

## **Anti-Racism Working Group: Exploring the Results of an Interdisciplinary Partnership at a Large Public University**

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***Abstract:** Institutions of higher education fail to address ongoing systemic racism within their classrooms, boardrooms, and commons when university personnel and students are not prepared to discuss racism and structural inequalities that exist within the campus community. To address this at a public, Predominantly White Institution (PWI), a group of students, staff, and faculty developed an action-oriented community to increase awareness and advocacy efforts against systemic and micro-level racism. Founded by faculty in the university's BSW and MSW programs, the Anti-Racism Working Group (ARWG) is composed of faculty, staff, and students from multiple university departments. The goals of ARWG include education and awareness, and dialogue about race, ethnicity, bias, power, and privilege; cultivating interdisciplinary faculty and student relationships, and inspiring anti-racist actions. This paper discusses and disseminates research about ARWG's inaugural year and early assessments of the program. Data includes responses from students who attended ARWG workshops and found them useful in their conceptualization and self-awareness around race, privilege, and taking anti-racist action. ARWG members benefited around three themes including skill development, relationship building, and the increased awareness and ability to engage in productive discussions around race, power, and privilege. We share these results with other universities and organizations to encourage the creation of similar programs and to facilitate learning from our experiences.*

**Keywords:** *White supremacy, racism, advocacy, interdisciplinary, higher education*

West Chester was founded in 1812 as a private, state-aided preparatory and teacher-training school, eventually becoming a state-owned teacher's college in 1927 and joining the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) in the 1980s. West Chester is a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) at both the graduate and undergraduate levels (Sinanan, 2016), and faculty and staff demographics are comparable to the student body: 83% White and 17% Black, Indigenous, and other people of color (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019; West Chester Office of Institutional Research, 2020). Like many other PWI's, West Chester's efforts to redress its latent institutional racism remain inchoate. While West Chester has pledged responsibility for its complicated history of

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serving the common good while enacting systematic oppression (Forde, 2008), the university has yet to create an environment in which students identifying as Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) and those who identify as white complete their undergraduate degrees at equitable rates (Robinson, 2020; West Chester Institutional Research, 2020) — more work needs to be done.

While university racial climate data acknowledges the challenges BIPOC-identifying students experience at West Chester, university personnel and students are often not prepared to dialogue about racism and structural inequalities in the campus community. Universities have an institutional responsibility to prepare students, staff, and faculty with strategies and knowledge to reduce racism both directly and structurally to navigate challenging discussions and achieve institutional change (Walls & Hall, 2018). One such outcome of this commitment was the formation of the West Chester's Anti-Racism Working Group (ARWG).

ARWG was founded in the Spring of 2018 by social work faculty and funded through an Innovation in Diversity and Inclusion Forum Grant from the West Chester Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. The request for proposals sought programs to enhance West Chester's campus climate. Initial ARWG funds were used to organize a two-day intensive anti-racism training, which resulted in the creation of an action-oriented community. The group focuses on increasing awareness and advocacy to counter racism at our institution and in our related communities. ARWG is composed of faculty, staff, and students from multiple university departments: Counselor Education, Educational Foundations & Policy Studies, English, Graduate Social Work, Management, the Library, Business College, Nursing, and Undergraduate Social Work, and includes a diverse range of participants in regard to markers of age, race, gender, and LGBTQIA+ identities.

To create an anti-racist learning community, to dialogue, and to practice a common language that can be shared among the working group members, students, and the greater college community (Alejano-Steele et al., 2011), ARWG convened for an initial 2-day intensive train-the-trainer workshop in August of 2019. The purpose of this workshop was to develop and build on the following goals: increase awareness of and the ability to engage in productive discussions related to race, ethnicity, bias, power, and privilege; cultivate interdisciplinary dialogue and encourage cross-campus professional faculty and student relationships; and inspire action and advocacy. This two-day time period was based on participant availability, grant funding (for food and an honorarium for the trainer), and also previous anti-racism training research demonstrating that trainings for a similar length resulted in changed attitudes and understanding around racism (Abramovitz & Blitz, 2015; Singleton, 2012). This initial training was supplemented with monthly and quarterly meetings to review the progress and expectations set forth from the first training, which was intended to be the jumping off point as racial equity cannot be achieved through a week-long, two-hour, or two-day training (Ajunwa, 2020).

During the 2019-2020 academic year, ARWG deployed across the university to host events to listen, educate, unsettle, and engage approximately 200 community members to take anti-racist action. ARWG also met monthly to engage in discussion around logistics; review feedback from workshop trainees; refine and develop best practices for anti-racism

training for West Chester students, faculty, and staff; create group advocacy goals and track progress towards meeting goals; and to support one another with encouragement and offer a safe space to debrief. This training for trainers attracts people (faculty, staff, and students) interested in examining their social political roles/identities and committing to having conversations about our history and the dynamics of racism, discrimination and inequality. This work involves the participants in learning content, analyzing the reactions of the participants, structuring and facilitating the content and subsequent discussions, and participating in developing strategies for outreach and policy improvements.

Following the completion of ARWG's first year of training and active engagement within the university setting, a survey was disseminated to all members of the working group and workshop evaluations were reviewed. In this paper, we detail ARWG's guiding theoretical frames of organizational change theory, specifically multicultural organizational development (MCO) and anti-racist social work pedagogy that is exemplified in Critical Race Theory (CRT), our research related to the lived experience of its working members, and our achievements, goals, and future plans for the group (Crenshaw, 2003).

## Literature Review

### Antiracism and Theory

Within social work, anti-racism has been discussed broadly as a political perspective (Keating, 2000), professional ethics (Husband, 1995), and transformational practice (Dominelli, 2017). Its eclectic development can be traced through Black activism, liberal multiculturalism, critical race theory (CRT), Marxism, feminism, post-colonialism, and post-structuralist frames (Gillborn, 2006; Ladhani & Sitter, 2020). While difficult to define, the unifying purpose of anti-racism could be summarized as understanding and confronting contemporary racisms at the level of experience within the context of what Foucault called the *dispositif*, the apparatus of discourses, institutions, and regulations immanent in oppressive systems (Foucault & Gordon, 1980). CRT has been a productive lens through which this immanence can be understood in the United States, framing the ubiquity and normality of racism, especially anti-Black racism, within the rubrics of intersectionality, a concept that seeks to understand how distinct identities create disparate and converging forms of oppression (Crenshaw, 2003; Crenshaw et al., 1995). With this in mind, anti-racism is often understood as requiring active opposition to forces which seek to hide, elide, or reinterpret racisms in order to maintain the status quo and limit multidimensional interventions (Corneau & Stergiopoulos, 2012; Dominelli, 2017; Ladhani & Sitter, 2020; Svetaz et al., 2020).

Eliminating racism was only recently named a Social Work Grand Challenge for creating a just society (Grand Challenges of Social Work, 2020; Uehara et al., 2017). While this acknowledgement is vital to the growth and efficacy of our profession, analyses of our literature reveal that we have inadequately addressed racism beyond the micro-level (Corley & Young, 2018; McMahon & Allen-Meares, 1992). What the limited body of research does show is that effective antiracism work requires a focus on culturally

responsive interventions as well as accountability and group organizing to counter the effects of racism across levels and systems. Anti-racist projects must therefore seek communal understanding of local conditions and empower action to lead from below as “low-power actors” to redress racism for ourselves, our communities, and our collective futures (Cohen & Hyde, 2014; Hyde, 2018, p. 1).

### **Antiracism in Higher Education**

Institutions of higher education remain sites of “post-race” discourse, meritocratic mirage, and whiteness as organizational culture (Tate & Bagguley, 2017). Similar to social service agencies, higher education institutions maintain and promote the status quo (i.e., White-supremacist distributions of power) through discriminatory hiring and admission practices, surface-level work focused on diversity through representation, and the creation and enforcement of professional standards and cultural norms (Miller & Garran, 2008). These standards and norms reveal an endemic feature of racism in higher education: institutions serve as gatekeepers and as brokers of resources, and restrict access to some communities of students, faculty, and staff more than others under the guise of merit, which always already operates within the rubrics of systemic racism and the intersectional convergence of identities and experiences (Basham et al., 1997; Figueroa & Garcia, 2006; Vaughn, 2008).

