

Shared GROUNDS



Building Bridges

March 20, 2015

OUR COMMITMENT TO POSITIVE GROWTH ALWAYS TAKE A TEAM SO LET'S BROADEN OUR CONVERSATIONS TO CONNECT OUR CAMPUS AND COLLABORATE WITH OUR COMMUNITY.

CONVERSATION ACTIVITIES:

Building Bridges offered what is often a difficult conversation, of race and racism in the United States, using the recent University of Oklahoma Fraternity Racism Incident as an example. Participants were incredibly engaged and comments were sincere; the dialog was honest, and it was a special opportunity to watch how vulnerable many staff were in sharing their ideas and thoughts.

The University of Oklahoma Fraternity Racism Incident refers to the controversy surrounding a leaked video in which members of the University of Oklahoma's (OU) Sigma Alpha Epsilon (SAE) fraternity are shown singing a racist chant, which surfaced online in early March 2015. On March 8th, 2015, news media reported that the SAE fraternity at OU was being investigated after members of the fraternity were allegedly filmed singing a racist chant to the tune of the children's song "If You're Happy and You Know It" on a charter bus, which indicated that black students could not join the fraternity. There is a YouTube video showing footage of the incident. Within eight days, the video received more than 770,000 views and 1,300 comments. On March 9th, 2015, OU President, David Boren, sent a message out to the community.

- ✧ Consider your initial thoughts on this situation.
- ✧ What barriers would exist on our campus if this would occur here?
- ✧ If something like this were to happen at UAA, how could we help to collaborate, build a bridge, across campus to help the community heal and move forward?
- ✧ What would a bridge look like, on our campus, if it were not a referral?
- ✧ What did you learn/hear today that you could use to bridge the identified barriers?



KEY INSIGHTS AND REACTIONS:

- ✧ Issues of race and racism elicit high emotion responses, which emphasizes the importance of being prepared with well-thought plans and processes for an institutional response.
- ✧ Racism still exists in educational institutions and society, even in 2015.
- ✧ Institution has a responsibility to apologize to victims and discipline and educate offenders.
- ✧ OU's incident and choices of a few impacted so many and created long-standing effects on numerous reputations.
- ✧ OU President Boren's rapid response reaffirmed the campus' zero tolerance policy, but was seen by many as premature in considering the education of and implications on the offenders, victims, students of color, Greek affiliates, campus community, prospective students, and many other stakeholders.
- ✧ It is important for a campus to consider and recognize fraternity affiliation nationally and the impact of a response on Greek members and alumnae connected to it.
- ✧ This type of incident can happen anywhere. What can UAA do to prevent it from occurring here?

POSSIBILITIES FOR CO-CREATION:

- ✧ Development response plans—determine who communicates what, when, and to which stakeholders?
- ✧ Affirm Seawolf identity to instill sense of pride among and expectations of students and the campus community
- ✧ Define plan to determine sanctions while educating students on impact of their behavior and supporting them to make steps to reconcile and change behavior. What partnerships need to be fostered to sustain this plan?
- ✧ Better educate students on responsible use, implications, and repercussions that can result from social media presence and virtual identity
- ✧ Increase awareness and discussion around various forms of discrimination, both among students and faculty/staff