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Anti-Racism in Academia: A Learning Journey - Persist

Monday, January 4, 2021

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>> TONYA BENNETT: Hello everyone. Welcome to the new year. We will be beginning very shortly. Tonya will be taking the lead here today.

 >> TONYA BENNETT: I think we will give it another minute for folks to trickle in. And then I will get started because I want to be conscious of everyone's time. Happy New Year everyone. And so, I think I'm just going to get started and just allow people to trickle in as they come in. First of all, welcome and Happy New Year to everybody. And this is an ARiA webinar and that stands for anti-racism in academia and it is a learning journey. This is a kick-off for part five. My name is Tonya Bennett and I'm one of the lead coordinators for this part, which is part five of the series. And so, I am coming into you live from cloudy and cold south New Jersey. I'm about five miles outside of Philadelphia. And we're thrilled to have you here today. And your continued support is humbling and it is overwhelming and thank you for taking the time to join us today. This meeting is being recorded and the recording will be made available on the website for those who couldn't attend. But please keep in mind --

 >> This meeting is being recorded.

 >> TONYA BENNETT: There it goes. Right on time. And so, just to go into that just a little bit deeper, just to make sure that it also is being transcribed. So, whatever you type into the chat to everyone will become part of transcription for this session. So, just be sure if you don't want something to be a part of -- having a private discussion, do that in the private chat and not into the chat to everyone because it will become part of the chat transcript for this session. And that being said, we want to engage you in the chat -- in using the chat feature. So, please feel free to jump in, introduce yourself. Let us know what the weather is and where you are. And so, what I wanted to do was just have you meet the ARiA team. So, there are multiple members of the amazing ARiA coordinator team on this call right now. And I want to introduce them really quick. There's Tina Pappas from Rutgers University. Desiree White is also from Rutgers University and Sowmya Shankar from the University of Delaware. Jonathan Hardy from the University of Georgia. Myself and there's Tracy Weber from Notre Dame. And those of the ARiA team that are here today will be helping to monitor the chat and respond to questions as well today. And I also just want to take a moment to express our appreciation and our gratitude to the EDUCAUSE team for their continued support and giving us this wonderful platform for hosting these kick-off webinars each month. The webinar is being recorded and it will be available in the next week or so for those who couldn't attend. And so, thank you again, EDUCAUSE, for all of your support. And our contact information for the ARiA team is on this slide. And we have an email address. And then we also have a website. So, if you want to learn more about ARiA or you want to take a look at some of the resources that we have for you, there's resource books, there's articles, there's social media information over there as well. You can go to ARiA.UGA.edu. Or if you have feedback or general questions and want to contact us, please feel free to use that contact information and reach out to us. I will go to the next slide. Just a little bit about the origin of the ARiA program. I want to talk briefly about the genesis and how the core team kind of formed. And it started with Tina Pappas and Jonathan Hardy. The dynamic duo reached out to me and asked me to join the journey and they reached out to Sowmya and Tracy and Desiree and we game this group of passionate individuals. And we are committed to the anti-racism efforts. And we wanted to go be beyond the word, beyond statements of solidarity, and actually put some action to it. Like have some teeth in it and some -- what they call skin in the game. And so, we wanted to be effective and supportive in this way. So, we came out of our comfort zones and we met in early July and formulated three goals for the ARiA program. And the first goal was to create safe spaces so we can share information and learn to have open and honest conversations about race. And then the second goal was to promote personal and professional growth through an awareness and understanding of the lived experiences of our colleagues and our BIPOC colleagues which is Black Indigenous People of Color. And the third goal was to empower individuals such as ourselves to enact changes and to create a more inclusive community. So, we really wanted to replicate the experience that the core ARiA team was having within the broader higher ed community in a more structured way. Next slide. So, this is where we are today in the process and this is a good snapshot of what the ARiA framework -- this is a snapshot of the ARiA program. So, you are in that middle column right now. It is here. We are at the kick-off webinar. And it is focused on higher ed and the focus of which month is persist. We will get a little more into persist in the talk as well. So, what it is to introduce the topic. But the work starts way before the kick-off webinar starts. And so, as we approach each topic the month before, we train our facilitators and we provide them with the logistics that they would need and a toolkit in order to carry out their small group sessions. And that comes in the form of a toolkit. And in this toolkit, we provide them with a slide deck that goes over the what, why, and how of the topic, which would be the what, why, and how of persist. We will also talk about that today. And there's communication templates and there are also tips and guidelines for facilitation and race conversations and also accessibility best practices which is very