To address these issues of institutional culture, our antiracism work has been informed by multicultural organizational development (Hyde, 2004; Jackson, 2006), a frame which posits the organization along a continuum of change, and prepares teams of change agents to plan, implement, assess, and renew actions across levels and subunits. As we are an interdisciplinary team in respects to tenured and untenured faculty, staff, and students across broad entities of the university, individual anti-racist leaders are dispersed across facets and realms of the university to act as change agents in various roles and departments (Healy, 2014). Fully developed multicultural organizations deploy diverse knowledge and perspectives from its members in developing functions, strategies, and values (Hyde, 2018). While institutions of higher education are unique organizations and require a nuanced approach different from more common MCOB analyses of human service organizations, some of the intentional techniques are transferable. For example, social justice change techniques such as utilizing collaboration across groups and campaigning for change, as well as incorporating social capital as a vehicle to empower change from below can all thrive in a university environment (Cohen & Hyde, 2014).

While its organizational elite rarely advances anti-racist projects, educational institutions such as West Chester University are characterized at low-power levels by the breadth of knowledge and diverse perspectives inherent to interdisciplinarity. Interventions for social change can develop and succeed in collaborative learning organizational cultures (Hyde, 2017). While universities are complicit in the forces of destructive neoliberalism, they also hold in escrow the knowledge, methodologies, and skillsets through which organizations may transform and anti-racist work may thrive.

### **Anti-racist Group Work: The Undoing Racism™ Workshop**

The Undoing Racism™ workshop developed by The People's Institute for Survival and Beyond (PISAB) has been shown to effectively interrogate both the ubiquity and endemicity that allow racism to permeate our communities (Abramovitz & Blitz, 2015; Hamilton-Mason & Schneider, 2018; PISAB, 2018). This workshop model has been studied in social work classrooms (Hamilton-Mason & Schneider, 2018) and education and human service institutional contexts (Abramovitz & Blitz, 2015). Notable elements of the PISAB framework include a deeper understanding of systemic inequality, the historical construction of race, the constitutive connection between race and class, as well as a general approach of critical self-analysis and accountability (Lykes et al., 2018; PISAB, 2018). Undoing Racism™ workshop attendees gained valuable knowledge of local institutional barriers which impede anti-racist work by exploring and discussing PISAB's anti-racist principles: analyzing institutional power, developing leadership, transformative gatekeeping, identifying and analyzing manifestations of racism, learning from history, accountability, sharing culture, and undoing internalized racial oppression (Abramovitz & Blitz, 2015; Hamilton-Mason & Schneider, 2018; PISAB, 2018). Hamilton-Mason and Schneider (2018) discussed delivering the Undoing Racism™ workshop in a social work classroom and found that the model offered measurable benefit over standard anti-racism content delivery methods. The authors identified key elements of the workshop experience: activities to enhance learning, peer conversations about difference, discussing white privilege, language-focused approaches, and developing action plans.

One of the key aspects to supporting ARWG was to incorporate time to develop an action plan within the allotted training time. A focus on action-oriented approaches to addressing and redressing systemic inequality was also discussed by Abramovitz and Blitz (2015). Their study of the workshop as a primer for larger institutional conversations is useful to our project in thinking through the ways that grassroots efforts are attenuated by the intricacies of organizational change and the many factors that limit or encourage efforts to build racial equity, such as funding limited to training, the institution's racial equity progress and population, a participant's personal engagement and attitude about race, and the racial composition of the organization's leadership.

### **Research Questions**

To evaluate the efficacy of our ARWG workshops and group member's experiences, this study utilized a pragmatic worldview and a qualitative mixed methods evaluation research design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017; Morse, 2010). The research questions were written to reflect the preliminary deductive qualitative strand (qual, Participant Feedback), the primary qualitative strand based on facilitator reflection (QUAL, Facilitator Feedback), and are ordered to match the proposed mixed methods design. They are listed as follows:

- Phase 1 (qual, Participant Feedback): How well does the anti-racist workshop reflect principles of anti-racist training?
- Phase 2 (QUAL, Facilitator Feedback): How do facilitators interpret their own experiences in the ARWG and integrate the workshop in their own efforts towards anti-racist practice?

## Methods

A mixed methods evaluation design is often used to evaluate programs, organizations, or experimental trials using more than one methodological approach (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). While typically mixed methods evaluation designs employ both quantitative and qualitative methods, following the developments by Morse (2010) and Creswell and Plano-Clark (2017), we utilized Morse's Sequential Qualitative Mixed Methods Design whereby two qualitative methods are employed to triangulate study findings (little qual represented as qual and big qual represented as QUAL).

