
CRUCIAL CONVERSATIONS

PEABODY STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES WITH RACE

January 29, 2015

NOTES FROM *CRUCIAL CONVERSATIONS* 2015

The theme of the second *Crucial Conversations* event was “Peabody in Context.” While keeping true to the original mission of exploring people’s experiences concerning race and ethnicity on Peabody’s campus, we also asked people to consider how these experiences are related to events happening in our local, national, and wider global communities. During a large group debrief, we asked people to share summarized thoughts from their small groups. In this document are the notes from those groups.

Our Experiences

- We ignore race, or we get nervous or tense. There can be fear and very little serious engagement.
- Students who have different identities and different views feel burdened to represent their respective groups, which feels extremely isolating.
- When race is talked about in classroom, it wasn’t always beneficial. Often, there is a colorblind mentality. Other times, white is just the norm.
- Sometimes discussions are overly clinical with no recognition of how people consider race.
- From the administrator’s perspective, we felt that maybe there were more conversations happening than what is really known in the classrooms.
- Efforts around diversity can be disjointed and even invisible on our campus. Sometimes people are fearful that they will say something inappropriate. But if we don’t talk about it, the fear grows.
- Many of us in our role are facing a lot of issues of economic diversity with our students. Undergraduate students are living with a diverse group of students on campus, but we don’t have enough opportunities for this at the professional and graduate level.
- Many times, we feel isolated as administrators and that we can’t build dialogue about diversity across groups, even among coworkers.
- A lot of people become a minority when they come to Peabody – this needs to be addressed explicitly.
- Often, race comes up in a historical sense and not a contemporary sense. Talk is very theoretical.
- The demographics in the programs often don’t reflect the demographics they are trying to serve.
- Race is seen as a variable, but is never the primary focus. Whiteness and privilege aren’t mentioned. One person said, “We have to work twice as hard to get the same respect.”
- As a person of color, you are looked on as the expert and get singled out.
- Some international students thought it was interesting to see how Americans talk about race and diversity.
- There is a narrowness of conversations around race on Peabody.
- Tokenism: Students are asked to represent their own group, race, or nation.
- People don’t know whether to say Black or African-American or brown, etc.
- There is a notable absence of these conversations in our coursework. Race is not a part of conversations inside and maybe also outside of classrooms. We don’t have broader view of what race looks like.
- Faculty demographics: There aren’t always role models or people students can relate to.
- Some conversations do seem to be happening much more at the undergraduate level.
- It is possible to be a student here and never have a conversation about race.

Beyond Peabody

- The larger community does sometimes engage in smaller conversations.

- As a respected research institution, we are careful about our public face, but this can sometimes keep us from talking about race and how we interact with the world.
- Peabody students are seen as leaders in these conversations and we all want to find ways for people to continue these conversations.
- Larger context in which Peabody is situated: Nashville, the south, how is race understood here...what might that mean for us?
- Peabody's response to world events has been nonexistent.
- We don't feel we are prepared to deal with these issues when we leave the classroom or enter the world.

Moving Forward

- We would like to see more engagement and move past fear.
- We have to talk about race and bring it up. This does happen, but the conversations are structured by professors who do that purposely.
- Regarding the burden of speaking and representing identities, everyone should have responsibility for conversations and we should share this.
- Role of students in the classroom: White students should challenge each other on their views so the burden doesn't fall only on minority students.
- Faculty should include race in curriculum more regularly.
- Some of these discussions should occur in class, but some should also happen outside of class. The Iris Book Club is a good example of having these discussions.
- We know there are conversations outside of the classroom, but we need to be thinking more intentionally about this and moving towards some solutions.
- We need to find a common ground for dialogue to bring everyone to that conversation.
- Also we need to think about these questions and ourselves as members of diverse communities.
- Identification of each person at the table changes the perspective; it is important to be aware of this when thinking about privilege and all of these issues. We should strive to find a balance between empathy and trying to understand.
- A safe space for a good conversation...how do we create this? We need to focus on more than just content. How do we address things when things get heated or a student feels uncomfortable?
- We need to help students develop skills to have these conversations. While we think that Peabody is making efforts to give this training and have these conversations, students and faculty may not have sufficient experience talking about diversity.
- People should feel more comfortable talking about race.