



Rhodes College  
—1848—

# CAMPUS CONTROVERSIES AS OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTROSPECTION AND TRANSFORMATION

## The Role of Academic Affairs



## **“Using Moments of Cultural Crisis as Opportunities for Assessment and Response”**

Noelle Chaddock and Michelle Mattson

Rhodes College, Memphis TN

- Structure
  - Dr. Chaddock: Introduction – (Re)capturing the American Dream?
  - Dr. Mattson: The Processes of Responding to Challenges in Campus Climate
  - Dr. Chaddock: The Humanness of Change



## (Re)Capturing the American Dream

- 2017-2018 have provided a national if not international textural landscape to problematize the framework and ideologies that support “the American Dream”
- Whose dream is it?
- Does this American Dream ideology serve higher education institutions and a diversity of constituencies, especially students?
- If we understand the students of the future to be different than those that have sustained our institutions, is recapturing an old idea going to move us forward?
- As we add layers (programmatic, administrative, branding, etc.) to our diversity and inclusion efforts, is it time to let go of this singular idea of the American Dream?

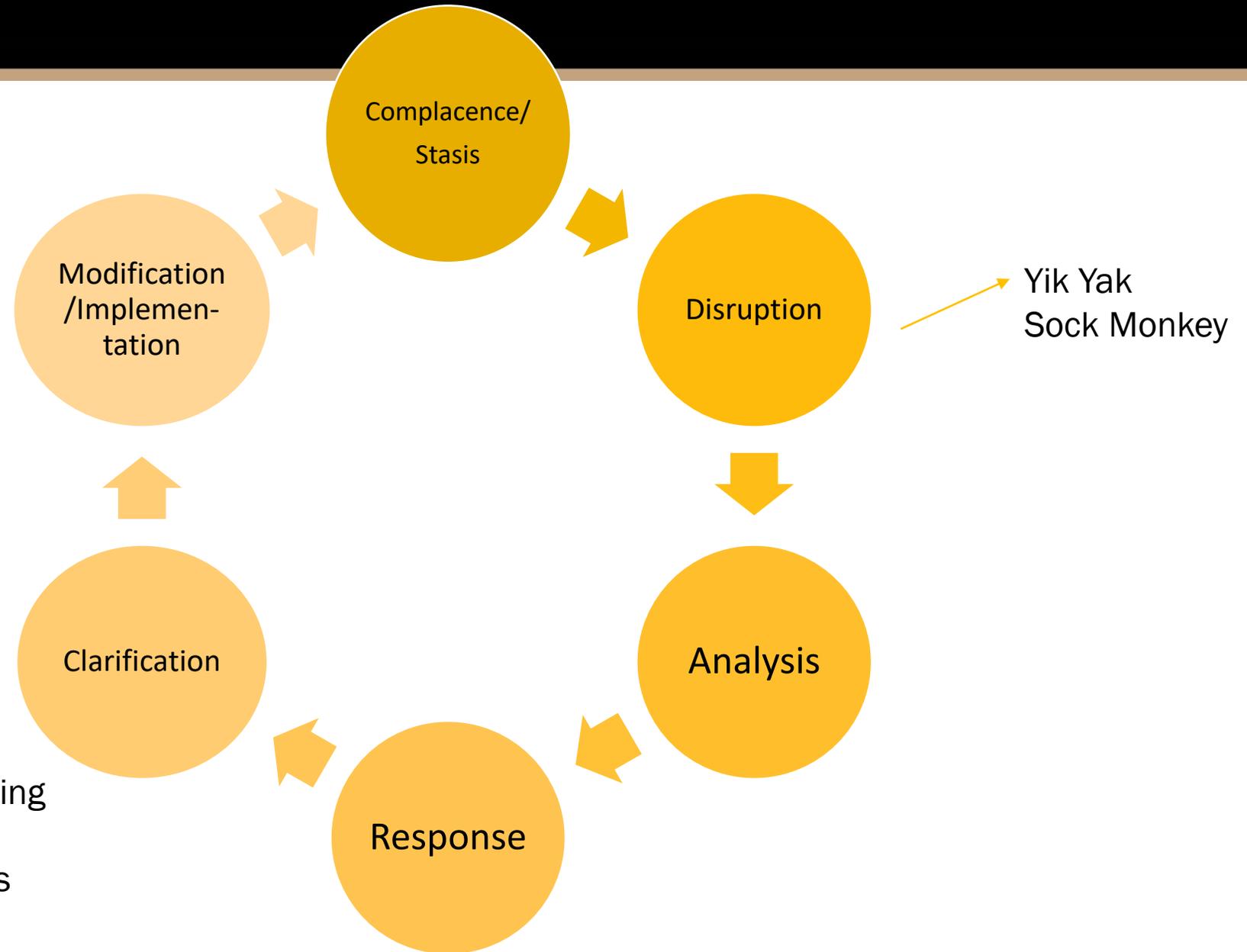


## The Role of Academic Affairs

- Intellectual and Academic antagonism
- Identifying issues of bias and inequity in the academic program
- Understanding the academic program as a fundamental litmus test for the overall institutional health and climate
- Making sure the institution is staying current in scholarship and professional development around issues that impact faculty and student experiences and success
- Filling the gap: the Chief Academic Officer as the second ranking officer in the institution should be leading the organization toward equity, health and optimal function especially in modeling scholarly and administrative resistance to “tradition” and other barriers to growth and equity



- String of challenging events 2014-2016 and responses:
  - Yik Yak: Racist, misogynist, and homophobic posts appeared on the anonymous social media platform Yik Yak (fall 2014)
  - Sock Monkey hung from a dorm window with a cord tied around its neck (April 2016)
  - Hiring an Associate Dean of Academic Affairs for Diversity and Inclusivity (May 2016)
  - Implementation of an on-line **Bias Education Response System** (Fall 2016)



Dialectical process: opening spaces to new perspectives/experiences and managing conflict



- Key points:
  - An increasingly diverse learning community naturally interrupts/disrupts the standard practices and habits of an institution.
  - In this sense, creating a diverse community (student, faculty, staff) is only the first step toward strengthening the learning community.
