



Let's Talk about Racial Justice, Food, and Moving DEI Work Forward

SPEAKERS

Stephanie Delaney, Tierney King, Santos Felipe Ramos

Tierney King 00:01

This is the Faculty Focus Live podcast sponsored by the Teaching Professor. I'm your host, Tierney King, and I'm here to bring you inspiration, energy, and creative strategies that you can utilize in your everyday teaching. Today we're gonna talk about racial justice, the relationship between food and culture, and a type of plan-do-check-act cycle for diversity, equity and inclusion work. To start Santos Felipe Ramos explains how food is so intertwined with culture that it makes for an effective method of inquiry into racial identity and racial disparities in his seminar, Understanding Racial Justice Through Food Studies.

Santos Felipe Ramos 00:46

So food is one of the essentials of life. It's frequent indulgence. It drives economies, and it's really an intimate element of our social relationships. It's hard to imagine a positive social experience that doesn't involve food. Yet, food is also a great cause of anxiety, stress, and even death. Many people struggle with eating disorders, or have distinctly unpleasant memories that they associate with food. Certain foods are unhealthy and lead to all sorts of health problems. And in this sense, food connects in some way to almost every aspect of life. The Department of Agriculture has defined food insecurity as a lack of consistent access to enough food for an active healthy life. And so I want to take time to highlight some of the findings from a really key study that is looking at food insecurity on college campuses. This is a study from 2016 that surveyed about 3800 students at 34 different community colleges and four year colleges across the country across 12 different states. And the study found that 22% of the respondents experienced the very lowest levels of food insecurity. So that's nearly a quarter of students experiencing there are different levels of food insecurity. Nearly a quarter of students were experiencing the lowest levels of food insecurity. And the study also found that 13% of respondents at community colleges reported being homeless. And so we know that there's a link between these two things. When students experience housing insecurity, they also oftentimes experience food insecurity. Now, just to sort of unpack that deal a little more, 48% of the respondents reported food insecurity in the previous 30 days. So it was the 22 that experienced the lowest levels, but 48 of respondents overall, had experience food insecurity of some kind. Very recently 57% of Black or African American students reported food insecurity compared to 40% of non-Hispanic white students. So we see a clear disparity in this study, which has been suspected and also, you know, reinforced by studies that exist outside of college campuses as well that communities of color on college campuses also are experiencing things

like food insecurity at disproportionate rates. Further 56% of all first-generation students were food insecure. Among the respondents from four year colleges, 43% of Neoplan enrollees still experienced food insecurity. So we see that first generation students tend to experience more food insecurity. And that enrolling on a meal plan is not necessarily going to guarantee that students are not going to face hardship when it comes to finding healthy foods. roughly 14% of all households experience food security each year. So these are just some broader kind of broader statistics here. And the available literature suggests that the rate of food insecurity among college students is up to four times greater than the national average. So we really are looking at here, not only a simple translation of society's larger problems with food insecurity, and people of color experiencing higher rates of food insecurity, this is all exacerbated according to the data we have so far on college campuses. So this is really an issue that needs to be addressed. And just some other sort of demographic information on college on higher education. In recent years, nearly half of all undergraduate students now are our bipoc students. So Black indigenous are people of color Native and black students are much more likely to borrow and much more likely to face, difficulty repaying their loans than other groups. So we know that that many students are having to take out a massive amount of loans in order to fund their education. And, you know, looking at the racial breakdown of this native and black students in particular are having to take out many more. And in terms of faculty, this is just one sort of specific look at faculty dynamics, but it speaks to some of the disparities that exist for full-time assistant professors in a recent study it was found that 73% identified as white, 14% as Asian or Pacific Islander, 8%, Black, 6% Hispanic and less than 1%, American Indian, or Alaska Native, right? So what we see is that there's more and more, I mean, one of the reasons that the statistics are so troubling is the student body is becoming more and more diverse, and it would seem that therefore, then food insecurity is also going to increasing as a problem as well. And what we see at faculty levels is that the further along in their careers that faculty are, essentially the less and less people of color that we're seeing. So there's less faculty to mentor students in the through their programs that can connect with them in that way that might be able to support them that share those sorts of cultural understanding with them. So finally, we want to talk about some of the solutions to these issues that have been tried by different activists and scholars. In general, increasing access to fresh foods, localizing food systems as much as possible when it makes sense to do so, and experimenting with new business structures, such as worker owned co-ops. Some solutions that are more specific to campus food pantries, where students can come and get free food and other supplies have been really taking off in recent years in 2009. There were less than 10 reported food pantries across the country. Today, there's more than 350. So there's good and not really bad, but just, you know, understanding food banks and food pantries in the larger context. Food pantries help to address the most immediate need, which is the fact that there are hungry students on campus. But this should not be seen as a structural solution to the problem. Rather, this is addressing a symptom, right? So this isn't the way to end hunger. This isn't the way to end these issues. But it is something that can really be beneficial to students, in the most immediate sense. Increasing access to heritage and fresh foods on campus. So thinking about, yes, on the one hand, what restaurants are available, and do students have different kinds of options. That's important. But I would also think of it in terms of where can students buy groceries? And what did cooking spaces look like for students on campus, and just considering all of that stuff sort of together, because when students are able to access a wider number of groceries, not only is it oftentimes cheaper, cheaper for them, but they can also be cooking foods, perhaps that are more culturally relevant to them as well. Dining center donations, so rolling over meal plans, just trying to make sure that if and when possible, instead of when a meal plan ends, if it's not

