**Learning Community of Difference**

Ground Rules for August 23, 2017

* Given that racism and bigotry are not topics that we tend to discuss openly in our society and that even in classrooms of higher learning these topics tend to be contained at best or avoided, as they are by nature contentious and hard to engage in, we recognize that we are entering unchartered territory in many ways and would therefore like to acknowledge this fact and commend all those who are present, including the facilitators, students, staff, and faculty, all of whom are present as volunteers. We are here because we believe that having these challenging discussions, is invaluable and necessary.
* In understanding and acknowledging the fact that racism and bigotry do not affect all people equally, we are **intentionally prioritizing space** for affected communities of marginalized/minority groups including African Americans, people of color, people of non-Christian faith groups that have been unjustly targeted, immigrants and refugees, LGBTQ, and others who have felt directly impacted by the escalating tensions of hatred expressed in our country. What this means is that as we begin the session, and in subsequent questions that may be asked, we will first open the floor to the aforementioned minority groups above to speak. We ask that those present from dominant groups i.e. White, male, heterosexual, Cisgendered, Christians (or any combination of these dominant groups) please allow for our minority affected communities to speak first before contributing. The intention is to flip the script on privilege and prioritize the needs of minority communities to be proactively heard in an effort to correct some of the unspoken injustices that occur within the dominant culture every day in the U.S.
* **Listen wholeheartedly** when someone is speaking. Consider listening with your whole self: body, mind, and spirit. Have an intention to be fully present in order to honor, hold space for, and better understand the person who is speaking. This means putting aside an agenda or formulating a response- just listen and be present with the one who is speaking. – When it is your turn to speak we likewise recommend that you consider speaking from your heart and not your head, let your gut and instinct guide you rather than your intellect. We know, what a thing to say in an institution of higher learning?! It’s a suggestion, for your consideration out of an interest in promoting a dialogue of open listening and caring. Also, keep in mind that it is always kind to begin by acknowledging the person who spoke before you and continuing the conversation from there. – See attached for suggested steps in compassionate communication.
* **Assume positive intent**- Remember that we are in a professional school of social work and that people have shown up out of concern for the present climate in our fractured country. For many, racial tensions such as macro and micro aggressions, are a fact of life that are lived with every day. For others the discomfort of the conversation around racial identities is very new. We therefore recognize the inherent tensions in having people on a continuum of learning around privilege. And yet here we are courageously coming together as a diverse community to do what we can to move the conversation for social justice forward in an effort to help heal ourselves, help each other, and to support our community. We acknowledge that progressive change and healing is most likely not possible in one session but we are wanting to take a first step nonetheless.
* It’s ok to **critique ideas but not individuals**- Use I statements and ask for clarification or express your feelings about your interpretation of what someone said but do not assume you understand the intention of another.
* We highly encourage journaling on paper (on the Metro campus we will provide blank sheets of paper) if you feel the need to get your thoughts out in a safe way and consider possibly doing so before speaking up. Consider possibly asking yourself before speaking- **THINK**- Is what I’m going to say adding to the conversation in a productive way- is it Tue/Thoughtful, honest, inspiring, necessary, and kind.
* **Feel free to walk out at any time** if you need a break or if you need to leave- always take care of yourself and please feel free to follow up with the coordinators if you would like to talk further about anything that might arise for you or any unsettled feelings, thoughts, or ideas- all constructive feedback or request for clarification is welcome and appreciated
* At any time if a participant or facilitator is sensing a moment of resistance or of someone dominating the conversation or a dominant group becoming the center of attention and thus dominating the conversation, it is encouraged to take a pause after someone calls out **RESISTANCE**. The intention here is not to shut down the conversation but rather to take a breather and open up the space to be more inclusive of everyone once more. This is a good time to practice journaling on paper and if you should feel inclined, to later share your thoughts with the group and/or with the facilitators after the session or through email.

Thank you for your willingness to engage in these courageous conversations. We honor each and every person who shows up with the intention of finding our way towards a more just and equitable society where all voices are equally valued. Please be on the lookout for more events and resources coming soon.