UNIVERSITY AT ALBANY
State University of New York

Working with/in Communities of Color: Engagement Opportunities and Challenges

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Objectives

- Provide a historical overview of systemic and structural racist practices that perpetuates a culture of oppression and distrust relative to community engagement.
- Gain a better understanding and appreciation for human and social complexities associated working with and in communities of color.
- Illustration for working *collectively* with communities of color using the UAlbany/Capital South Campus Center (CSCC) partnership as a case study.
- Share effective strategies for addressing engagement challenges.

The Office for Public Engagement

supports the University's capacity to do **public good**, locally and globally, through the advancement of research, teaching and community engagement initiatives that address societal issues.

- Report under the Office of Government & Community Relations within President's Office
- Focus has evolved from community service to public engagement
- 2 full-time staff
- Downtown campus
- Public Engagement Council
- 15 liaisons throughout campus
- 6 years on President's Honor Roll

How Does OPE Fit Into UAlbany's Values and Priorities?

Our Values

ACCESS: To enable individuals to pursue learning, research, and service regardless of economic, societal, or physical factors.

INTEGRITY: To be committed to—and expect from all—honesty, transparency, and accountability.

INCLUSIVE EXCELLENCE: To value diversity of all forms, academic freedom, and the rights, dignity, and perspectives of all individuals.

COMMON GOOD: To work collectively and collaboratively to benefit our communities—and create a sustainable way of life on earth.

Our Priorities

STUDENT SUCCESS is at the center of all we do;

RESEARCH drives our **EXCELLENCE**;

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION are intrinsic to our success;

INTERNATIONALIZATION increases our visibility and impact across the globe;

ENGAGEMENT AND SERVICE foster partnerships with reciprocal benefits.

Community Engagement

- Community Engagement is a form of Public Engagement with partnerships and students at its core. In community–engaged work, community partners are equal players, and projects are created, developed and carried out collaboratively with students from the start. *(Definition from Cornell University)*

Case Study

UAlbany and the Capital South Campus Center (CSCC)

- In 2014, CSCC opened its doors as an educational/workforce development hub located in the heart of the South End. Funded by a $5 million Housing and Urban Development grant.
- A partnership between the Albany Housing Authority (landlord) and Trinity Alliance (management).
- UAlbany was asked to assist in providing expertise, resources, direction and strategy.
- In 2015: Appointed as UAlbany Special Adviser for Educational Engagement at CSCC and stationed on site.

Case Study

If appointed UAlbany Special Adviser, what would you do in the first 3 months?

Historical Overview

- **What is systemic racism?**

  Developed by sociologist Joe Feagin who theorizes the following:

  *"Systemic racism includes the complex array of **antiblack practices**, the unjustly gained political-economic **power of whites**, the continuing economic and other resource **inequalities along racial lines**, and the **white racist ideologies and attitudes** created to maintain and rationalize **white privilege and power**."*

- This theory (and reality) of systemic racism is applied across all people of color (POC) who are negatively impacted by long-standing institutional structures, polices and practices.

Historical Overview

- **W.E.B Du Bois' Double Consciousness**

  *"It is a peculiar sensation, this **double-consciousness,** this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (1903).*

- Today, blacks and POC continue to experience heightened levels of identity conflicts in a society that vilifies racial/cultural forms of expression and penalizes them for celebrating their **black authenticity.**

Historical Overview

Tuskegee Experiments

- From 1932 to 1972, 600 black men participated in a medical study conducted by the Public Health Service and Tuskegee Institute.
- The study was done under the guise of understanding the natural history of syphilis to justify treatment programs for blacks.
- Approx. 399 black men with syphilis did not receive treatment, were uninformed of the risks/benefits, and were lied to (had “bad blood”). In return, participants received free medical exams and meals.
- 1972: deemed ethically unjustified by U.S. government. In exchange, provided free medical insurance and burial insurance.

Historical Overview

Tuskegee by the Numbers

- By 1972: 74 of test subjects were alive. Of the 399 black men, 28 died of syphilis, 100 from related complications, 40 of their wives were infected and 19 of their children born with congenital syphilis.
- 1974: A $10 million out-of-court settlement is reached. The U.S. government also promised to give lifetime medical benefits and burial services to all living participants
- 1995: The program was expanded to include health as well as medical benefits.
- 1997: President Clinton issues public apology on behalf of the nation.
- 2004: The last study test subject died in 2004. To date, there are 12 offspring receiving medical and health benefits.

