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Change Begins Here: Dismantling Systemic and Everyday Racism

Letter from the Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer

Thursday, July 30, 2020

The year 2020 has sparked many opportunities to come together and develop a “new normal.”

Over the last few months, the challenges facing our nation put us at a crossroad in terms of race relations. In recent months we have banned together to become a culture of Zoomers, while also recognizing that racism is its own pandemic. We honor the lives of George Floyd, Ahmaud

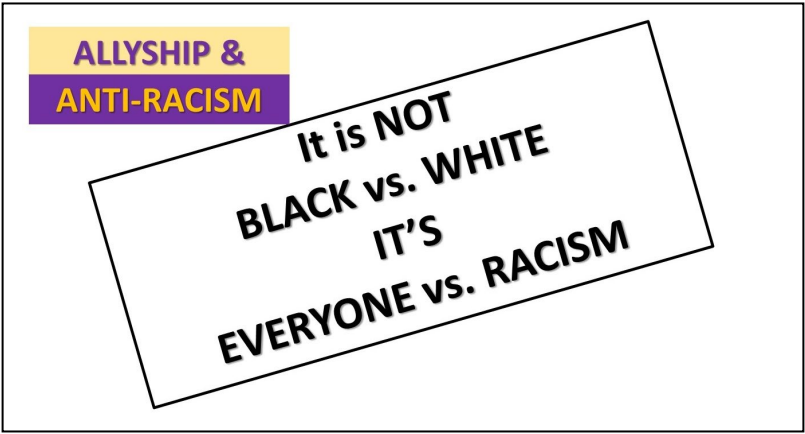
Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and the many other named and unnamed victims of racial injustice by taking action to end all forms of everyday systemic racism. Unequivocally, silence on these issues equates to agreement.



NO MORE TRAGEDIES- Don't try to make sense out of senseless acts: At the recent student-led protest on campus in June, I shared my personal story of visiting Mother Emanuel A.M.E. Church in Charleston, SC in March of 2015 with a group of college students for an alternative spring break trip. The students were enrolled in my Africana Studies course and it was my sixth year teaching the course and leading the trip. Shortly after we arrived at the church, we stood as a group and introduced ourselves as visitors. As customary in any black church, we were welcomed with warm hugs, words of encouragement, prayers and of course an invitation to come back and worship anytime we were in Charleston, SC. We could not have imagined that just two months later Dylan Roof would walk into Mother Emanuel killing nine people. Among them were the individuals who greeted, hugged and prayed for us during our visit. We were sad, angry and deeply confused. The injustice didn't just reside in the shooting at the church. In April of 2015, Walter Scott, an African American was shot in the back in Charleston, SC in a traffic stop for a non-functional brake light. Caught on video, it made national news and had been met with protests and national outcry. We observed all of this happen, only to then watch Dylan Roof be peacefully taken into custody after engaging in a shooting rampage in a church and his meal paid for at a Burger King by the arresting officers. No one should be idle after these events. For real, sustainable change, we must stand together as a diverse coalition against racism of any form, anywhere, at any time.

**WE ARE GOLDEN: IT IS NOT ENOUGH TO
CONDEMN ACTS OF RACISM.**

As a community of educators, we make progress in our communities by listening, using our voices, recognizing and managing bias, developing empathy, and actively taking steps to engage in anti-racist work. Author Ibram X. Kendi said that you are either racist or an anti-racist. As Golden Rams, saying, “I am not racist” is not the same as engaging in “anti-racism work.” Being "concerned" about diversity and inclusion is not the same as demonstrating a commitment to this work. The “new normal” that we strive for should be a nation free of racism. This is not an issue to be left for future generations to continue to struggle with daily. We must affirm through individual and collective actions that Black Lives Matter Everyday at WCU!



The building blocks are in place to embrace that Change Begins Here, in our community. When you read the University’s Mission Statement, Values Statement, Vision Statement and Strategic Plan: Pathways to Students Success, it is clear that diversity, equity and inclusion are priorities at West Chester. Often times, people measure diversity through numbers. Dismantling systemic racism, however, is not as simple as counting numbers to measure progress. Anti-racism work must be intentional. It must work to address historic and current challenges, address disparities by permanently removing barriers, foster access and level the playing field on an ongoing basis to achieve equity and inclusion. To do so, discomfort is unavoidable. New ideas and transformational approaches are necessary, and will be essential. For change to begin here, each of us must participate in opportunities to increase our awareness, create spaces for dialogue personally and professionally and develop skills to disrupt and address racist acts.

CALL TO ACTION: As the fall semester approaches, it’s time for our work as a community of scholars to begin. This website serves as a Call to Action to West Chester University faculty, staff and students and will be a continuous resource to share what’s happening, what is next, how to learn more, how to get involved and what initiatives are in progress. The information provided here will be updated throughout the academic year. In partnership and solidarity, we invite faculty, staff, students, departments, offices, and student organizations to actively increase your awareness and understanding while engaging in anti-racism work. In addition, you can contribute content, plan events, host bold dialogues, create opportunities, share resources and even provide personal reflections and testimonials of your work and commitment. To connect with this effort, please email upcoming events, initiatives or resources to the Office for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

Sincerely,

Tracey Ray Robinson, Ph.D.
Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer