

A Proposal for Carleton College's Antiracism Initiative, January-June 2021

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This proposal outlines the scope of work we feel we are able to undertake for January-June 2021.

Given that Carleton's antiracist initiative is intended to take place over a longer span of time (which we applaud – too often these interventions are planned as quick-fix, short-term efforts), we propose that the first phase (January-May 2021) be one in which the whole community is introduced to the conceptual and practical 'grammar' of antiracism.

We know that there will be many at Carleton who have significant experience around antiracist education and activism, and that some of this training will be at too elementary a level. But we always come back to our starting point – the 'problem' of racism in a predominantly white institution is the fact that many white faculty, administrators and staff feel that race is not a significant issue, not something they need to think about until some kind of crisis or incident brings it to their attention. They believe their white identity does not constitute a racial identity and that only people of color are raced. In this perspective race and racism come to be viewed as something only relevant to Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC).

To seed permanent change, therefore, Carleton needs a common language and a shared understanding across the whole community of how racism is manifested and the importance of race as a component of every person's identity. This first phase of the antiracism initiative will engage everyone at Carleton in a guided conversation around issues of race and racism. The intent is to 'normalize' race talk by making it an expected theme that will inform everyday meetings, teaching and planning across the community – not something that only arises when hate speech or some other event clearly diminishes Carleton BIPOC community members.

We have both seen examples where conversations around race have been initiated without adequate preparation. Without such preparation, conversations can easily be derailed and become sources of resentment.

The 10 most common missteps we have noted are:

1. Not adequately acknowledging the concerns of BIPOC folk and white members of the community moving too quickly to a defensive posture by claiming that accounts of racism are overstated and due to people of color being too sensitive, thin skinned, and seeing racism where it doesn't really exist.
2. Positioning training as a form of mandatory confessionals, where white members feel they are being shamed and disdained simply because of their identity. If they feel that "training" requires them to apologize, confess racist sins and ask people of color to absolve them of their racist history, then enormous resentment is generated. In addition, people of color get weary of white colleagues expressing their "woke-ness" in front of

them. This is why we advocate racial affinity groups so strongly.

3. Moving far too quickly to an individualist interpretation of racism, instead of understanding it as the structure of embedded advantage it really is.
4. Using terms such as racism, white supremacy, anti-blackness and white privilege in inexact and indiscriminate ways.
5. Perceiving training as being mandated in a top-down way with no attempt by those in charge of training publicly modeling their own engagement in antiracist conversations.
6. Assuming that simply talking about race opens people up to considering their own unwitting participation in racism. In fact, without clear protocols and ground rules, talking about race can actually make things worse. People situate themselves in defensive camps, feel others are not listening, and are personally threatened.
7. White members of the community being unwilling to participate fully in conversation for fear of being judged to be racist, of saying the “wrong” thing.
8. Expecting a series of conversations, workshops and trainings to “fix” the problem and remove racism from the community.
9. Thinking that success in race-based conversations entails a collaborative celebration of each other’s identity, fundamental transformations to newly liberating viewpoints, and a joyful coming together in agreement. Our view is that success is simply keeping the conversation going, having people listen to alternative viewpoints, and then learning to live with the realization that fundamentally different views of racism at Carleton co-exist and not seeking to move to any premature celebration of consensus.
10. Not understanding that the conversational model privileged in academic environments of calmly rational analysis—what hooks (1997) describes as “bourgeois decorum”—does not apply in race-based discussions. Consequently, when the emotional temperature rises and people cry in frustration or express anger, or long awkward silences prevail (all of which are quite natural and inevitable), participants feel the discussion has gone awry, broken down and failed. In fact, all these phenomena are regularly occurring dynamics of conversations regarding race.

Overall Structure of this 1st Phase

Each month will open with a community-wide event for faculty and staff that focuses on a particular building block of racial understanding (more detailed descriptions of these sessions will follow). That event will be recorded and available to those unable to attend the live session.

Following each community-wide event, everyone will attend one racial affinity group discussion meeting during that month. In these gatherings, which will not be recorded, we will go deeper into the particular theme previewed in the community-wide monthly event.

We will use the same prompts and conduct the same conversational protocols in all the meetings. Three different racial affinity group discussion sessions will be offered each week, at various times, in the hope that everyone is able to identify one monthly session that will work for them:

- Two of these weekly meeting opportunities will be for white folk (we've scheduled two because of the larger numbers of white folk at Carleton) and one will be for BIPOC community members. Stephen will run the white affinity group meetings, and Bryana and/or Rama Hart will run the BIPOC affinity group.
- We anticipate that with a choice of eight meeting times for white members each month, and four meeting times for BIPOC members, that everyone can find one meeting they could attend.
- We are open to structuring these affinity group meetings functionally (one for staff, one for faculty, one for administrators, one for trustees, one for alumni, and so on) as well as having a mix of participants from different units at each meeting.
- We would urge that attendance at monthly affinity group meetings be acknowledged as evidence of employee commitment to antiracism in performance reviews and annual appraisals.

Breakdown of Topics

January Kick-Off: What Does it Mean for Carleton to Commit to Antiracism?

Carleton representatives will outline the BIPOC concerns expressed by students, staff, faculty and alumni of color that have led to the antiracist action plan. We have a strong belief in the power of storytelling so would hope that some key figures in the Carleton community could join us in talking about their struggle to understand, withstand and combat racism. Modeling from senior leadership will go a long way to convince skeptical community members that this initiative is being taken very seriously.

We will be introduced as trainers and talk about our own racial identities, our racial journeys and the organizing principles and commitments that inform how we'll work across Carleton with different groups. Depending on the time available we will try to gauge the different levels of understanding of race that exist in the community and possibly introduce one or two key ideas.

We will also share the Continuum on Becoming an Antiracist and Multicultural Organization developed by Crossroads Ministry in Chicago: <https://racc.org/wp-content/uploads/buildingblocks/foundation/Continuum%20on%20Becoming%20an%20Anti-Racist,%20Multicultural%20Institution.pdf>

February: What Racial Identity Means for How Life at Carleton is Experienced

This month will focus on how the different racial identities present on campus structure very fundamentally how life at Carleton is experienced. We want to go deeper into exploring how white folk can believe things are going fine, racially speaking, while BIPOC folk believe they experience racism on a regular basis. White folk can assume that race is not a significant part of their lives because they are never required to think in racial terms; unless, of course, a situation arises when race crashes into their world.

In reality, different worlds co-exist side by side at Carleton (as they do everywhere) without a widespread awareness of that fact. White members feel like people mostly get along and BIPOC members feel like their race marks them out as ‘less than’. We will introduce some work on BIPOC and white racial identity development, particularly the belief that (a) white people have ‘escaped’ race because, being white, they don’t have a racial identity and (b) acting in a colorblind way is the most moral way to live.

An opening community-wide event (1-2 hours) will introduce some basic ideas regarding the development of racial identity. In this session we want to get across the idea that for people of color, *everything* is seen through a racial lens, something that usually comes as a shock for white folk. This opening community event would be archived on Zoom so that those unable to attend can catch up on their own time.

During February there will be **eight (1-hour) meetings of white affinity groups (2 per week) and four (1-hour) meetings for BIPOC affinity groups (1 per week)**. Each meeting will allow members to express concerns, ask questions, and give reactions. We will use the same prompts and protocols for each meeting to provide consistency. These meetings will not be recorded.

March: What Is Racism?

A foundational shift we want Carleton community members to make is to think of racism as less of an individual act of behavior, but rather as a systemic and structural reality that predisposes people to act in certain ways without their being aware that this is what’s happening. White people are often deeply offended when someone accuses them of being racist, arguing that they don’t see race and harbor no ill intent to any person of color.

We want to introduce the idea that racism is passively accepting and not noticing structures that disadvantage people of color, just as much as it is using racial slurs. The intent here would be to start people thinking about the structures in their own units and departments at Carleton that disadvantage people of color.

We will then move to looking at how a racist world entrenches white advantage. This is the basic idea of white supremacy or white superiority; that whites, because of their supposedly superior innate intelligence and capacity to use reason should naturally be in positions of authority and power and direct the actions of everybody else.

