

The USC Equity Institutes address five challenges that undermine racial equity on college and university campuses. Our theory of change is embedded in the articulation of these problems, and project outcomes are specified beneath each.

Postsecondary educators often neglect to engage in serious, honest conversations about race and racism on campus

Our center's campus racial climate studies consistently reveal that race and the discussion of racism remain taboo in most academic departments and campus units. Most White participants say they fear being perceived as naïve about racial issues, or even worse, as racist if they speak the wrong words. Many people of color in our research fear the professional ramifications of calling out racism, while others become fatigued by always being the only persons raising their White colleagues' consciousness. Ours and others' research shows that faculty members and campus leaders have learned to skillfully talk around race without explicitly naming particular racial problems, persons, or groups.

OUR STRATEGY

Equip 20 campus leaders with vocabulary and techniques to effectively raise race questions and lead productive conversations about racial equity on their campuses. This is achieved by offering them rehearsal opportunities that permit racial mistake-making, recovery, and learning. We create space for colleagues to talk honestly with each other about seemingly explosive racial topics.

Few campus leaders know how to effectively 'do' racial equity

One major finding from our five-year national study on the early-career experiences of higher education professionals is that few actually learn how to 'do' racial equity in their graduate degree programs. Accordingly, practically nothing is taught about what to say or do, for example, when white supremacists show up on a campus. Moreover, most senior leaders confess to us that they never learned what to do when academic progress reports show alarming disparities within and between racial groups; when racial segregation is observable and commonplace on campus; and when faculty and student demographics are terribly mismatched. If racial equity is to be achieved, people who work on college campuses (those who are supposed to do something about inequities) must be taught content and strategies they never learned anywhere else in their academic and professional upbringing.

OUR STRATEGY

Teach 20 campus leaders skills they never formally learned anywhere else along their educational and professional trajectories. This is achieved through Equity Institute modules that introduce participants to topics, frameworks, evidence-based readings, books, and practical tools on racial equity.

Racism undermines campus equity goals

Racial inequities in first-to-second year persistence, six-year graduation rates, faculty and staff promotion, and employee turnover are rarely understood to be outcomes produced by racist institutional policies, cultures, and practices. The Chronicle of Higher Education, Inside Higher Ed, and other outlets frequently publish news stories about racist incidents on college campuses that are consistent with examples students, faculty, and staff members of color offer Center researchers in our climate studies. These experiences negatively affect sense of belonging and mattering, student success, and employee productivity and retention.

OUR STRATEGY

Raise consciousness among 20 campus leaders and/or faculty members about how experiential encounters with racism, in combination with other well-studied factors, co-mingle to negatively affect student and employee outcomes. This is achieved by introducing Equity Institute participants to readings and digital resources that illuminate these issues.

Too few senior leaders are actively engaged in local and national equity learning networks

Organizational learning strengthens racial equity work in colleges and universities. That is, colleagues are considerably more invested in organizational improvement efforts when they talk with each other, engage collaboratively with data, make discoveries together about forces that facilitate and undermine equity, and collaboratively assess their contexts. Also, learning is enhanced when professionals across different campuses share examples of effective educational practices and policies, as well as instructive stories of times they failed to meet their racial equity goals.

OUR STRATEGY

Cultivate cohorts of 20 equity-minded colleagues and collaborators on a single campus. Also, unite hundreds of college and university professionals in a sustainable national network together and with other administrators across the country who participate in USC Equity Institutes.