CAREER READINESS FOR WOMEN OF COLOR: CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR AUTHENTIC ENGAGEMENT

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BEFORE WE BEGIN...

Expectations & Explanations
SETTING EXPECTATIONS

• This workshop is...
  • Designed to help career services professional get a better idea of the career-readiness barriers that women of color face

• This workshop will go over...
  • Why women of color need special attention
  • Why we should care and what we can do about
  • General strategies for increasing your cross-cultural competence

• And have an activity!
SETTING (MORE) EXPECTATIONS

• This workshop is not...

• An “If you meet with a woman who is [insert race/ethnicity/culture here], then you should [insert stereotypical/essentialist thing that is reflective of said race/ethnicity/culture here]” experience

• A “This one time that one girl did one thing, which I have then used to generalize the entire group” storytelling session

• If you feel uncomfortable, think about the why not the what of your discomfort.

• Remember: This is a safe space, so no judgement allowed!
A NOTE ON SEMANTICS

• By “women of color” I mean individuals who identify and/or present as female and who are members of racial, ethnic, and cultural minority groups

• This includes transgender women as well as gender fluid and gender non-binary individuals

• Because...

• Some experiences are based more on others’ assumptions, so we need to cast this wide net in order to have the ability to conceptualize as many women’s experiences as possible.
WHY WOMEN OF COLOR?

“But I thought the guys had the problems...”
IT’S NOT THE “OPPRESSION OLYMPICS”

• Overwhelming focus on negative experiences of men of color leaves many to assume that “the girls are okay”

• Women of color operate within the same oppressive social structures that constrict their male counterparts

• The responses tend to look different, hence the illusion of okay-ness

• Initiatives for “women and girls” tend to overwhelmingly help White girls, while initiatives for “young people of color” tend to overwhelmingly help men of color

• This leaves many women of color underserved
CONCEPT OF INTERSECTIONALITY

**Theory:** Argues that women of color exist at the intersection of race and gender identities, and can only be understood (and served) by taking that combined social location into consideration (Crenshaw)

- Can be extended to include identities such as sexual orientation, gender presentation, and religious affiliation

**Practice:** Policies that aim to assist women of color will only work if they are intersectional

- If we want to help women of color be ready for future careers, we must take their racial and gendered experiences into consideration.
- Focusing on one or the other will lead to failure.
SOCIAL & CULTURAL MESSAGING ABOUT “WORK”

- Differential socialization practices that what is deemed “normal” for men and White women
  - Socialization = the process of learning the rules and norms of your culture
  - Social class, economics, and immigrant status are hugely important to consider

- Familial and/or cultural messages about what majors and careers are acceptable/appropriate
  - Less passion and purpose, more money and status

- Familial and/or cultural messages about the role that work should play in a woman’s life
  - Often contradictory
UNIQUE CAREER-READINESS HURDLES

• One-two punch of racism and sexism permeates all aspects of career-readiness processes

• Career research shows skewed demographics and awful experiences of racism and sexism in many lucrative fields

• Recent research: Asian-sounding last names get less interviews

• Similar to studies that show that Black-sounding names are passed over for interviews, even when employers are given identical resumes with White-sounding names

• Networking/informational interviewing with biased people

• Opportunity gaps caused by inequality in education and training, especially in STEM and financial services
ON-THE-JOB ISN’T MUCH BETTER

• Racialized gender pay gap

  • Women earn less than men (86 cents/$1)
  • Asian women earn slightly more than White women (87 cents vs. 82 cents per $1)
  • Non-Asian women of color earn the least
    • Black women: 65 cents/$1; Hispanic/Latinas: 58 cents/$1

• Racial and gender-based standards for what is “professional”

  • Natural hair
  • Religious head coverings
  • “Ethnic” prints and patterns

• “The (White) Boys Club” ensure exclusion of women of color from key career development entities
WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE ON CAMPUS
The lived experiences of women of color in college
Microaggressions from classmates, faculty, and staff

• *Definition:* subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) directed towards people from marginalized groups, often automatically or unconsciously

• Common examples:
  
  • Your discussion contributions are ignored in class until they are parroted by a White student.
  
  • Your TA consistently confuses you and the only other person of color in the class, despite your lack of similarities.
  
  • Your professor assumes you plagiarized your paper because it doesn’t “sound like it came from you.”
  
