition to other consequences. Lastly, some noted that bystanders and people who make racist comments on social media should also fall under the jurisdiction of this policy.

2. Ongoing Mandatory Education on Racism

Participants indicated that education on racism should be mandatory and ongoing for all University of Rochester administrators, faculty, staff, and students. The recommended topics for these trainings are allyship, why racism is problematic, whiteness, white fragility, a history of racist incidents at the University of Rochester, racist incidents throughout the US and internationally, the history of racism in the US, Black history, privilege, how to be an active bystander and have uncomfortable conversations, the reasons that people who are not Black should care about racism, bridging communities and understanding, impact versus intent, microaggressions, why racism is not a Black issue, how to support students of color in their on-campus initiatives, and accountability for racist actions. Participants also indicated that it is important that any educational programs be safe spaces for learning and could include speakers from the Rochester community.

Education for Students

Participants had several ideas for how the mandatory, ongoing, and genuine education for students would be structured. Some suggested a mandatory class on racism while others leaned more toward a first-year experience class with a large racism component for incoming students. They pointed to Writing 105 as an example of a mandatory first year course. Other participants recommended mandatory classes about racism that span all four years. Still others recommended mandatory compassionate conversation workshops like the One Community Program or other programming led by upper class students throughout the entire first year for incoming students (i.e., not just at orientation). A few also asked that there be programming specifically focused on race at orientation and that the current orientation inclusivity efforts be assessed for success. All recommendations were for programming that was not an online “click through” module like the current Title IX training. One group also introduced the idea of having all students sign a promissory note indicating that they will be good community members (and defining what that means) while another recommended that all classes taught at the university of Rochester have a component on racism and that it should be noted in the syllabus.

In addition to the educational ideas for students on an individual level, several groups also indicated that there should be additional training on race for fraternities, sororities, student organizations, and sports teams (including a component on any history of exclusion or racism in their organization). It was also recommended that there be collaboration between different organizations for events and trainings. Specifically, there was an interest in Panhellenic Sororities and Interfraternity Council organizations collaborating with the Multicultural Greek Council organizations on events and initiatives and student organizations collaborating with the cultural organizations on events and initiatives (without the onus being on the MGCs or cultural groups). Others asked for unity between all groups against racism. Lastly, students who are part of student life groups asked for training on how the group should respond to racist actions of group members.

Education for Administrators, Faculty, Coaches, and Staff

Participants indicated that training for administrators, faculty, coaches, and staff be mandatory, genuine, ongoing, and not an online “click through” module like the current Title IX training. In addition, some recommended that administrators and faculty have relationships with the student service professionals that work closely with students.

Participants specifically requested additional training for the Department of Public Safety. This training would cover misperceptions of the people who live in the 19th Ward and issues of racial profiling.

3. Updated Response Protocol to Racist Incidents on Campus

Lastly, participants indicated that they would like to an increase in the transparency and speed of the administration’s response to incidents of racism on campus. In addition, they stated that the response should be less sanitized, less diluted, clearer, more direct (for example, saying the words racism and Black), and indicate the severity of the incident. Participants would like there to be multiple communications per incident that describe the incident, the process to address it, the steps that will be taken or have been taken, and the outcome. Some asked that communications about high profile bias related incidents go through a standardized process so that the communications are immediate, public, and sent across platforms to the entire University community (including URM) so that University employees and students do not learn about them through non-University social media posts.

Groups asked that the administration evaluate what is or is not an effective response to incidents of racism on campus. Some groups recommended that the administration do so by engaging in research and benchmarking to understand how other institutions address these issues. Others recommended that the administration listen to the viewpoints of Black students on these matters and be open to feedback on different perspectives for healing, prevention, solutions. Participants asked that freedom of speech not be used to excuse racism on campus and that the administration not be afraid to hold people responsible for racist incidents.

Finally, participants requested that the administration engages in some ongoing initiatives outlined in a clear action plan to address racism on all scales. Ideas for this plan includes talking about race before racism occurs, ongoing restorative practice, more frequent College Diversity Roundtable discussions that are better advertised, long term solutions that last more than four years, repercussions for racist actions of faculty members, allowing dialogue around these issues on the University social media pages, confronting racial disparities among positions on campus and respecting employees at all levels, and a clear statement from the President coupled with action on racism.

Statement of Thanks

We want to thank all of the students, faculty, staff, and alums who participated in the One Community Dialogue on Race.