Notes from Penn Summit: Race-Conscious Leaders

Themes from campus-climate surveys:

Overt Racism; Curricular Disregard; Tokenization, Involuntary Spokespersonship, and Hypervisibility; Structural Passification; Secondhand Racism Microinvalidations; Microaggressions

What Race-Consciousness Requires:

- Accurate understandings of the realities of race on campus
- Authentic conversations and collaborations with people of color that entail listening and feeling
- Willingness to boldly confront longstanding racial problems
- Strategy, intentionality, and cross-sector partnerships
- Professional literacy
- Multi-level accountability
- Critical self-reflection, professional honesty, and remediation
- Constant questioning

Questions Race-Conscious Leaders Raise:

- How do my (in)actions reproduce racial inequity?
- What do I really know about the realities of race on my campus?
- Why does the diversity of our faculty and staff not reflect the diversity of our student body?
- What are the consequences?
- How racially diverse is my leadership team and staff?
- How is whiteness built into definitions of merit and quality?
- Why do so few Latinas study abroad? Why are there so few Black males in engineering? Why do faculty and staff members of color depart our institution at disproportionately higher rates?

What Race-Conscious Leaders Do:

- Walk into meetings, notice who is seated at the table and who is not, and recognize that all (or the overwhelming majority) of the senior-level administrators and tenured faculty are White.
- Raise questions when they see racial segregation and ethnic clustering on campus, racial inequities in data reports from the office of institutional research and elsewhere, and too few people of color in leadership roles and tenured professorships.
- Refuse to be convinced that there is a shortage of qualified candidates for faculty positions and key leadership roles. If they are unsuccessful in attracting a diverse talent pool, race-conscious leaders continue to search until diversity is found.
- Do not celebrate minimal success. Neither the appointment of one Asian American vice provost, one Latino dean, nor a chief diversity officer signals to a race-conscious leader that significant racial progress has been made.
- Recognize that an all White (or overwhelmingly White) leadership team and/or faculty is a sign of a malfunctioning organization.
- Are the top advocates for racial equity in their departments/ schools/institutions. They become role models for others who are inspired by their demonstrated commitment to racial equity.

- Understand that they sometimes unknowingly commit racial microaggressions and inadvertently make racial mistakes.
- Hold themselves and others accountable for responding to reports of racism, investigating, inequities, and closing racial equity gaps.
- Expect data to be disaggregated by race and gender. They insist on institution-wide and sub-unit equity benchmarks to continuously monitor progress toward closing racialized opportunity gaps.
- Are aware of power asymmetries, and account for them by partnering with students, faculty, and staff members of color. While particular persons may be responsible for regularly reporting on racial equity markers (e.g., CDOs), race-conscious leaders see much value in hearing firsthand from people of color.
- Remediate their professional shortcomings.

Strategically Improving Campus Racial Climates:

Individual Level:
- Identifying unconscious biases (https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/education.html)
- Creating a personal curriculum – readings, conferences, etc.
- Developing checklists of substantive use of effective professional practices
- Identifying exceptional actors, adapting the essence of their effective approaches
- Seeking feedback from critical friends

Unit Level:
- Department/school-wide conversations on race
- Collective listening sessions Collaborative inquiry (e.g., equity scorecard process)
- Common readings and media viewings, collective conversations, and plans for subsequent application and integration
- Syllabus/activity/approach sharing with internal and external input
- Collaboratively determining metrics for assessment and goals for unit improvement

Institution Level:
- Internal campus racial climate study
    - Pros: contextualization, faculty less likely to discredit methods, study can occur over a longer time period, follow through more likely
    - Cons: familiarity may contaminate interpretation of results, participants may feel less comfortable, internal racial politics may affect reporting
- Commissioned campus racial climate study
    - Pros: expertise and experience, some objectivity
    - Cons: faculty more likely to discredit methods, no follow through
- A curricular approach to faculty and/or staff development
- Written institution strategy document

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