fully utilized, allowing those to sort of roll over. Perhaps even donating the rest of those unused tickets to the food pantry on campus. And then the food pantry can give those out to students in need. There's also campus gardens farms, emergency grants that can be granted to students, addressing the cost of tuition on college campuses, we're getting back into some of the big picture items here, thinking about how to redistribute internal funding, getting grants for students of color, first-gen and other marginalized students. And then a very practical thing that can be done just in sort of interpersonal interactions, asking for dietary restrictions and making sure to order a variety of foods. So if you're asking for a variety of reasons why somebody might have a dietary restriction, it might be for health reasons, it might be for just personal preference, it might be spiritual or religious reasons for why people have a particular food restriction. So, communicating with people, especially in terms of event planning, and helping to stay informed as you're planning that out. So it's inclusive of lots of different people.

Tierney King 10:16

As Ramos offers the specific solutions and ideas that you can start to think about, it's also important to consider how you can see both subtle and significant gains with DEI work on your campus. In this session, Stephanie Delaney offers a multi step process for narrowing DEI work from a huge multi-generational project into something obtainable each week.

Stephanie Delaney 10:40

The problem that we are facing is these gigantic issues that we may be trying to solve around diversity, equity and inclusion. At the same time, we're trying to manage the constant onslaught of daily work, for example, emails and telephone calls, and back-to-back meetings, when you're having to manage those little but constant activities, it's really hard to take care of those big, long-term issues that can so easily escape us as we attend to the urgent actions of the day-to-day. So I'm going to talk to you today about a way to think about the work and divide it up so that you can see yourself actually making some progress. If you're familiar with the Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle, this approach may seem familiar to you. But I think I'll have some perspectives on it that are unique to diversity, equity inclusion work that I hope you'll find helpful. The way that I'm going to present this, I want you to actually be answering these questions that I'm going to ask you as we go along. So that by time you get to the end, you'll have a plan of attack. And you'll know how you can see the progress that you're making, both in the short and the long term. The first question that I have for you is what problem is it that you're trying to solve? For example, the problem I'm going to give an example of throughout this series is trying to eliminate systemic racism. But maybe you're trying to improve accessibility for your disabled students. Maybe you're trying to create a more welcoming environment for your formerly incarcerated students. There's all sorts of big diversity, equity and inclusion work that we're doing. And your first step is to identify what specifically is it that you're trying to do? The next thing you want to ask yourself is, how does that problem show up in your environment? So for example, if the problem I'm trying to solve is systemic racism, and the way that it shows up on my campus are many, one of the ways that shows up is that we're not seeing the same completion rates on our Black and Brown students as we are with our White students. And so that's just one thing that we're seeing. We are seeing that there are some of the programs at my institution that don't have as great a diversity as some of our other programs, and asking questions like, why is that? So there's probably a long list of ways that the problem that you are trying to solve shows up at your college. I encourage you to write down as many of those as you can think of and do a little brainstorming activity and just think of as many ways as you can, that you can

see evidence of the problem in your environment. And at least three to five but the more examples that you have, the easier it'll be as you go along with this set with this activity. The next question that you're going to ask yourself, is what you can do to move the needle on this problem. Now, when you think about this, there's lots of things that perhaps could be done by groups by others by your institution. But the question I'm asking here is what you individually can do. It might be something like, you know, joining a committee, but I urge you not to get into the joiner trap. The joiner trap is where you just show up, but you don't actually do anything. You'll see that this plan is super action-oriented, and those actions need to result in results. So often, just going to a meeting doesn't result in anything tangible that you can see. If it does, then going meetings is a good thing. But if it doesn't, you want to make sure that it's something that you can actually do to move the needle on the things that you listed under how the problem shows up. When you're thinking about the time window of when you would make that difference, I encourage you to limit the time window. Don't think about sort of forever, but rather, what can you do in the next 12 to 18 months to move the needle on one of those items? After I've talked about what success will look like after I've listed that on my worksheet, the next thing that I want to identify is, how would I measure that success. So if I'm doing my project of having people read, So You Want to Talk About Race, I might measure success in the number of books distributed, or the number of book groups that were formed to talk about the book, maybe in the number of members of the book groups, how many people are actually engaged in these conversations about race? Those are different measures that I could look to and say, hey, you know, today, this number of people on our campus have read this book. And tomorrow, that number is going to be, you know, so much bigger, well, maybe not tomorrow, but at the end of my 12 to 18 months, the number might be twice as many or four times as many, let me identify what that would look like. If today's number is zero, maybe the end of 12 months, my number is 100. The next question that you're going to want to ask yourself is who can partner with you in this work? When you're doing this large, multi-generational work, it can't be done alone. You have to do it in community with others. And so as you're thinking about the work, who can do the work with you, or who can you do it with? Maybe there's groups out there who are already doing the work and you can join in with those groups, as opposed to starting something new and fresh yourself. So thinking about that is important, identifying those people who can help you move the work forward.

Tierney King 17:12

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