Challenges

Communities of Color

- Comprised primarily of groups of people who share a similar racial/cultural oppressive experience due to systemic and structural racism.
- The majority of families fall within or below the federally established poverty threshold.
- Other similarities include poor educational training and lack of resources towards gainful employment; inadequate health and mental services and benefits; eligible for free and/or reduced lunch; language and cultural barriers to success; and unjust criminalization of black/brown youth and adults, particularly men.

Fordham Road, The Bronx

Community Distress

City of Albany

Challenges

The University

- An expectation of a public and/or land-grant institution is to provide a public benefit.
- Demystifying the Ivory Tower perception.
- Faculty and staff body may not be reflective of the communities they work in.
- Some faculty and students may exhibit naiveté, at worst ignorant, perspectives relative to racial and cultural complexities of historically disenfranchised populations they wish to work with.
- Everything is grounded in context (McAvoy et al., 2000)

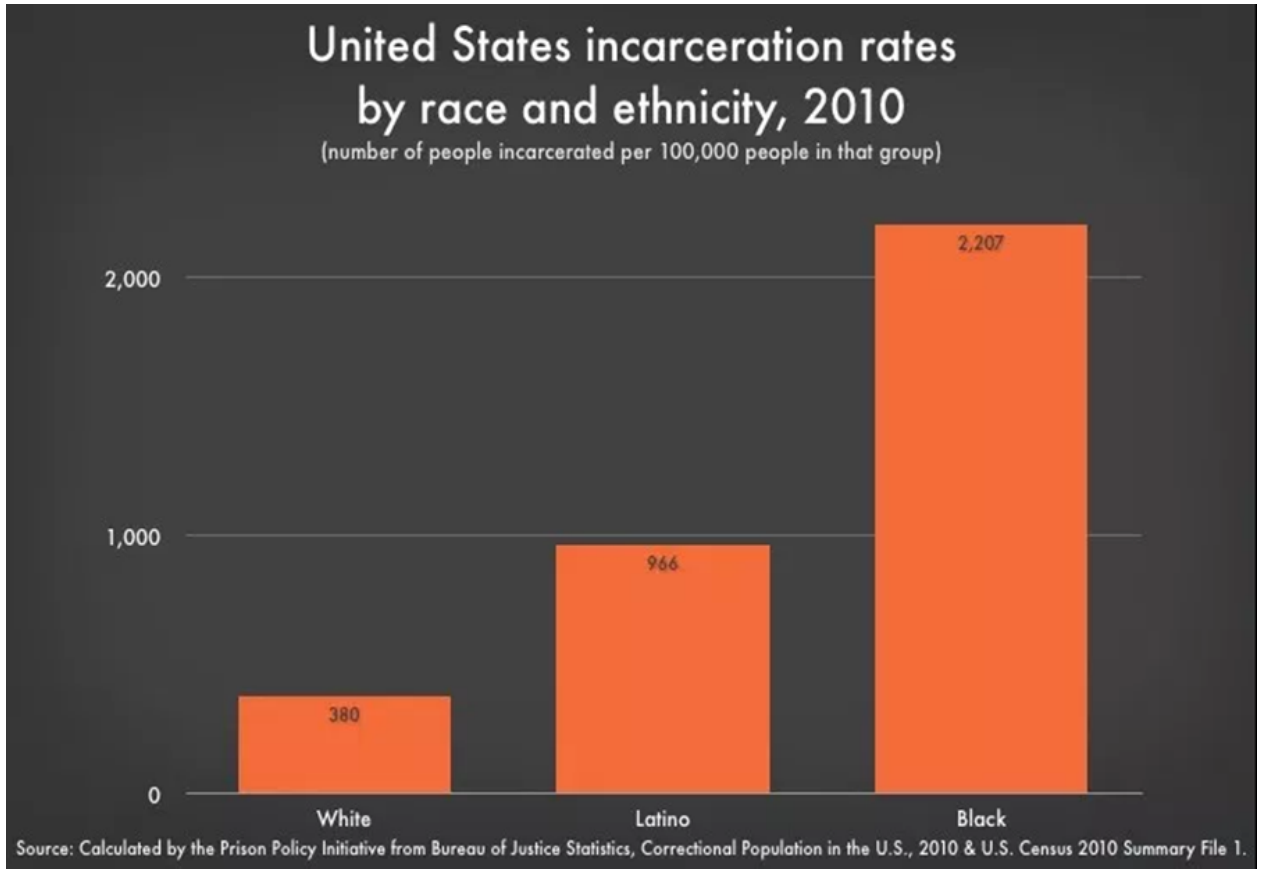
Fordham University, Rose Hill

Social and Human Complexities

Complexities of Blackness

- Historically oppressed group of people once enslaved and continue to experience alarming social, economical, health and educational disparities than their White counterparts.
- According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2017), Black or African-American comprise 13.4% of the population, yet account for 34% of the total 6.8 million who are incarcerated (NAACP, 2018). That is five times the rate of Whites.
- Blacks and Whites use drugs at similar rates, but the imprisonment rate of African Americans for drug charges is almost 6 times that of whites.
- Negative connation associated with identifying as black. Viewed from a deficit-thinking perspective.

Social and Human Complexities



"Arguably the most important parallel between mass incarceration and Jim Crow is that both have served to define the meaning and significance of race in America. Indeed, a primary function of any racial caste system is to define the meaning of race in its time. Slavery defined what it meant to be black (a slave), and Jim Crow defined what it meant to be black (a second-class citizen). Today mass incarceration defines the meaning of blackness in America: black people, especially black men, are criminals. That is what it means to be black."

- Michelle Alexander, The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness (2010)

Social and Human Complexities

Understanding Latinxs

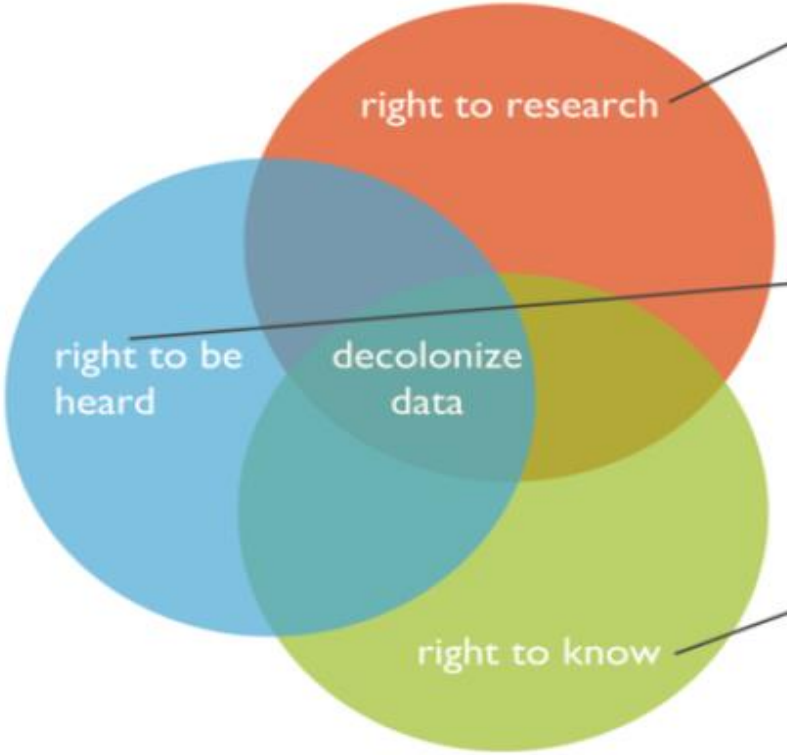
- According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2016), Latinxs are the largest and youngest ethnic minority group in the United States at 17% or 53 million people.
- Latinxs come from more than 20 countries sharing a common language. Cannot be viewed as a homogenous group due to distinct subcultures (e.g., U.S.-born versus foreign-born, Dominicans vs. Mexicans).
- Share similar disparities and unjust treatment as Blacks/African-Americans.
- Understanding racialized identities (e.g., Afro-Caribbean) is important.
- *Allocentrism* (collectivism) is a central attribute to Latinx culture: interdependent individuals who identify and behave according to group norms, traditions and values.

