DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION IN HIGHER EDUCATION:
A Presentation to the VMI BOV-2

Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
The Honorable Janice Underwood, PhD
“Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred...or we can walk through lightly, ready to imagine another world.”

— Arundhati Roy, Author

“The God of Small Things”
Many Virginians: ONE Commonwealth

Shared Goal - To develop Virginia into an inclusive state where all people can live, learn, work, play, and thrive.
REVIEW
BEST PRACTICES IN IMPLEMENTING DIVERSITY INITIATIVES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

- VP Reports to the Superintendent
- Executive Cabinet Role
- Institutional Memberships (NADOHE, AAAED)
- Faculty & Student Recruitment Plan (SREB)
- Staff (Compliance & DEI Initiatives)
- Equitable Budget
- Strategic Diversity Plan
- Accountability
HOMEWORK

• Do your homework
• Engage in honest dialogue
• Create a job description for a VP of Diversity
• Begin Your Search for a VP of Diversity
• Foster collaborative feedback and ask questions
PERSONAL DIVERSITY

- Race
- Culture
- Socio-Economic Status
- Geography
- Education
- Belief System

ORGANIZATIONAL DIVERSITY

- What does VMI represent?
- How do you value your role in shaping diverse leaders?
- How do you make VMI sustainable over generations?
The *RACE* Toward Difficult Conversations
Discussion Norms

• 3C’s - Speak with compassion, clarity, and courage
• It’s okay not to know everything about race and racism
• Discomfort is to be expected – Walk (or lean) towards the discomfort
• Listen to others
• Engage in self reflection and examine your own racial engagement
• Resist a discourse of defense
• Talking about race and racism is a good thing; it doesn’t equate to racism or invalidate other forms of oppression
Terminology

- **Race** – a fictitious social construct; remains complicated and nuanced in the 21st century
- **Racism** – an institutional system of oppression controlled by a dominant group of people
- **Prejudice** – discriminatory beliefs or individual acts
- **Racism and prejudice** exist as different constructs
The Problem
The Problem

Equally  

Equitably  

JUSTICE
Contemporary Racism: *Invisible Binary* (Diangelo, 2018)

**Racist = Bad**

- Bigoted
- Ignorant
- Prejudiced
- Hateful
- Mean-spirited
- Lynching

**Not Racist = Good**

- Educated
- Progressive
- Open-minded
- Well-intended
- Polite
- Having diverse friends

*This Binary makes talking about race and racism so difficult; maintains racism as the status quo.*
Why is it so difficult to talk about...

Race
And
Racism?

Bystanders
Bystander Statements

Joseph William Turner, The Slave Ship
©Burstein Collection/CORBIS
My parents taught me to love everyone.
I don’t see color. I am a person of color and don’t need to talk about race.
I don’t care if you are purple, pink, or polka dotted.
Everyone struggles in life, but if you work hard you will be successful.
I’m not racist. We all bleed red on the inside.
I see people as individuals. I have black friends.
Racism is in the past.
Race doesn’t have any meaning to me or anyone I know.
When my great grandmother immigrated to the U.S, my family was discriminated against too; so, I know what it means to be a person of color.

I have black people in my family. I am married to a person of color.

**We have women and black people on our team.** I have black friends.

I went to a very diverse school that celebrated all people.

We adopted a child of color.
What is Bias?

• The *stories* we tell ourselves or others about an individual or a group
• comes from our limited personal/life experiences
• Creating a shortcut - Our brain’s way of summarizing large sums of data from our specific life experiences
Microaggressions

- Microaggressions are seemingly benign statements that are actually rooted in bias and bigotry.

- TSA motto: When you see something, say something

“Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.”

• What Would You Do?
Microaggression, honest mistake, or something else?
Microaggression, honest mistake, or something else?
PROMOTING INCLUSION

Inclusive Workforce

- Background, experience, industry
- Age, generation life stage
- Disability
- Sexual orientation or LGBT+ ally
- Office location, LOB,
- Ethnicity (culture or country of
- Race
- Languages
- Thinking or personality style
- Military service
- Education
- Gender
- Family status
CREATING A CULTURE OF INCLUSION

The Cultural Iceberg

Observable

behaviours & practices

Not Observable

perceptions

climate

attitudes

geography

beliefs

demographics

values

economics

media

education

ideologies

religion
QUESTIONS?

Governor’s Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
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Yewande Austin | Mikaela Swann | #DiversityWins | #CommonwealthConversations

https://www.governor.virginia.gov/diversity/