Diversity and Inclusion at the Warner School

The Role of Micro-aggressions

Micro-aggressions are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative slights and insults toward members of non-dominant groups.

The Warner School has shifted from working on ways to “help” people from nondominant groups (staff, students, and faculty) feel welcome, supported, comfortable, etc., to examining the ways that Warner as an institution and community is complicit in maintaining barriers to true inclusivity.

Along those lines and from recognizing that micro-aggressions are a problem across many postsecondary schools and campuses, the Warner Graduate School of Education’s Diversity and Inclusion Committee has offered a series of presentations over the past two academic years. These sessions were designed to foster dialogue and discussion and included three faculty forums and two whole-school meetings scheduled during local schools’ winter break so that our students could participate.

Our goal for these sessions was to examine when and where micro-aggressions occur—in the classroom, the office, the hallways, within our school, and on the campus. Questions, topics, and issues raised during our large and small group discussions included:

• How are we preparing ourselves and our students to talk about these issues?
• Where and how do these issues get addressed in our curriculum?
• What is the role of white privilege in the ways we work on diversity and inclusion?
• Have we created safe spaces that encourage this kind of self-examination?
• How are we addressing issues of ability status?
• Are we making concrete moves by providing close-captioned videos and ASL interpreters for classes, presentations, lunch hour meetings, and colloquia?
• How can staff, faculty, and administrators understand how their privilege plays itself out in their scholarship, teaching, and service?

These questions and topics pose significant challenges for faculty, staff, and students. The Warner School’s Diversity and Inclusion Committee continues to provide professional development and guidance to support self-examination. By critically examining ourselves, we are creating a climate that welcomes and encourages people from nondominant groups to thrive.

The Warner School recognizes its role as a member of the larger University of Rochester community in identifying policies and practices that prevent all of us from understanding the impact of micro-aggressions. To learn more about micro-aggressions and the work of the committee, contact Nancy Ares at nancy.ares@rochester.edu.