

Dean's Innovation Fund: "Racial Literacies"

ABSTRACT

"Racial Literacies: How to Talk, Teach, and Learn about Race, Racism and Anti-Racism" intends to inspire transformative conversations in our communities that will result in ameliorative policies and preventative programs. The principal investigators of this proposal, Kirk Ambrose, Jennifer Ho, and John-Michael Rivera (all of whom hold leadership positions in arts and humanities) emphasize the multiple ways that we must all become conversant on topics of race and racism in order to combat structural inequity and to advocate for anti-racism, as individuals and as institutions. Scholars may know how race and racism operate within particular fields of study or subjective racial identities and experiences, but we do not always know the different forms of lived experiences that others have, as well as the long and complicated history of race and racism that has emerged and morphed across centuries within and outside the US.

SUMMARY

How will we end racism? What strategies can we use to promote anti-racism in higher education? Where, on our college campuses, are the places that people can best intervene to end systemic racism? These are the central questions that drive our proposal and our commitment to racial literacies. Openly discussing race and racism is often a challenging experience, particularly within university and college classrooms—spaces intended for open discourse. In the US, many have grown up knowing the importance of different forms of literacy and fluency: in reading and writing in the English language; in knowing how to decipher a map; and in basic math skills. Yet the US populace has not been taught how to talk about race and racism, nor how to facilitate these conversations. Framed by and engaged with scholarly historical and theoretical works about the origins of race and racism, race discrimination, and narratives about racial identities and communities, "Racial Literacies: How to Talk and Teach about Race and Racism in the US" offers our university community (staff, students, and scholars) innovative dialogical, pedagogical, and epistemological approaches to discussing and debating systemic racism, racial formation, and anti-racism practices in service to fostering constructive dialogue and improving the literacy around race at the University of Colorado Boulder.

The goal of this year-long seminar is to understand race and racism as both theory and praxis and to create anti-racism practices that can be flexible and durable, since how we respond to racism will change across time and space. "Racial Literacies" is a scholarly project rooted in critical race theory with broader practical applications to our work lives, especially in a university setting. To that end, "Racial Literacies" considers not just faculty, graduate students, or undergraduates as facilitators and participants, but also our staff members, many of whom have degrees that range from BAs to PhDs and who are actively advancing racial equity in their units. We wish to create a campus-wide community engagement that provides tools for listening and learning so that staff, students, and scholars can write, research, and teach about race and racism more productively and so that all of us can create anti-racism scholarship and practices as solutions to the problem of systemic racism.

Seeking to advance scholarly discourse, "Racial Literacies" will develop practices for holding conversations that address systemic racism in and out of the classroom and on and off campus in which participants are able to truly listen to and sincerely engage with one another. Seminar participants will meet as a large group twice monthly during the seminar year. Fall 2023 will focus on "Racism and Racial Formation," providing a foundational knowledge about these

topics before shifting in Spring 2024 to “Anti-Racism and Intersectionality,” allowing people to apply what they learned the previous semester into action items. We will showcase guest speakers who are national experts in race, racism, ethnic studies, and/or critical race studies.

We plan to have “Racial Literacies” launched in Fall 2023. Furthermore, we intend to create public partnerships with community organizations in the Boulder and Denver metro area, such as Su Teatro, Latino Alliance, Longmont Museum, Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art, Black Box Theater, among others. Here is a breakdown of how we hope the 2023-24 academic year will be structured:

Semester I (Fall 2023): Racism & Racial Formation – 2 meetings for each theme

- *Critical Race Theory – August/September
- *Settler Colonialism – September/October
- *White Supremacy in the US – October/November
- *Global Racism – November/December

Semester II (Spring 2024): Anti-Racism & Intersectionality – 2 meetings for each theme

- *Race & Religion – January
- *Intersectional Oppression – February
- *Anti-Racist Theory – March
- *Anti-Racist Practice – April

There are many staff, students, and faculty who are genuinely invested in anti-racism efforts, on and off campus. We will ask people to fill out a simple application where they express their interest in the seminar’s theme and their commitment to racial justice. Each participant will be put in a cohort of five and will be encouraged to interact with one another using an on-line course management system, Canvas, by sharing their thoughts and reflections in a group journal managed through Canvas and which the graduate research assistant will oversee.

The structure of the cohorts will emphasize the following through the course of the seminar year:

- 1) Learning and Listening
- 2) Talking and Listening
- 3) Acting and Listening

Using Canvas, the participants, through their small cohorts, will reflect on the readings and the larger bi-monthly discussions of the seminar. The group journal prompts on Canvas will allow participants to develop trust with a smaller group of people, through critical writing and thinking. After a few months, we will then ask cohorts to meet, either virtually or in real time, to engage in conversations related to the seminar. Again, this will facilitate trust by practicing talking about race and racism in a group in which they’ve already learned and shared reflections in a group journal. In Spring 2024 we will ask each participant to work on a project related to their interests in advancing anti-racism. The cohorts may choose to work together on a project or to find others in the seminar who share their interests in applying the knowledge of “Racial Literacies” to a specific project. In this manner the participants, in small groups, will move from learning to talking to taking action, all with an emphasis on purposeful listening—as our above structure emphasizes, at every step listening as a key component. All projects will be archived on the “Racial Literacies,” website and made sharable for other organizations to replicate and serve as a model for how to not just think and talk about anti-racism, but to enact anti-racism practices.

BUDGET

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| Books/Materials/Photocopies: | \$2,000.00 |
| Honoraria for speakers: | \$6,000.00 |
| Travel/Lodging for speakers: | \$3,000.00 |
| Student/Staff stipends (30x\$300): | \$9,000.00 |
| Faculty stipends (20x\$150): | \$3,000.00 |
| Facilitator stipends (14x\$200): | \$2,800.00 |
| Graduate Research Assistant: (\$30.06/hr, 320 hours) | \$9,619.00 |
| (11% fringe) | \$4,348.00 |
| TOTAL: | \$39,767 |

Budget Justification:

We believe that one way to incentivize our community to engage with meaningful anti-racism work is to pay small stipends. We will limit the number of active Racial Literacy participants to 50 (30 staff/students and 20 faculty) and expect that in return for the stipends they will actively participate in the year-long seminar, in their cohorts, and in creating an anti-racism project that they can enact on or off campus. We intend to bring between 3-4 speakers (to be determined, but we hope to invite both researchers who are outside of Colorado as well as our colleagues at CU Denver and Colorado State) to campus to facilitate our anti-racism projects and to push our thinking on anti-racism work. We will provide books or photocopied materials for participants (specific works to be determined), and we will pay 14 people to help lead discussion of the specific topics in our seminar. We will also hire and pay a Graduate Research Assistant to manage the logistics of the Racial Literacies seminar (help with the creation of Canvas and our Racial Literacies website that will be the repository of the projects, aid with the travel and logistics of our visiting scholars) and to maintain clear and active communication among our participants.