We chose this qualitative mixed methods evaluation design because this type of study allows for both deductive (e.g., "hypothesis testing") and inductive qualitative investigations (e.g., "emergent analysis") using data from multiple stakeholders over an extended time (i.e., participants and facilitators across a year). While inductive and deductive approaches to research seem quite different, they can be rather complementary in a qualitative Mixed Methods evaluation design. Researchers can plan for their research to include multiple components, one inductive and the other deductive and look for ways the findings "converge" or "diverge" depending on the analysis. This allows us to compare the end results and look for additional ways that mixing these two qualitative approaches adds value above and beyond the individual components (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Therefore, we first used the deductive a priori coding in Phase 1 to identify areas of success with implementing the principles of anti-racist training (qual). In Phase 2, we inductively analyzed the survey results with the qualitative open text responses. This allowed us to connect the participant results from the workshop with the facilitator results to explain the anti-racist working group's successes in its stated objectives (QUAL). We then compared these two approaches to identify areas of "convergence" and "divergence." See Table 1 to view the implementation matrix describing the strategy, sampling frame, goal, and analysis strategy for the two phases.

### *Ethical Consent*

To address ethical considerations, Internal Review Board approval was obtained (IRB protocol number: 20200609B). Data were kept under secure and confidential storage. All facilitators signed consent forms for study participation. Workshop participants reflected on their experience post-workshop anonymously, and completion of their reflection provided implied consent. To protect workshop participant confidentiality during analysis, data were only used in non-identifying ways as per our university's Institutional Review Board's guidance. We are in the second year of ARWG, we continue to have IRB approval even as our university's operations have become remote.

Table 1. *Implementation Matrix Describing the Strategy, Sampling Frame, Goal and Analysis Strategy for Phase 1 and Phase 2*

Strategy	Sampling Frame	Goals	Analysis
Post-Workshop Surveys	All participants in the workshop were given the survey	Assess efficacy of workshop training goals in meeting anti-racist training objectives	Deductive qualitative analysis using a priori codes from Santas (2000)
Open text response survey prompts to facilitators	All continuing facilitators were invited to participate in end-of-year survey	Identify how these facilitators met principles of anti-racist training: e.g., Did the workshop methods increase awareness of and ability to engage in productive discussions related to race, ethnicity, bias, power, and privilege?	Constant-comparative qualitative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The specific approach to coding data includes open coding, axial coding, and selective coding.

## Measures

### *Survey Phase One (Participant Feedback: qual)*

Approximately 200 attendees completed workshop evaluations anonymously via paper/pen at the conclusion of the ARWG workshop. The evaluation included five Likert scale items to rate the training and open-ended prompts documenting the trainee's advocacy goal and allowing for additional feedback. If a trainee provided their email address, they received a post-workshop evaluation via Qualtrics two weeks after they completed an ARWG workshop. The survey consisted of open-ended questions asking trainees to assess the advocacy component of the training and share their success with their advocacy goal.

### *Survey Phase Two (Facilitator Feedback: QUAL)*

Phase two involved a qualitative data collection through Qualtrics survey software. For this phase, the facilitators were invited to complete a series of open-ended responses. The reflection logs consisted of open-ended questions asking about the facilitators' understanding of and experiences with implementing the anti-racist working group plan over the past year.

## Data Analysis

### *Survey Phase One (Participant Feedback: qual)*

For Phase One, we implemented a confirmatory ("hypothesis-driven") qualitative coding method (qual). This involved taking "a priori" qualitative codes from Santas (2000)

and looking for evidence of effective anti-racist training. A confirmatory, hypothesis-driven analysis such as this is guided by specific ideas or hypotheses the researcher wants to assess. The researcher may still closely read the data prior to analysis, but their analysis categories have been determined, a priori, without consideration of the data. Santas (2000) developed an application of democratic and anti-racist educational principles in a college setting building from four key components of anti-racism utilizing existing educational theory (i.e., Dewey, Freire) and contemporary guidance from anti-racist organizations (Santas, 2000). Using this model, we applied these four principles as codes to the participant responses for Phase 1. These codes included (1) defining and undoing racism: overcoming the trap of inevitability through analysis and recognition of historicity; (2) teaching the history of racism: historical stages of racism and the recognition of race as a social construct; (3) leadership development: overcoming the structure of domination by cultivating leadership and independence; and (4) accountability: overcoming domination by multidirectional accountability (Santas, 2000).