Framework for Research Justice

Coalition of Communities of Color

- Formed in 2001, the Coalition of Communities of Color (CCC) is an alliance of culturally-specific community based organizations with representation from the following communities of color: African, African American, Asian, Latino, Native American, Pacific Islander, and Slavic.
- Based in Portland, Oregon.
- CCC addresses the socioeconomic disparities, institutional racism and inequity of services experienced by our families, children and communities; and to organize our communities for collective action resulting in social change to obtain self-determination, wellness, justice and prosperity.
- The Research Justice Center (RJC): research arm of CCC in consultation with the community.

Framework for Research Justice*



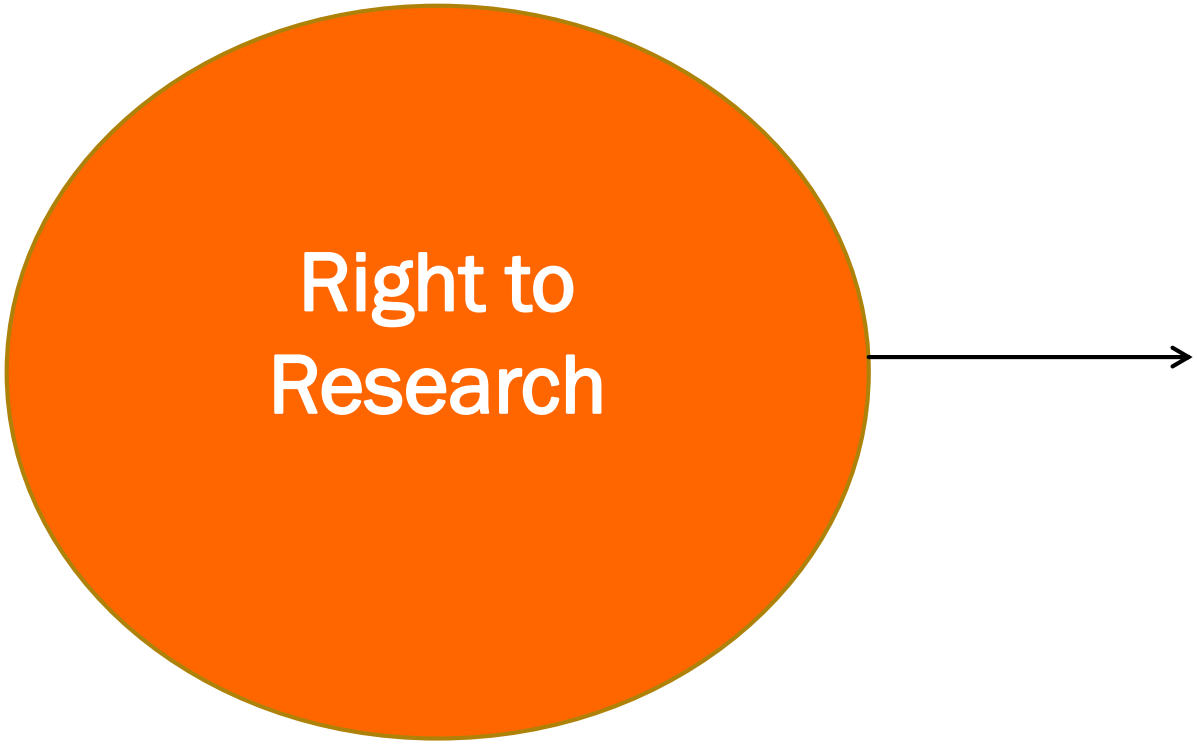
Right to Research: the right to the tools through which any (individual or group) can systematically increase that stock of knowledge which they consider most vital to their survival as human beings.

Right To Be Heard: to use social science tools - such as surveys, interviews, mapping - to package their knowledge into data to convey to decision-makers and other chosen audiences.

Right To Know: to access information beyond their reach, whether that knowledge is inaccessible due to cost, technical jargon, or other barriers.