Introducing racism as something that a system exhibits, and as something people learn unconsciously, circumvents a common white reaction of feeling as if people are being accused of deliberately evil actions and intent.

An **opening community-wide event** (1-2 hours) would introduce the concept of racism in the terms outlined above. The opening community-wide event would be recorded on Zoom so that those unable to attend can catch up on their own time.

During March there will be **eight (1-hour) meetings of white affinity groups (2 per week) and four (1-hour) meetings for BIPOC affinity groups (1 per week)**. We will use the same prompts and protocols for each meeting to provide consistency. These meetings will not be recorded.

April: Implicit Bias & Microaggressions

By now we suspect people will be wanting to know what practical steps they can take to act in an antiracist way. Recognizing implicit bias and the enactment of racial microaggressions is a relatively non-threatening place to begin. Armed with an acknowledgment of race as an important component of everyone's identity, and with an understanding of racism as systemic, people can start to look at biases within themselves, within their peer group, and within institutional policies and practices. We would emphasize that an acknowledgment of implicit bias is an important starting point for the kind of focused institutional change at Carleton that will follow in 2021-2022.

Racial microaggressions are an enactment of implicit bias, so it makes sense to have the session include this theme. Microaggressions are small, daily actions that represent a wider racist system. They are generally not intended to be harmful and, when brought to someone's attention, are often strenuously denied. Examples are who gets called on to speak in class or a staff meeting, how a teacher, leader or supervisor makes eye contact with some and not others, how promises are made to BIPOC folk and then forgotten, what kinds of humor and jokes are acceptable, and questions that are posed ("where are you from?" to a student or colleague who does not look to be of white European descent). When microaggressions are revealed in a mixed race group the white members will often dive in to 'save' or excuse the perpetrator, and people of color will be told not to be so sensitive.

An **opening community-wide event** (1-2 hours) will introduce the notion of implicit bias and microaggressions, and as co-facilitators we will model how we enact these. This will be recorded on Zoom so that those unable to attend can catch up on their own time.

This would be followed by **eight (1-hour) meetings of white affinity groups (2 per week) and four (1-hour) meetings for BIPOC affinity groups (1 per week)**. We will use the same prompts and protocols for each meeting to provide consistency. These meetings will not be recorded.

May: Bystander Interventions & Allyship

Building proactively on work done around implicit bias and racial microaggressions, we would end this phase by exploring the different kinds of bystander interventions people can make when they feel (a) someone is being treated unfairly based on their racial identity, and (b) that race is being pushed aside and regarded as a non-issue, or even ignored completely, in unit and departmental decisions and practices. We will also introduce the notion of allyship, particularly in terms of what BIPOC communities feel are the best contributions white allies can make.

An **opening community-wide event** (1-2 hours) will introduce common forms of bystander intervention and as co-facilitators we will model how we have enacted and witnessed these. This session will be recorded on Zoom so that those unable to attend can catch up on their own time.

This would be followed by **eight (1-hour) meetings of white affinity groups (2 per week) and four (1-hour) meetings for BIPOC affinity groups (1 per week)**. We will use the same prompts and protocols for each meeting to provide consistency. These meetings will not be recorded.

Future Work

The January-May introductory phase constitutes a community immersion in the language and concerns of antiracist work. The hope is that, as much as possible, when people speak about racism and how it's enacted and experienced at Carleton after this first phase, everyone will share a common understanding.

We understand from the Action Team's proposal that, as you move into Fall 2021 and beyond, you might want to bring things down to a granular level and consider—on a unit-by-unit, department-by-department, program-by-program basis—how Carleton can move further along the antiracist institution continuum. This would involve reviewing policies and practices (e.g., hiring, performance appraisals, reporting structures, curricular change, teaching approaches, etc.) to ensure that the college is becoming an antiracist organization.

Additional Personnel

Stephen and Bryan have associates that they have worked with in the past whom they call on from time to time. These include Dr. Rama Hart (University of St. Thomas), Dr. Mary Hess (Luther Seminary, St. Paul) and Dr. Lucia Pawlowski (St. Lawrence University, Canton, NY).