Combat Racism With NCBI

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On April 24, Metropolitan State University’s National Coalition Building Institute (NCBI) held a four-hour workshop. NCBI is a non-profit whose mission is to eliminate racism and oppression. This workshop focused on promoting NCBI goals of “prejudice reduction, violence prevention, conflict resolution, and coalition building” and was a follow up to a shorter workshop held earlier in February. This fall, the NCBI is planning on hosting a training session that will create new facilitators.

Trained NCBI facilitators, Jose Santos and Kathleen Cole, began this workshop with an introduction to NCBI principles. Workshop attendees were asked to respect these principles, which included honoring confidentiality, respecting others, leaving work and technology outside of the room, speaking for yourself, and listening respectfully with your full attention on what is being conveyed, and those in attendance raised their hands in confirmation.

Ups and Downs

Participants were then invited to partake in two activities that were featured in February’s shorter workshop. The first activity involved group members standing up and sitting down, and thus is appropriately named “Ups and Downs.” Presenters identified various groups, which included birth place, age, educational status, connection to the university, religious affiliation, sexual orientation and ethnic heritage, to name a few. When a participant identified with a specific group, they would stand and those sitting clapped and cheered in support and recognition.

This activity allowed the workshop group to recognize the voices that were present, as well as those that were not, and promote pride when establishing individual representation. Afterward, participants shared why the activity was difficult or not and discussed how some categories are assigned by others, as well as how labels cannot fully describe each individual.

Personal Identities

The second activity included participants identifying their personal identities, which is important because, according to Santos, “One thing that we do find is that these different groups…whether you have them thrust upon you or whether you don’t even notice if you are a member of them, they affect your leadership. They affect your ability to navigate within groups, and they affect your ability to direct those groups, and they affect how people might react to you.” Attendees worked in pairs with a given prompt to identify a personal identity and discuss the positive and negative aspects associated with their chosen social group.

Stereotypes

The next activity focused on attendees’ knowledge of numerous social groups and how a lot of knowledge can be the result of stereotyping. NCBI thinks of stereotypes as “records that play in our heads even if we don’t want them to” according to Cole. She explains that it’s like a song that you hate but you know all the words to. “First thoughts” was an activity that included teaming up with a partner and picking an identity from a list provided (that neither member was a part of) to share the records each person has heard about the social group.

After choosing a group, one person spoke the name of the group while the other replied with the first word that came to mind. This activity allows participants to examine their “records” which is important because, according to Cole, “We internalize knowledge about various social identity groups and normally those things are stereotypes…and you just pick them up by being in the culture…even if you don’t necessarily endorse it.” This took place four times before the pair switched roles. Once the activity was over, the group discussed how the results of the exercise shocked or surprised them.

Caucuses

After a short lunch break, Raj Sethuraju took the place of presenter Cole. Sethuraju introduced himself and then the group began the next activity, called “Caucuses.” The goal of this exercise is to have groups of three or more represent a certain social group that they belong to. Attendees provided social groups to the presenters and the group was then divided into smaller groups to represent an identity that they belong to. Groups then discussed the question: what do you never again want people to say, think or do in regards to your identity group? Each group then shared a few answers to the question with all attendees, which allowed those listening the opportunity to practice being better allies to various social groups.

The last activity included hearing stories from two group members regarding their experiences with oppression based on a social identity group. Everyone then expressed the thoughts and emotions each story brought up, and participants provided their support.

In closing, the presenters and attendees expressed statements of appreciation to the presenters.

NCBI provides training that is beneficial to everyone. Santos explains further: “There are groups that we are told that we are members of…and then there are groups that we don’t even notice we’re a member of…it’s about being able to see these things even if you don’t want to lend them power.”

For those interested in learning more about Metro State’s NCBI, future workshops or leadership training, contact the organization at ncbi@metrostate.edu.