

Understanding Diversity and Inclusion Issues in Academia

What is privilege? What constitutes institutional racism at the university and how can faculty members address it? What is intersectionality and why is the term so significant to understanding the compounding effects of discrimination?

Understanding Diversity and Inclusion Issues in Academia, a Fall 2020 workshop facilitated by Dr. Bernadette Gailliard of the Rutgers **Office for Faculty Development**, engaged faculty members on the dynamics and repercussions of discrimination in higher education.

Gailliard, whose goals for the workshop included the opportunity to provide a safe space for frank conversation, noted that the topic couldn't be more relevant or urgent. Gailliard challenged faculty members to re-examine their definition of privilege. She asked faculty members to evaluate a number of statements, including:

- "Places to worship or practice my religion are numerous in my home community."
- "I can look at the mainstream media and find people of my race represented fairly and in a wide range of roles."

Privilege, Gailliard noted, is real. But privilege also is not absolute.

In another exercise, Gailliard shared her modified version of Monopoly. In her game, half of the participants play according to the rules, while the other half start the game with less money, use only one die and are permitted to purchase only certain properties. In classroom exercises, students are immediately frustrated by the inequities; those who play under the restrictive rules have no chance to win. This tactile, emotional experience is often a powerful lesson in the lifelong effects of institutional racism.

Gailliard also led a discussion on intersectionality, a term coined by lawyer and scholar Kimberle Crenshaw, which recognizes that each of us lives at the intersection of multiple identities. For those who fall into more than one marginalized group (a person, for example, who is part of a racial or ethnic minority and who is homosexual), the compounding effects can be devastating. As Gailliard noted, all the social and institutional dynamics come together, creating a unique set of often overwhelming challenges.

Each exercise prompted dynamic discussions, and workshop participants were eager to share their experiences, challenges and solutions. Many stories – about privilege, discrimination, racism, microaggressions, empathy – were poignant and deeply personal. (Even after two hours, participants expressed reluctance to leave the workshop.) Many workshop participants sought next steps – specific and immediate actions that they and the university can take to help make Rutgers more diverse and more inclusive. Gailliard offered suggestions. "Be a mentor," she said. "Be an advocate."

She also offered an important reminder: "We *can* question the rules."

Note: The Rutgers Office for Faculty Development plans to facilitate future workshops and discussions on Diversity and Inclusion.