

DARS Family,

Since our statement on American Racism a few weeks ago, I have had several groups and organizations respond with offers to help. Most notably is a letter from a group of DARS alumni of color (see attached). I am very grateful for this letter for several reasons. First, it offers help and we need help. Second, it offers mechanisms of accountability. Such mechanisms are important so that DARS' commitment to explicitly address American Racism does not dissipate from distraction and inaction. Third, the letter accurately points out things we can do better in DARS and suggests actions that are feasible and impactful.

Moving forward, the faculty and I will be formalizing communication and consultation processes between DARS' students, faculty, and DARS' alumni of color. These processes will serve as mechanisms of help and accountability. For example, for the infusion of DARS' American Racism Advocacy Projects, I think faculty/students being able to formally consult with an alumnus of color will help generate creative, innovative, and impactful advocacy strategies. Another example, for DARS' students of color, I think connecting them with an alumnus of color for mentorship would enhance their academic and professional self-actualization. Another example, I think asking students and/or alumni of color to serve on future faculty search committees would enhance the recruitment of Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) candidates. Finally, I am committing DARS to other suggestions in the letter: (a) a survey of alumni for suggestions regarding DARS' original statement on American Racism, (b) regular panel dialogues with alumni of color, and (c) establishing scholarships for BIPOC students.

The above will place an unfair burden on DARS alumni of color. While I am grateful and accept their offer to take on this burden, I want to be clear: a vast majority of the change and healing will need to occur in our own hearts and minds. The above actions, mechanisms of help and accountability will have a secondary impact: facilitating growth in us as counseling faculty and counselors in training. Thus, I think this journey should be guided by a couple principles.

1. Continuous dialogue that is courageous, compassionate, and respectful. We will dialogue toward the primary goal of changing our own hearts and minds and not necessarily changing the hearts/minds of others. This will require courage. Courageous dialogue does not mean the absence of fear. Indeed, courageous dialogue includes expressing and transcending one's own fears with honest self-reflection and willingness to change and grow. This dialogue will require compassion. Compassion (i.e., to suffer with) where we feel each other's fears, anger, and pain. Finally, dialogue that is respectful is not negotiable. Courageous, compassionate, and respectful dialogue will breed trust; the deeper the trust, the greater the risks we will take with each other. Trust will also help us dialogue in a spirit of individual accountability as opposed to judgment by others.
2. Apolitical. DARS does not and will not endorse particular political candidates nor parties. Per our ethical duty, we will be addressing American Racism by actively advocating for the health of Black Americans, especially in the context of seeking counseling. While this will include engaging/petitioning politicians of all parties, as well as other policy makers and stakeholders, we will not be making political nor partisan statements nor taking political nor partisan positions. I am sure others will try to label our actions as political and partisan, which is an unavoidable fact of current American society. To be clear: *DARS is not driven by politics, DARS is*

*driven by the physical safety, mental, behavioral, vocational, and spiritual health of Black Americans.*

Why the focus on American Racism...what about the other bigotries? I think American Racism needs to be DARS' immediate priority for two reasons. First and foremost, the physical safety of Black Americans is in crisis. American Racism can stop being our priority when events like a Black male being shot twice in the back by police and Black males being found dead hanging from trees stop. Second, the history of American Racism permeates American history. Here are a few reminders of the toxicity spewed from the disease of American Racism:

- 1640, in Virginia, two White servants and one Black servant ran away from their master. After being caught, a judge ordered all three to receive 30 lashes; yet the two White servants received an extra year of indentured servitude while the Black servant (John Punch) was sentenced to a lifetime of servitude. This action has led many to consider John Punch to be the first American slave.
- 1669, the Virginia legislature passed an act that if a slave died while being punished by their slave owner, the slave owner would not be charged with murder.
- 1704, South Carolina created "slave patrols," a police force to control unruly slaves.
- 1857, the United State Supreme Court Chief Justice stated in the verdict against Dred Scott's lawsuit for his freedom that "Black Americans had for more than a century before been regarded as beings of an inferior order, and altogether unfit to associate with the white race, either in social or political relations; and so far inferior, that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect."
- 1861, Civil War.
- The compromise of 1877, when the federal government turned its back on Reconstruction, allowing southern states to pass laws requiring separation of persons of color from White people (i.e., "Jim Crow" laws).
- Civil Rights Act of 1957. This was the first Civil Rights Act since Reconstruction; almost 100 years had passed.
- 1991, the police beating of Rodney King. The first viral video depicting American Racism.
- 2020, a police officer kneels on George Floyd's neck for eight minutes and 46 seconds. As a result, George Floyd is killed.

Thus, American Racism is our immediate priority. To be clear, DARS will not avoid addressing other bigotries. Indeed, I believe prioritizing American Racism and its pervasiveness will, invariably, have a ripple effect of motivating additional actions toward addressing other bigotries. Indeed, many of the action toward American Racism will be replicable toward other bigotries.

Why have we not done these things sooner? As Department Chair, I do not necessarily have a good answer but here is my honest answer. I believed that being a department that focused on mental health, addictions, and rehabilitation; a department with faculty with counseling experience and credentials, an explicit course on multicultural issues and accreditation standards for cultural competence; a department where research has been conducted on multicultural and racism issues, etc., etc. made DARS different...more transcendent of American Racism and other bigotries. This mentality is passive, it has been safe, and it has been, frankly, an arrogant White privilege. Watching George Floyd being slowly killed by a police officer with the look of righteousness on his face has shattered this mentality.

DARS is a (small) institution. As an intuition, our immediate priority is to change and grow so that (a) Black students seek and complete our excellent programs without the cost of hindered self-actualization and (b) Black Americans in need of counseling do not hesitate to seek it from all of our students and alumni. From there, DARS will not be fully healthy until BIPOC students, students from other oppressed groups, and White students seek and complete our programs because the programs are excellent AND because DARS, as an institution, actively and strategically supports students' different paths to self-actualization.

I believe a fully healthy DARS is a matter of time and hard work. If you have read this statement, then you, in some way or another, are part of the DARS family. If you have suggestions and/or want to help with the above challenge, please let me know- [toriellop@ecu.edu](mailto:toriellop@ecu.edu). I cannot guarantee all suggestions will be implemented but I can guarantee all suggestions will be considered.

Forward!

Dr. T