  • Your academic advisor steers you away from quantitative courses despite your good grades and stated interests.
EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG WOMEN OF COLOR AT PWIs

Assumptions of admissions status

• Common with Black and Latina students
• Idea of a “stolen seat” vs. an earned one
• Fisher vs. University of Texas at Austin
  • 48 students admitted with lower scores
  • Case only challenged the 5 minorities of that group

Assumptions of financial circumstances

• Classmates assume they are on need-based scholarships or receiving aid unrelated to academic merit
EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN OF COLOR AT PWIs

• Double consciousness (DuBois)
  • People of color are conscious of both how they see themselves and how others see them with regards to their non-Whiteness
  • Add gender, and it’s a triple consciousness

• Stereotype threat (Steele)
  • Theory: Negative stereotypes become self-fulfilling prophecies for people who are members of the marginalized groups
  • The common set up: Students are given a test. Right before they take it, they are told that members of a specific group tend to do poorly on the test. The results indicate this.
  • Reverse is also proven true
HOW THESE EXPERIENCES MANIFEST

- Burnout
  - Doing school work while dealing with identity is exhausting!
- Comparatively lower grades
  - Due to the extra mental energy expelled with maintaining sanity
- Self-segregation
  - Safe way to escape, but not useful for networking and forming cross-cultural relationships
- Distrust of the institution
WHY THIS MATTERS TO US

• Creates additional barriers to entry for and engagement with young women of color on our campuses
  • Assumption that they will be rejected by Career Services as they have been in other campus offices/departments
  • Discomfort with the staff and/or more comfort with other staff/departments

• *In short, we’re guilty by association.*

• We are agents of the institutions that aren’t trustworthy, so we aren’t trustworthy
WHAT WE CAN DO ABOUT IT

Some best practices for authentic engagement
ANALYZE YOUR MESSAGING (IMPLICIT & EXPLICIT)

• Big question: Are your print and electronic resources and materials inclusive?
• Is there distinct messaging to specific groups, or are the language and directives “universal”?
  • “Make sure your hair is neat in an interview.”
  • What does that mean to a Black woman with natural hair? To a Muslim woman who covers her hair?
  • “Add your activities to your resume.”
  • Could this disclose the student’s identity in a way that harms their job search?
• If there is population-specific information on your website, where is it housed?
• Case of the “Other Students” – Make sure your information doesn’t further marginalize students
FIGURE OUT YOUR GAPS

- Does the makeup of your office reflect your student body?
  - If the people don’t exist, does the knowledge base?
- Do the demographics of the students who access your services match those of your student population?
  - Use your data and see who you are missing
PARTNER WITH STUDENT GROUPS & OTHER OFFICES

• Ask students what they need from you
  • Co-develop programming so that...
    • It will meet the needs of the students you are trying to reach
    • You can take what you learn back to your office/practice
  • *Bonus:* Students will actually show up!

• Work with campus entities to gain access to students who aren’t visiting your office
  • Multicultural Affairs
  • Affinity groups
  • Specific academic departments
LEVERAGE YOUR EMPLOYER & COMMUNITY PARTNERS

• Survey your recruiters about their corporate cultures so that you can properly advise women of color on what to expect
  • Go on site visits to see if what they say is true
• Many employers claim to care about “diversity”
  • Exploit the lip service!
  • Offer to host population-specific events in your spaces
• Connect with community organizations to...
  • Attract their constituents to your office
  • Learn from their community-specific expertise
BE HONEST WITH YOUR MESSAGING

• Don’t pretend that race and gender issues magically disappear on the job search or in a career
  • Microaggressions never end, they just change (or not)
• Know that students may not bring it up, so be proactive
  • Use empathy and active listening skills with students whose situations you may not have encountered
• Our job is to prepare students for what awaits them outside of college, so we need to be as honest as possible
WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT YOU
Building up your cross-cultural competencies
SELF-REFLECTION & SELF-EDUCATION

Reflect to figure out your knowledge gaps and blind spots

• Focus on what you know the least about
• Interrogate your discomfort

Use your resources to self-educate

• Journal articles
• Books (academic and mainstream)
• Strategic social media follows
• Pop culture of cultures that aren’t yours
• Each other!
Remember: There is always something to learn.

• Create your own learning opportunities
  • Use downtime productively *(Hi, June & July!)*
  • Build it into your professional development
• Support each others’ process and progress
  • Team up with other learners to pool knowledge
  • Share resources with colleagues
• *UCDA Book Club, anyone??*
ACTIVITY TIME: SWOT YOURSELF!

Conduct a *SWOT Analysis* surrounding engagement with a particular population of women of color on your campus

• What **strengths** do you have?
• What are your **weaknesses**?
• Can you think of any **opportunities** to take advantage of?
• Name some **threats** to your engagement with this group
ANY QUESTIONS?
Let’s chat!
SELECT REFERENCES (IN PARTICULAR ORDER)


• Whistling Vivaldi: How Stereotypes Affect Us and What We Can Do, Claude Steele (2011)


• Critical Race Feminism, A Reader (Second Edition), Editor: Adrien Katherine Wing (2003)

THANKS FOR PARTICIPATING!

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