

Department of Psychology & Counseling

Black Lives Matter

As scholars and teachers in the fields of Psychology and Counseling, we study the complexities of human thought, feelings, and behavior. Through this lens, we have watched in horror as our country's longstanding pandemic of anti-Black racism rages on. We are grieving and angry at the brutal murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery, as well as countless other Black Americans at the hands of police or other armed White people. We are devastated by the staggering death toll of COVID-19 in the Black community, knowing that Black Americans are dying at a rate more than three times higher than White Americans. Sadly, this is nothing new. The unthinkable continues to happen, we feel it deeply, and we know we must act.

To that end, our stance is clear: **Black Lives Matter**. But as psychologists and counselors, we must go further than words. We passionately uphold our professional commitments to social and racial justice. We must use our tremendous educational privilege toward dismantling the systemic and institutional racism that has plagued our country since its inception. Yet, to move forward, we must first acknowledge that our professions have been part of the problem. Black Americans have been both excluded from and exploited by psychological and psychiatric research, leading to underrepresentation, misdiagnosis, and mistrust (Perzichilli, 2020). There is a woeful lack of access to mental health resources in Black communities, including a shortage of providers of color and culturally competent care (American Psychiatric Association, 2017). Literature on multicultural competence, though evolving, has at times perpetuated racial stereotypes and only recently has pushed White practitioners and scholars to examine their privilege and fragility, as well as intersectional identities in the populations they serve. We must start here and work from the inside out.

In that spirit, as a department, we are committed to the continuation and creation of the following actions to promote anti-racism in our programs:

- Highlighting and centering the contributions of Black/African American psychologists and counselors in our courses
- Recruiting and training students of color to become psychologists and counselors (e.g., through a \$2.2 million HRSA grant, which provides partial and full funding to a select group of M. S. Counseling students to work in traditionally marginalized, medically underserved communities on graduation)
- Infusing multicultural competence, anti-racism, and racial justice and advocacy into all courses, including specialized courses such as AFPY 270: African American Psychological Perspectives and COUN 502: Social & Cultural Foundations of Counseling
- Continuing and beginning scholarly research projects that center around mental health of Black Americans and other underrepresented groups (e.g., Dr. Graves and Dr. Smith looking at college readiness and higher education experiences among students of color; Dr. Meade's study of African-American female experiences of power and powerlessness in the workplace; and Dr. Shaine's research on mental health care experiences of trans military service members)
- Working to better support students of color by actively listening to their needs and pushing White students to examine their privilege, implicit biases, and fragility

- Recruiting and mentoring faculty of color
- Thoroughly examining our own pedagogies for manifestations of systemic racism, such as biased evaluation practices and exclusive or inequitable opportunities (e.g., research, internships)
- Ensuring our faculty are actively participating in conversations around race and racial justice (e.g., Dr. Graves is one of the co-advisers to the Diversity Coalition ; Dr. Smith is the faculty adviser to the Black Student Union; Dr. Shaine is on the Bias Incident Response Task Force; Dr. Kakkur is the faculty adviser for the Hood chapter of the counselors for Social Justice)
- Promoting and empowering student organizations such as Counselors for Social Justice, the Black Student Union, and Diversity Coalition