important as well. And then we also provide logistical support, which is the event management. And so, when those small sessions are scheduled and people are able to sign up to the small groups, we also provide that logistical support as well attending management and the feedback survey. And so, following this webinar that is happening right now, we will have breakout sessions which would be open to all employees of higher ed. And also I wanted to mention our facilitators are also higher ed employees as well. They are volunteer higher ed employees. And with those smaller groups, the breakout sessions in the third column, those are not recorded. Those are guided by the facilitator and they may -- the what, why, and how will definitely be the same, but they may be delivered a little different just depending on the facilitator and their lens and also their lived experiences and also the group homogeny as well the group make-up. After we spoke about the goals of ARiA and using those goals, we moved forward to promote the framework with five parts and they are the core components of it. And the five parts are reach out, listen, learn, act, and persist. And we came one the hashtag ROLLAP. And that is the first letters of the first words. If you are joining us and you are referencing or talking about ARiA on social media, please use the hashtag as well. And so, the way the program is designed is that each part of the series would happen for a month with the exclusion of act, which actually happened over the month of November and December. And that just was due to the -- there was the Thanksgiving holiday and then there was the winter break. So, since we had those holidays in those two months, we figured we would hold it over that span in order to give more time to the series. And then the other thing is that we understand that each individual that wants to be part of this journey in some way shape or form is at a different point this chair journey, in their anti-racism journey. And just based on that, we came up with a three-prong approach to address the ROLLAP framework. And those three prongs are learn, grow, and lead. And I'm going to dive a little bit into those three as well. The first part, learn, is where you gain deeper knowledge and more meaningful understanding of issues in racism. So, a lot of active learning happens here and individuals use their critical thinking and self-analysis and empathy to understand the lived experience of their colleagues, their BIPOC colleagues. That's where people start. And then it is the grow stage. And that is the stage where individuals feel empowered and confident and more courageous to think about challenging the status quo or discriminatory practices or policies. And so, that's another stage as well. And then the final stage is the lead stage. And we encourage individuals to lead so they can navigate those challenges and implement the strategies that they learn to create an inclusive environment. So, as we said and as it is in the name, this is a journey. And we understand that people are in all parts of this journey and they join us with a bunch of different lived experiences and so, we are aware of that and that's why the learn, grow, lead is a big part of the ARiA framework. Can we go to the next slide? And so, in saying that, as I mentioned, this is part five of the five-part series. So, this is the last part of series. We have already gone through the other four part topics of the series. And what I want to do now is just talk about those just briefly before we get into what the fifth part entails. And so, reach out is an intentional effort to proactively and respectfully engage in meaningful dialogue with people from different racial backgrounds from your own. And those words are bolded, intentional proactive and respectfully engage. And those are the points that we really wanted to drive home with this series. So, just a little glimpse of what happened for those who didn't attend any of the reach out sessions, I just wanted to share some of the things that they went over in those sessions where they gave the attendees a chance to explore their own personal circumstances. And just in the context of anti-racism work. So, for example, if someone grew up in a homogenous environment and they had little exposure to diversity, what that meant for someone's views or experience. And then we talked about listen which is to make an intentional effort, to give attention to someone with goals, the goal of understanding what is being shared and formulating meaning from sound. And the bolded words in that are intentional, attention and understanding. And so, in some of the listen sessions, particularly the one that was held in the month of September, but in September, some of the sessions included watching and reacting to spoken poetry, to exercise listening skills and attendees appreciated going through those experiences. And to talk about learn. So, learn is to gain a deeper understanding of issues on systemic racism, implicit bias, allyship, intersectionality, critical thinking and analysis. Those words, systemic racism, implicit bias, those were themes given for that topic. And so, if we look at the bolded words, we see deeper, critical thinking and self-analysis. And so, through these -- in learn, it wasn't a lecture style and it was more about self-discovery. And so, that's what some of the attendees gained from attending the learn sessions. And then act is making an intentional effort to ensure attitudes, practices and policies are inclusive and more equitable to BIPOC and there were inclusive language, inclusive workforce and bias in technology. And as far as one of the themes was inclusive workforce and it gave an opportunity for participants to brainstorm and deliberate about thoughtful strategies to ensure that recruitment practices and hiring and retention policies are equitable and inclusive. And so, that's just a bit of what -- that's