### ***Survey Phase Two (Facilitator Feedback: QUAL)***

The reflection logs in Phase Two collected in the summer of 2020 were then coded with a constant-comparative qualitative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The specific approach to coding data includes open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Constant-comparative coding is appropriate when studying how concepts from an anti-racist training were successfully implemented over the training year. This contrasts with the more deductive “a priori” coding methods implemented in Phase One and allows for themes to emerge inductively (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

## **Results**

### **Survey Phase One (Participant Feedback: qual)**

Participants (n=200) found the workshop to be meaningful and useful to their conceptualization and self-awareness around race and privilege. Attendees of the workshops had a positive experience and wanted more students from diverse areas of study to have a similar opportunity. The main feedback focused on participants wanting the workshops to be longer and requesting access to more leadership possibilities and opportunities to continue the work. Participants also wished they had mechanisms to remember their anti-racism actions developed at the end of the workshop. Based on program evaluations, participants found the workshop to be meaningful and useful to their conceptualization and self-awareness around race and privilege.

We found support for the four themes from the coded results from participants wanting to act on anti-racism. These included (1) defining and undoing racism: overcoming the trap of inevitability through analysis and recognition of historicity; (2) teaching the history of racism: historical stages of racism and the recognition of race as a social construct; (3) leadership development: overcoming the structure of domination by cultivating leadership and independence; and (4) accountability: overcoming domination by multi-directional

accountability (Santas, 2000). Selected quotes that supported these themes are included in Table 2.

Table 2. *A Priori Codes Phase I and Selected Quotes*

Theme	Selected Quotes
(1) defining and undoing racism: overcoming the trap of inevitability through analysis and recognition of historicity;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Thinking practically about the challenges and opportunities to improve school systems and taking steps towards anti-racism.</i></li> <li>• <i>I think a course on racism should be implemented with the curriculum.</i></li> <li>• <i>Have a class about race be part of general ed! I'm tired of hearing the word diversity thrown around.</i></li> <li>• <i>Also, make it a requirement for ALL educators at [the university] to have a training about dealing with race.</i></li> </ul>
(2) teaching the history of racism: historical stages of racism and the recognition of race as a social construct;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>I enjoyed the history behind racism and the power of an individual class can completely destroy/ degrade another race. I like how you said this made them a ton of money coming out with stats that are random. I feel this still happens today.</i></li> <li>• <i>The most beneficial part was discussing the 4 "oids". Hearing people's opinions on these general stereotypes was thought provoking.</i></li> </ul>
(3) leadership development: overcoming the structure of domination by cultivating leadership and independence;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Learning about the opportunities we can take to improve the ant[i] racist movement was beneficial.</i></li> <li>• <i>The call to action! Not just saying I am not a racist, but doing something to better the world.</i></li> <li>• <i>Being self-aware. Reading articles and textbooks to increase my knowledge.</i></li> </ul>
(4) accountability: overcoming domination by multi-directional accountability.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>I am going to be more proactive in the "it's just a joke" type of racism or the subtle racist remarks and bring it to attention.</i></li> <li>• <i>Correct individuals racial/ stereotypical comments in a respectful manner to raise awareness.</i></li> <li>• <i>Intervening when experiencing racist rhetoric/ actions. Committing myself to understanding someone who has experienced racism personally.</i></li> <li>• <i>I believe I committed to becoming more informed on racism and how it affects all populations.</i></li> </ul>

**Survey Phase Two (Facilitator Feedback: QUAL)**

We developed three themes based on facilitators’ survey responses (1) increased awareness and ability (2) success cultivating cross-discipline, cross-campus professional student, staff, and faculty relationships (3) developing skills to facilitate discussions on race. We detail each briefly.