* *Coalition of Communities of Color adaptation of the framework from DataCenter: Research Justice*

Framework for Research Justice*

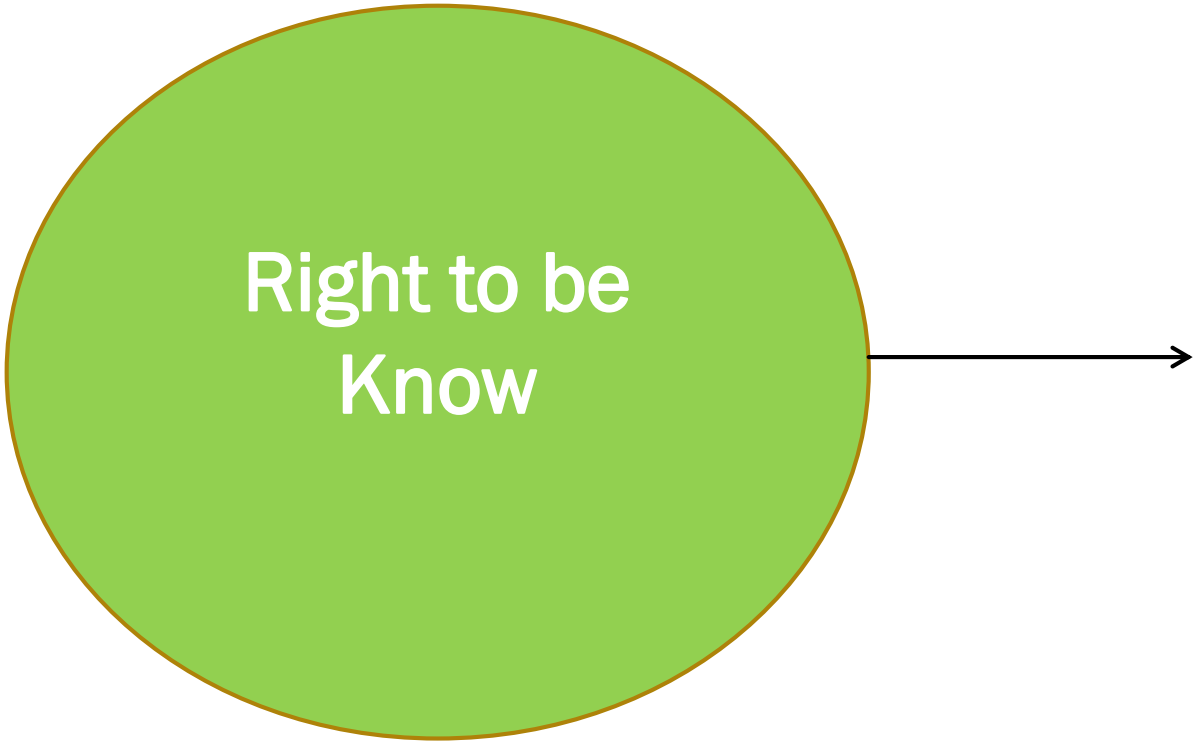


- ✓ Right to the tools through which any individual or group can systematically increase the stock of knowledge.
- ✓ Vital for long-term survival.
- ✓ Human capital theory.
- ✓ Chinese proverb: *Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.*

Framework for Research Justice*

- ✓ Be given a voice at planning and decision-making process.
- ✓ Respect their lived experience.
- ✓ Collective impact.
- ✓ Knowledge is data.
- ✓ Approaches to data gathering (e.g., surveys, focus groups, roundtables, invitation to university events.

Framework for Research Justice*



- ✓ Access to information beyond the reach of the community.
- ✓ Remove barriers and mitigate challenges to access — institutional policies, technical jargon, costs, transportation.
- ✓ What are you reporting? Is it factual? Has data been contextualized?
- ✓ Before reporting information, be consultative. Sharing is caring.
- ✓ Keep lines of communication open. Transparency is paramount.

Case Study

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Strategies

Opportunities for Success

- Check your privilege, biases and assumptions at the door. This is more than just cultural competency.
- Be an effective listener and learner. Provide the community with a **voice** (e.g., focus groups, conversations, attend community events to learn).
- Do not enter a community with an agenda. The agenda MUST be shaped by stakeholders and more importantly, the residents that will access services.
- Establish credibility and legitimacy by enlisting the aid of “gatekeepers” to help make introductions, navigate the community landscape, and learn about what has already been done.

Strategies

Opportunities for Success

- Understand the needs and barriers of your intended population.
- Get out of your comfort zone and increase your presence in the community.
- Create a more welcome environment at the university and make community leaders/residents feel a part of a greater community. Reciprocity is key.
- Don’t make assumptions about a population. Frame conversations into positive contributions.
- Your lived experience is far greater than simply the color of your skin or cultural understanding.
- The community doesn’t want a hand-out. They need assistance and maintaining ownership of the problem and solution.

Contact Information

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Strategies

Thank you.

Questions?