a quick overview. But if you want to learn more and you haven't been able to bar take in any of these small group sessions on these topics, please visit our website to get more information about them. And we're going to go to the next slide. And then we will talk about what persist entails. And so, this is just a quick snapshot pretty much by the numbers. It's just a way to show you how well received and well attended this program was. You can see from inception that there were nine facilitators, 11 sessions and 75 participants. And those numbers have doubled and more. This is phenomenal growth for this program that was a grassroots effort. And so, it just describes the popularity and the format that is leading to this increased participation. It is an opportunity also to connect with peers from across the country and to discuss race in a setting where everyone's involved and interested and supportive of the topic. And so, it is where you will find people to share stories and experiences with others because a lot of stories aren't shared and a lot of stories aren't told or heard. And this is a good platform for that and a good space for that as well. As we go to the next slide we will get into very quickly what persist means. One of the book definitions of persist is to continue, firmly and obstinately in an opinion or a course of action in spite of difficulty, opposition or failure. And what I want you to do just quickly is think about a time where you persisted and think about what that felt like and what that drive and what that fire was to make you, you know, be persistent and to push through and to carry on. And the goal is just to think about what persist feels like. And what persisting feels like. And we should be intentional and deliberate and consistent in our persistence to make meaningful change and -- meaningful attitudes with the practices and policies to create a more inclusive culture and anti-racist organization. And we should remember that we are more easily compelled to act when we have a passion or when we have a purpose or high stakes motivate us. So, that is why I asked you to think about when you persisted because those driving forces are a good place to anchor when you are thinking about persisting in -- persisting in anti-racism work. Oh, sorry. I think a good thing to do is identify why anti-racism work is important to you. And it will be what you can anchor to as well to continue and to keep your drive and to keep pushing through any obstacles or even if you feel burnt out or any other things that come your way. Any challenges because with anything, there are also challenges as well. And as we go to the next slide, we can talk about why persisting matters. It is just the work of building an inclusive racially equitable culture. It is a journey and it is not a destination. So, ARiA is a learning journey and you will be on this learning journey. And it doesn't -- there was a quote that it doesn't start and stop when the protests do. This is -- you're in it and you're in it for the long haul and there will be a long haul. So, just understand that this is a journey. And yes, you might stumble along the way. You're human. You may trip. There may be challenges along the way. But just carry on with the journey. And the power of many coupled with steadfast and productive and ongoing activities will disrupt and dismantle racism and are crucial to systemic change. So, this is to say that we could be a domino and we could start a reaction or we could keep that reaction going. And so, it does matter. Your efforts matter. They are important to all of us and we're in this together who are doing this work. And so, that's why it matters because it is important and it is important for everyone to know that you can move the needle. And we collectively can move the needle. Also keep that in mind if times get tough or you're feeling a little bit disconnected or things like that. And when we go to the next slide. So, how do we do it? So, very a lot of ways we can do it. But what I wanted to focus on here is if something that we can do right now and it is a low barrier to entry. And I mean right now. When you get off of this webinar, you can do this. And it is to elevate BIPOC. If you just want -- and these suggestions don't require raising BIPOC up instead of others or to do so without merit. But if you can, just have an increased mindfulness, specifically including the BIPOC in ways that are left out -- out or not that you have. So, you could be intentional about giving praise to a BIPOC or for their contributions or amplify them. Or use publications from BIPOC and promote them or either highlight an impact that someone that is BIPOC has made and stand up for a BIPOC colleague or amplify their voice. This could be done on social media. This could be done in meetings or in the hallway. It is shining a light on some who may deal unseen or unheard. And that's why it is a way to really consciously make a conscious effort to do that. And then, we're going to go to the next slide. I want to talk a little bit about joining the conversation. Balk you could join the conversation. Enrollment starts today. So, we ask that you only sign up for one breakout session so everyone gets a chance to participate. And then we will also be having an encore event. So, just like EDUCAUSE so graciously partnered with us to provide us with this platform and to let us do this web that are on their platform, they are also a part of ARiA and NERCOMP is also providing a basis for us to give out information -- spread this ARiA information as well. And all of this information again is on our website and you can use the link below. And I'm going to wrap up just to see if there are any questions. We will use the last few minutes for questions. I haven't seen the chat but I know the ARiA team has been really good in the chat. In manning the chat. There's no questions? Okay. So, I guess I will just --