***Theme 1: Facilitators indicated an increased awareness and ability to listen and integrate narratives and experiences related to race, ethnicity, bias, power, and privilege.***

Facilitators and ARWG group members (n=10) described how rich and meaningful it was hearing the perspectives and narratives of other workshop participants. These conversations promoted learning through introducing different viewpoints and opinions. Dialogue became especially powerful when students and facilitators were asked to hear about the experiences of racism, and creating a culture of action and response without fear as in the following comment from a facilitator:

*I very much enjoyed my experience with ARWG. I find that I am very insecure in speaking up on issues related to discrimination and racism because I am fearful of making a mistake. My experiences with ARWG allowed me to explore opportunities of working towards a goal of inclusion and equality, identifying obstacles to these goals and presenting them in a way which fosters listening, growth, and change.*

Another facilitator commented that these discussions even found their ways into the classroom discussions:

*I shared an anti-racism statement in my syllabus and integrated material about intersectional racism in all of my classes. I read several books and was more vocal and active with students and BIPOC colleagues.*

Generally, facilitators benefited from the ability to hear the thoughts and experiences of others, including admissions of power and privilege. The facilitators found these conversations productive, and emotionally moving. ARWG members found the support to explore how they might make changes and increase accountability across their departments.

***Theme 2: Facilitators indicated they had success cultivating cross-discipline, cross-campus professional student, staff, and faculty relationships.***

The workshop, according to facilitators, created a sense of mutual support and community building. In addition to hearing new perspectives, facilitators left the initial ARWG workshop with strategies for doing anti-racism work across departments and positions at the university. A prominent theme in facilitators' reactions on the last day of the workshop was the feeling that they were leaving with a plan of action for incorporating anti-racism into their work. One respondent spoke about integrating the material into their cross-department relationships:

*I had a positive experience. I most appreciated the safe space during the two-day training to learn and challenge each other. I have continued to build on those relationships throughout the year - seeking consult, offer consult, etc. I really liked that the alliance we formed was across campuses, departments, roles, etc.*

Another commented that the group set up important processes for engaging with other parts of campus:

*We had a great training, and set up a system for sending trainers throughout campus. I was particularly impressed with the social work department's faculty and involvement. Everyone however was open and willing to do this important difficult work.*

The ability to leave the workshop with concrete strategies and an action plan empowered the facilitators and may have additionally alleviated some of the distress that came with learning about the impact of racism. The inclusion of discussion action plans and concrete strategies also fits with the call-to-action component of anti-racism education described in the literature.

***Theme 3: Facilitators thought they developed skills, techniques, abilities to effectively facilitate discussions about race.***

Despite experiences of discomfort, facilitators did indicate significant gains as a result of participating in the workshop, particularly through learning new skills and techniques for discussing race. Respondents reported feeling they left the workshop with ways to speak about racism and power and privilege. One facilitator indicated that this commitment to discussion created greater capability for taking action, especially in the classroom and department meetings with faculty:

*It was amazing to be a part of a group of others working towards a common goal. It felt limited at times to make time and to not be more engaged or disjointed. But the involvement helped me to bring ideas up in my classroom and in my department meetings.*

Learning working definitions of terms like race, racism, and prejudice and intentionally creating time for discussions left facilitators feeling empowered. Intentionally making time for discussion creates a more inclusive campus community through increased faculty, staff, and student action. Facilitators also shared that they learned new skills and ideas during the monthly and quarterly meetings to address racism and to collectively brainstorm and troubleshoot when there was a challenging situation either with a student, trainee, co-worker, or policy.

### **Integration of Findings**

We found areas of convergence between the reflections provided by participants and facilitators of the ARWG. Notably, we found that both facilitators and participants indicated an increased awareness of and ability to engage in productive discussions related to race, ethnicity, bias, power, and privilege. Both groups, facilitators, and participants, thought they developed skills and techniques to effectively facilitate discussions about race. Participants found that they could develop skills as evidenced by Themes 3 and 4 (leadership development: overcoming the structure of domination by cultivating leadership and independence; and accountability: overcoming domination by multi-directional

accountability) in Phase 1. Facilitators also thought they could engage productively with a new skill set to create anti-racist discussions in the classrooms and faculty meetings as evidenced by Themes 1 and 3 (increased awareness and ability and developing skills to facilitate discussions on race) in Phase 2.

