

SUBJECT: Proposal: Transforming the Counseling Program to represent Anti-racism in its values, mission, goals, curriculum, assessments, and policies.

As you well know, throughout the country, we are experiencing an [unprecedented wave of racial justice activism across the country](#). As you also are no doubt aware, the movement to disrupt white supremacy is also rolling through UVM:

UVM's Vice President of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, Wanda Heading-Grant's vulnerable, soulful and powerful call to "let us redouble our efforts to insist on systemic reform...to advance critical social and cultural efforts everywhere" and College of Education and Social Services' to Dean Thomas's impassioned declarative that our college will

"stand for racial justice and systemic changes that realize equity," United Academics stand with the [Black Lives Matter protest](#) here in Burlington along with, support of the [Cynic's calling out of UVM VP Richard Cates complicity in racism](#) and of the [Higher Ed's "toothless" response to the murder of George Floyd](#). Numerous colleagues within our department expressing love, support and solidarity to our Black colleagues and for the Movement for Black lives. The scores of counseling students and counseling program alumni who have expressed gratitude and continued effort on my part to supply them with anti-racist resources.

Within this context, I offer the following proposal: That the UVM Counseling Program take substantive actions to firmly and unequivocally transform our program to be anti-racist in its values, mission, goals, curriculum, assessments, and policies.

In other words, I invite us to move the Counseling Program forward by taking concrete actions that will structurally align our program the movement for Black Lives and in the work of undoing systemic white supremacy.

Such work would ideologically align with the ACA Code of Ethics (2014) preamble on core professional values on p. 3, and definition of social justice on p. 21 as well as the CACREP Standards (2016) 2. Social and Cultural Diversity, items b. and h..

Towards these ends I offer the following action items for consideration:

1. That we take up the work of Dr. Ibram X. Kendi, [keynote speaker of UVM's 2020 MLK series](#), adopt his definition of both racist and anti-racist, and integrate these definitions into our program philosophy:

Racist – One who is supporting a racist policy through their actions or inaction or expressing a racist idea. **Anti-Racism** – One who is supporting an anti-racist policy through their actions or expressing an anti-racist idea.

2. That we (a) collectively adopt one of the recent ground breaking anti-racism books as a Counseling Program- wide text for AY 20/21, (b) we as faculty commit to reading the book this summer, and then (c) strategize how we might use it across program curriculum this year. I would suggest either [Ibram X. Kendi's work "How to Be An Anti-Racist"](#) or [Resmaa Menakeem's "My Grandmothers Hands: Racialized Trauma and The Pathways Towards Healing our Hearts and Bodies."](#)
3. That we survey our alumni and/or hold a community gathering with them to seek their input and ideas about how to re-shape our program to be firmly anti-racist.
4. That we form an anti-racism advisory group of alumni and/or colleagues in the field who can aid us in taking action steps toward operationalizing anti-racism endeavors within the program.
5. That we survey current students and/or hold a community gathering with them for their input and ideas about how to re-shape our program to be more firmly anti-racist.
6. That we integrate [Racial Trauma competencies](#) into our clinical course work and clinical assessment tools.

Racial trauma: Although similar to PTSD in symptoms such as hyper-vigilance to threat, flashbacks, nightmares, avoidance, suspiciousness, and somatic expressions such as headaches, heart palpitations, among others, racial trauma differs from PTSD in that it involves ongoing injuries due to the exposure (direct and/or vicarious) and re-exposure to race-based stress (American Psychologist, Special Issue, 3/19.)

The American Psychologist has made their [special issue on Racial Trauma freely available](#) during this time of nation-wide racial justice activism. It's time, or rather it's long past time, that every student who graduates from our program is competent in both conceptualizing and treating racial trauma.

7. Work with our site supervisor partners to integrate anti-racist policy activism into the Internship Seminar curriculum and assessment tools in order to aid students in developing the skills to surface and redress structural racism within schools and agencies. For example, interns could develop the skills to conduct anti-racism equity audits at their sites during their internship experience, present their findings to the leadership of their site, and propose action steps. In addition to being an invaluable skill for our students, it would be a gift for their host agency

and school.

8. Construct a Counseling Program Faculty policy that operationalizes a democratic, syllabi review process towards the development of anti-racist curriculum within each course.
9. Construct a Counseling Program Faculty Course Assignment Policy that operationalizes a democratic process wherein the faculty collectively make recommendations to the Dept Chair regarding faculty teaching assignments. In other words, all faculty will have a voice in matching individual faculty members to course objectives and instruction.
10. Offer anti-racism CEU-bearing PD trainings for our site supervisors, part-time instructors, alumni and community members on an anti-racist approach to supervision, working with Racial Trauma, and/or [Racial Healing](#).
11. Add anti-racism items to our Exit Survey, Site Supervisor Program Evaluation Survey, Alumni Survey and Employer Survey in order to measure our effectiveness.
12. Construct CMH electives and SC Special Topics courses specifically on anti-racist approaches to CMH counseling and School counseling.
13. Plan and hold a ceremony that ritualizes our program's commitment to anti-racism. Invite alumni, adjunct faculty, and site supervisors to assist in the planning and to participate.
14. After formalizing our anti-racist action plan, insert the Black Lives Matter symbol into our website and into the cover of our student handbook.
15. Communicate our intentions, our new policies as they develop, and our outcome data to all of our stake holders (students, alumni, site supervisors) as they occur.

These are just a few ideas. I'm sure other folk will have better ones. And undoubtedly, my internalized whiteness limits even my best intentions in brainstorming how to operationalize anti-racism within our program. I looking forward to hearing which of these resonate with a majority of the faculty, what might be added and/or deleted, and how this proposal might be shaped by others. Perhaps we also develop a timeline to allow for a manageable "phase in."

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, I invite us to consider how we can approach this work in a way that is mindful of the racial trauma that is the ongoing lived experience of some of our faculty, students, and alumni. In other words, it's important to approach this task without imposing additional emotional labor upon our BIPOC counseling program community members, specifically those who identify as Black.

I look forward to your feedback and ideas. In solidarity,