



## **IMPLEMENTATION OF A RACIAL EQUITY COURSE WITHIN A COMMUNICATION SCIENCES AND DISORDERS GRADUATE PROGRAM: A STUDENT PERSPECTIVE**

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Although the systemic racism underlying institutional designs has been ignored and manipulated since American's foundations, the drive to change those systems has waxed and waned. As my mind constantly shifts through ideas for change, I find myself confronting that every abstract goal, must be broken down into tangible actions. It was in a discussion with a peer in mid-June from my undergraduate program that developing a racial equity course, an area I found most Master of Sciences in Communication Sciences and Disorders (CSD) programs to be lacking in, could be a tangible action for the abstract goal of developing a more diverse CSD community. I feel that I am frequently challenged with whether I am sufficiently using the resources and support I have to guide the path to more culturally competent clinicians and a more welcoming field for historically disenfranchised groups, with respect to both the clients we serve, and future clinicians. When considering long term change and the significant lack of previous education, the necessity of racial equity courses in the Speech Language Pathology (SLP) field is undeniable.

Following my discussion with my undergraduate peer, I approached my research advisor with this idea for a course. Through her support I began implementing the racial equity series within the research lab via one-hour weekly discussions with reading and listening materials sent out prior to the meeting. Through trial and error, I developed a resource discussing how the training would be best structured, resources for the training, discussion questions to support the conversation, and measurable outcomes. The outcomes included understanding one's own cultural and linguistic variables, how these may compare to others, and how these variables impact

health and educational disparities. We begin with history, so that we could then incorporate the learned history specifically into the realms an SLP or audiologist would work in; schools and medical settings. Lastly, we discussed how one could apply what we are learning to the field of speech-language pathology and audiology, and how we could ensure that, in our approach to diagnostics and treatment, we are considering the differing experiences that clients bring. Within the research lab I have been facilitating discussions with fellow lab members on how we could ensure that the research questions acknowledge the broad differences in social determinants of health that may impact research recruitment as well as how the research is used. Through discussion, lab members have shared with me that they felt more aware of their own thoughts, biases, and dedicated to searching for new information independently by the end of the summer series of the course.

Throughout my experience I have confronted a plethora of emotions, sometimes at the same time. Sadness, frustration, and exhaustion come to mind, but so do warmth, hope, and determination. I am learning so much about how to balance burnout with the importance of developing this systemic change. But it is particularly in those moments of exhaustion that I reflect on how encouraging and refreshing it is to watch those who, because of a poor societal system, have never confronted these issues. Not only are they confronting the issues, but also, they are welcoming the confrontation within themselves. And it is heartwarming to watch. I may not touch everyone, and I may not change how everyone perceives the world and their work as a clinician, supervisor, or educator. But for those that are ready and willing to do the work, I know that these newfound perspectives

have the power to institute change regarding the experience of students, clinicians and clients from historically disenfranchised groups, some of whom have lived their whole life working with health professionals who have never considered their experience. We are at the beginning of a long, and at times, draining process, and this step of making the conversation critical and interwoven into all we do is essential to current and future change.

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