There were also areas of divergence between facilitators and participant feedback. One point of divergence between facilitators and participants was in their reflections on future anti-racist action. Whereas workshop participants focused on individual actions towards anti-racist action (e.g., confronting racist comments or jokes made by peers, acting at a local protest, working on a new anti-racist policy or committee), facilitators had a more expansive view of thinking about cross-discipline, cross-campus professional relationships that could move forward anti-racist efforts at the university. This should be interpreted considering the positions of these two respective groups. Facilitators tended to be employed at the university in faculty and staff roles and this featured prominently in their reflections, while workshop participants tended to be undergraduate and graduate students at the university. Getting the perspective of both groups highlighted the benefits of this qualitative mixed methods evaluation approach.

### **Discussion**

As noted within the review of literature, the American Academy of Social Work & Social Welfare's Grand Challenges for Social Work include a call for creating a just society by eliminating racism in a way that focuses on culturally responsive prevention and interventions (Grand Challenges of Social Work, 2020). This call, and the action of ARWG, is bolstered by the tenets of CRT, which guide work in anti-racism through the lens of intersectionality, acknowledging that our socialization into racism, sexism, and classism naturally inhibits our ability to meet such challenges without intentionality (Crenshaw, 2003). Analysis of the data from both participants and facilitators during the inaugural year of the ARWG would indicate that this call is being addressed and that we are headed in the right direction in meeting this challenge. The following discussion points elaborate on the working groups' contributions to the anti-racism movement.

In its inaugural year, ARWG accomplished many tasks. It trained its first cohort of facilitators, held multiple workshops across campuses, developed and refined training materials, and began the process of collecting data for program analysis which is a central element of MCOB to move towards more inclusion and integration to redefine our University (Jackson, 2006). Utilizing the MCOB continuum, ARWG members reviewed the placement of the larger institution as well as the group's placement, assessing a developmental lag between the latter and the former (Jackson, 2006). This difference was expected and is in line with MCOB's bottom-up approach to organizational change (Hyde, 2017).

We found areas of convergence between the reflections provided by participants and facilitators of the ARWG. Notably, we found that both facilitators and participants indicated an increased awareness of and ability to engage in productive discussions through the frame of CRT related to race, ethnicity, history, experience, bias, power, and privilege. Both groups, facilitators and participants, thought they developed skills and techniques to effectively facilitate discussions about race.

There were also areas of divergence between facilitators and participant feedback. One point of divergence between facilitators and participants was in their reflections on future anti-racist action. Workshop participants focused on individual anti-racist action and facilitators focused on institutional anti-racist efforts. This should be interpreted considering the positions of these two respective groups. Facilitators tended to be employed at the university in faculty and staff roles and this featured prominently in their reflections, while workshop participants tended to be undergraduate and graduate students at the university. Getting the perspective of both groups highlighted the benefits of this qualitative mixed-methods approach, but these divergent responses also signaled the power dynamics at play. Workshop participants, including student workers and graduate student administrators, bring valuable perspectives that can aid future antiracist collaborations beyond the micro level. Moving forward, MCOB's consciousness raising training philosophy will be used to support workshop facilitators to include more mezzo and macro action-oriented content in their training and dialogue opportunities to better connect theory to practice, which is characteristic of later stages of MCOB growth (Jackson, 2006).

Evidenced in the results of our preliminary evaluations is a shared feeling that spaces are needed to talk about race, create shared understanding about history and the language we use to discuss racial injustice, and coordinate action. A key purpose of ARWG is pushing beyond the boundaries of a typical diversity training. Attending a workshop does not certify that a person is now anti-racist, a common challenge presented by one-off trainings (Bezrukova et al., 2016). This commitment to action and next steps promotes the idea that none of us are ever "done" with anti-racism work. These ideas resonated with participants who left workshops eager to act and be held accountable in their anti-racist laboring.

Student enthusiasm for action and requests for opportunities to become leaders has expanded ARWG's focus for the future. Students are especially motivated to engage with other students in discussions of race and inequity on campus. There is significant research to suggest that peer to peer dialogue about racial injustice can have a long-lasting impact on students' decisions to become more actively involved in anti-racist action (Alimo, 2012; Nagda et al., 1999; Rodriguez et al., 2018). This also further supports our efforts at MCOB bottom-up activism and change (Hyde, 2017). This inaugural year has assisted us in preparing for and working through disagreements, acknowledging that to grow, we must lean into discomfort and provide everyone the opportunity to work through intentional and unintentional contributions and reactions.

