OVERVIEW

In 2018, the American Council on Education (ACE) published a report titled, "*Speaking Truth and Acting with Integrity: Confronting Challenges of Campus Racial Climate*", which examined the racial crisis at the University of Missouri System and the University of Missouri-Columbia (MU) , our efforts towards transformative and lasting change, and our journey toward inclusive excellence. The ACE research team reviewed the local, state, and national climate that influenced the crisis; assessed MU's capacity for diversity and inclusion work; and suggested pathways for progress after a racial crisis, using a collective trauma recovery model.

HISTORY AND CLIMATE

ACE noted that MU experienced longstanding racial tensions and racist incidents for decades. However, 2015 was a pivotal year, beginning with the protests in Ferguson, MO after the shooting and death of Michael Brown. Several key incidents at MU then made national headlines:

- In August, graduate students were given 24 hours' notice that subsidies to their health insurance would expire.
- During the homecoming parade on October 10, the group *Concerned Student 1950* organized a public demonstration to demand that the university president at the time, Tim Wolfe, address their concerns.
- On October 21, *Concerned Student 1950* submitted a list of demands to the administration.
- An untenured faculty member, Melissa Click, entered into a verbal and physical altercation with a photojournalist to protect students. Ultimately, her contract was terminated by the Board of Curators.
- A swastika, drawn in human feces, was found in a residence hall.
- A student leader, Jonathan Butler, began a hunger strike on November 2.
- On November 7, the football team announced a strike, boycotting all games and practices, until Tim Wolfe resigned from office.
- On November 9, President Tim Wolfe and Chancellor Bowen Loftin resigned.

CAPACITY-BUILDING FRAMEWORK AND MU'S DESIGNATION

The ACE researchers assessed MU's capacity for diversity and inclusion (D&I) work, and found that prior to the campus protests in 2015, MU was at the low end of moderate capacity. Their reasons for this designation include their findings that MU had not invested significantly in D&I work – as evidenced by a lack of a thoughtful, strategic plan for diversity; a lack of knowledge about D&I in the leadership; few discussions about D&I values; and limited opportunities to expand campus knowledge of D&I.

Additionally, the research team found that there was a lack of trust in the administration, our internal and external communication was ineffective, and leadership lagged in their response to campus incidents, especially in 2015. It is not surprising, therefore, that the ACE team assessed MU as having a low capacity for D&I work at the height of the crisis.

REBUILDING CAPACITY: PROGRAMS AND RESOURCES AT MU

The ACE research team provided a framework for improving the D&I capacity of an institution by focusing on 5 key areas:

- strategic planning, institutional mission and guiding values
- leadership expertise
- building trust and respect across stakeholder groups
- institutional investment in continual learning for faculty, staff and students, and
- evaluation of metrics and assessment practices

The report noted MU's commitment to strengthening our D&I capacity, with specific initiatives such as the collaborative development of a system-wide strategic diversity, equity and inclusion plan (the Inclusive Excellence Framework); the creation of a mandatory D&I workshop for incoming first-year and transfer students (Citizenship@Mizzou) and of a corresponding workshop for faculty and staff (CitizenshipToo); the use of Inclusive Excellence grants to support research with DEI implications; and inclusive teaching incentives to support the infusion of DEI subject matter into the curriculum.

COLLECTIVE TRAUMA AND RECOVERY

The ACE research team introduced the concept of collective trauma into the discussion of progress after a racial crisis, stating that institutions with low and moderate D&I capacity are at a higher risk for trauma. Leadership must acknowledge trauma and create space for the community to process it, otherwise the institution may not be able to effectively respond to serious challenges in the future. The trauma generally manifests as anger, distrust, fear, and fatigue.

The report illustrated that MU's feelings of **anger** stemmed from a belief that administrators had abandoned the campus community and fostered a poor racial climate, that they could not articulate a vision to recover from the racist incidents, and that they did not respond to student concerns - even when physically confronted by protesters. With regard to **distrust**, the report delineated the issue of a lack of transparency in decision-making processes, repeated unanswered requests by students to meet with the administration, a history of poor race relations in the state of Missouri, and staff turnover following the racial crisis.

Trauma at MU also manifested as **fear** – of hostile or offensive racial messages, and of retaliation by university leadership – which led to a culture of silence. A climate of **fatigue** had developed at MU, as community members expended significant labor to respond to campus needs, in addition to their explicit job responsibilities, but grappled with their belief that the labor was not valued by leadership.

The report offers a three-part framework for recovery from collective trauma. It involves:
1. **Active listening**—structured listening and responding that focuses the attention on the speaker, instead of one's own perspectives. Over time, this improves mutual understanding, and rebuilds relationships
2. **Speaking from the heart** —This mode of communication involves honest communication from leaders, free of pre-approved notes and messaging. Ultimately, this model encourages acknowledging and responding to emotions.
3. **"Acting with"**—honest communication without political spin. Leaders engage with community members directly, particularly those most affected by traumatic events, before attempting to solve problems.

CONCLUSION

The ACE research team ultimately found that after the racial crisis of the 2015-16 school year, MU began addressing D&I issues and making improvements to the campus racial climate by implementing programming and initiatives for the campus community. However, they noted that institutions generally have a long road to recovery after a crisis, because anger, fear, fatigue, and distrust take years to fully address, even with the collective trauma recovery framework. ACE made plans to write a second report documenting MU's progress in 2020.

*This summary was produced by the Office of Inclusive Engagement. Please read the full 2018 ACE Report to learn more.