

Understanding Stereotype Threat

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Beth Fisher, the Teaching Center, Director of Academic Services

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Description of the topic

Claude M. Steele is a social psychologist who disseminated years of his research on the phenomenon of stereotype threat in an accessible book titled *Whistling Vivaldi: How Stereotypes Affect Us and What We Can Do*. His research has demonstrated, for example, that the underperformance of minority students can be attributed to a cascade of neurological events that take place when the student -- consciously or unconsciously -- experiences performance anxiety when tested in a domain in which a group with which the student identifies is negatively stereotyped. The impact of stereotype threat has been shown, for instance, in the performance of African-American students on verbal tests, the performance of women on mathematics tests, and in numerous other academic contexts. Our group will use a discussion of *Whistling Vivaldi* as a basis for understanding the research on stereotype threat and various ways in which we might identify the potential impact of stereotype threat on our students, our trainees, our departmental hiring practices, our community, and ourselves. We will also use this area of research to identify interventions that can positively offset the effects of stereotype threat in our teaching, recruitment, and outreach practices.

Why is the topic important and appropriate?

We know that the issue of diversity among our staff, faculty and student body is extremely important to the university and administration. We also know that a number of faculty members are interested in understanding how they can make changes in their teaching, outreach, and training to immediately aid in this diversity effort. We view the proposed discussion group as a complement to the initiatives ongoing at the Provost's office; it would represent a grass-roots effort to allow faculty to directly understand the hidden mechanisms that may be preventing us from increasing diversity among our students, or causing problems for certain groups already at the university. We hope that this group of faculty, over the course of the year, will determine a set of programs that will allow us to bring awareness of the problem of stereotype threat and interventions to the university at large.

Preferred meeting format:

Lunch

Proposing faculty:

Kristen Naegle, School of Engineering and Applied Sciences, Biomedical Engineering, Assistant Professor

Beth Fisher, The Teaching Center, Director of Academic Services; School of Arts and Sciences, Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, Lecturer

Regina Frey, School of Arts and Sciences, Chemistry, Associate Professor and Co-Director of CIRCLE

Additional faculty to be invited:

Mark Alford, School of Arts & Sciences, Physics, Professor and Chair

William Buhro, School of Arts & Sciences, Chemistry, Professor and Chair

Heather Corcoran, School of Design & Visual Arts, College and Graduate School of Art, Director and Professor

Jan Duchek, School of Arts & Sciences, Psychology and Occupational Therapy, Associate Professor; Cornerstone, Director

Garrett Duncan, School of Arts & Sciences, Education, Associate Professor

Tonya Edmond, School of Social Work, Associate Professor

Kathy Flores, School of Engineering and Applied Sciences, Materials Science, Professor and Associate Chair

Andrea Friedman, School of Arts & Sciences, History, Associate Professor

Steven George, School of Engineering and Applied Sciences, Biomedical Engineering, Professor and Chair

Kathy Miller, School of Arts & Sciences, Biology, Professor and Chair

Jennifer Kapczynski, School of Arts & Sciences, Germanic Languages & Literatures, Associate Professor

Jay Turner – School of Engineering and Applied Sciences, Chemical Engineering, Associate Professor and Director of undergraduate studies

Additional faculty to be invited, if above cannot participate

Igor Marjanovic, Sam Fox School, Architecture, Associate Professor

Amanda Moore McBride – Brown School of Social Work, Professor, Associate Dean; Richard A. Gephardt Institute for Public Service, Director