### **Limitations**

Some limitations were noted for this study. This paper and findings take place during an inaugural and unusually challenging year of a group at one university. The global pandemic required a massive shift in university policies and practices, as staff, faculty, and students moved from primarily face to face instruction to remote learning. This impacted the ability for group members to stay involved and to be as focused on the work of the group while faced with other presenting challenges and demands such as work, homeschooling, and caregiving for both children and sick family members. Our

positionality as both white and BIPOC identifying members who self-selected to engage in this working group may have impacted the study. While we are intentionally an interdisciplinary group, almost a quarter of us, including our lead facilitator and trainer, are social workers, which creates a focus on social work values and shared language. Our second cohort has a diverse group across various roles and identities of staff, faculty, and students. One aspect of evaluation that has not yet matured in the inaugural year is an assessment of whether policies or practices within departments or student groups have shifted based on attendance in workshops or other ARWG involvement. To meet our group's founding goals, these policy and practice impacts must be assessed by the ARWG in subsequent years. The implications of anti-racism work point to the interdisciplinary and macro, mezzo, and micro dimensions of social work as critical elements for social change.

### **Implications for Social Work**

The implications of this anti-racist work magnify the need for social work professional leadership in encouraging interdisciplinarity. Moving forward, one goal is that through organizing and learning with faculty, staff, students, and citizens in the communities where we work, we will be better prepared to listen and speak to address and redress racism. This anti-racist work involves examining organizational and institutional policies that are rooted in the logics of the neoliberal university and other forces which obstruct access to the policy development process.

The themes identified in the results section provide guidance for new workshop design and development, but also in the continuing evaluation of curricula and recruitment across disciplines, departments, and student groups. Social work educators collaborating with faculty of various disciplines should advocate for curricula that include literature by diverse researchers and identify mentors, role models, and resources from diverse cultural groups. Curriculum design should incorporate ways faculty may enhance their teaching to be flexible and inclusive, limit marginalizing or shaming students with different languages and abilities, and promote critical pedagogy and self-reflection. Opportunities for students to share feedback should be increased. Faculty development efforts and departmental protocols must include underrepresented faculty members in planning and decision-making. At West Chester, this work builds on the institution's strategic plan to become more accountable to the needs and strengths of students across demographic sectors.

### **Conclusion**

Institutional oppression hides in the wicked plasticity of race, yet this past year clearly showed its indelible effects. We witnessed higher COVID-19 mortality rates among minoritized racial and ethnic groups (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020), especially Black and Indigenous communities. We saw on display the circadian brutality of a racist criminal justice system in the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, among many others. Clearly, there is an urgent need for anti-racism work on a larger scale in our institutions. These recent events have shocked our university, like many others, into prioritizing engagement in anti-racism work (Nwonka, 2020; Sobo et al., 2020). We were approached multiple times in the summer 2020 by various departments and leadership

teams to partner together on training and programming, which led to a reexamination and redefining of not only our group's goals but our capacity for sustainability and outreach.

ARWG has received funding from West Chester's Diversity Forum grant for a second year to continue our work to build a racially conscious and self-reflective community. We are working to broaden the group, inviting individuals from departments and university anti-oppression organizations who have not yet participated in the program and who bring unique strengths to ARWG work. We are also building online training modules to support our work as we train with cohort 2 and add updated materials to meet the growing needs of our changing university environment. During the 2020-2021 year, ARWG is offering a virtual workshop series which coincides with the university's shift to remote learning during the pandemic. Additionally, our work will continue to support our satellite campuses, as they can be omitted from important programming opportunities without purposeful actions of inclusion (Groenwald, 2018). We continue to address the campus's racial climate survey results and host a virtual workshop for faculty to increase opportunities for affirmation and anti-racist pedagogy in their classrooms. Additionally, we will host a workshop showcasing faculty who have audited their classroom examples, readings, and syllabi to antiracist principles.

Looking to the future and our third cohort, we will seek to enhance and expand the ARWG community within and outside of West Chester's "walls." We hope to expand ARWG by including community members who serve in supervisory roles for West Chester students completing internships and service-learning projects. In addition to replicating and expanding the training to include new members of our community, we will seek to document the advocacy efforts and narrative reflections of ARWG members and trainees. Our hope is that these advocacy actions and collective work can become embedded within the larger culture at West Chester and normalized as everyday practice towards social equity.

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