 >> SOWMYA SHANKAR: There's one question. Will this continue through spring and what will that look like?

 >> TONYA BENNETT: I think Sowmya can you --

 >> SOWMYA SHANKAR: See that wants to jump on that. Literally jumped on the mic.

 >> TINA PAPPAS: I was jumping on the mic to laugh out loud. The short answer is yes. What does it look like? We don't know yet. Our minimal goal as a team is to do what we call a sprint, running ROLLAP. Minimally, we would like to run another sprint in 2021. We hope to run sprints well beyond 2021. But we have to take it one step at a time. If we were to really reach for our stretch goals, we are considering other ways to expand the work that we're doing. Perhaps building kits that people can bring back to their organizations and then do exactly what ARiA is doing nationally in their local communities. There are other things we are doing that fall between those two goals. That is to partner with institutions or organizations like NERCOMP or EDUCAUSE to collaborate on programming in the form of public webinars, information sessions. So, there are a number of things that we have in the pipeline. But what we are first and foremost going to focus on is getting through this month's activities, the breakout sessions. We are lining up a reflections event in February and then we are going to spend some time figuring out what the five month sprint will be in 2021. We don't know what months those will be. They likely will be sooner than starting in August like we did last year. We are on track so far to get that far and as we sort of pin down the details and we know more, we will be sure to be very public with that information. Beyond the fact that we do make announcements as often as we can, without overdoing it, we will continue to post on mailing lists. But if you want to learn more about what we are doing, the first place we tend to post is our own newsletter and you could sign up on your website for that. We don't post frequently but we will typically post and let our newsletter subscribers know a little bit in advance when they can sign up. Here's hoping 2021 will bring a lot more ARiA things. We have a couple more. We are over time. So, we are probably going to call it. There are issues with the sign-up link. We will take a look at that right away. Someone mentioned NERCOMP. NERCOMP is another association similar to EDUCAUSE. They have done us the favor of running the registration system this month for us. When you go on the link to register, you will go to the ARiA web and from there you will click on the event which will bring you to the NERCOMP website to complete registration. It is okay if you land on the NERCOMP website. That is by design. You could complete the registration and get confirmation for the event that way. Any other questions? Okay. If you have any other questions we are available by email and contact form. We try to put as much information up on the website for self-service purposes. Feel free to reach out to us. Thank you all for joining us today and taking the time in the new year and we look forward to seeing you -- we won't see you in the breakout sessions but we look forward to you joining the breakout sessions and thanks to our facilitators for taking the time to join us today. We appreciate your dedication and commitment. Take care, everyone.