- The goal for Academic Affairs and other campus leaders =
  - 1) making visible and attending to the structural and interactional habits that have accrued and now seem like the most “logical/natural” way for the institution to be constituted (Sara Ahmed, *On Being Included. Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*)
  - 2) “interrupting patterns of failure” (Daryl Smith, *Diversity’s Promise for Higher Education*)



## Constituent Groups and Their Goals

- Students: creating a supportive learning community and a place for themselves in it
- Faculty: pursuing and disseminating knowledge, fostering critical thinking and the space for challenging dialogues
- Student Affairs: nurturing student learning and development through community and support services
- Senior Leadership: preserving the future of the institution through student recruitment, philanthropy, and community relations – while ALSO trying to set the tone for campus dialogue
- Academic Affairs: while all play a vital role in creating a welcoming, equitable, and inclusive learning environment, the Office of Academic Affairs is tasked with providing leadership through the curriculum and the faculty – at the core of the institution both in terms of size and mission



## Competing Demands?

- Students:
  - Of the faculty – create classroom spaces where all students feel respected and where no students from under-represented population groups feel tasked with educating the community on their lived experiences or on the biases present in the community around them
  - Of the administration – provide venues for training faculty/staff on issues related to diversity and equity AND provide systems and structures for students to share concerns and to know those concerns would be addressed
- Faculty:
  - No constraints on their ability to teach what and how they deem it appropriate
  - No further attempts to impose institutional surveillance of the faculty – particularly those who already feel they occupy precarious spaces (non-tenured faculty and those from traditionally excluded populations, including women)



## The task for Academic Affairs:

- Create the spaces for these different constituencies to express their concerns and to structure the dialogue in such a way as to establish processes for critical self-reflection and generative thinking
  - *Including:*
    - Creating a process for gathering information and thoughtful exploration
      - Who should be at the table?
      - How are participants chosen?
      - How is trust established?
    - Helping to build a common basis for generative thinking
      - Sharing the research
      - Offering comparisons
      - When useful, seeking compromise
    - Documenting process and outcomes
    - Moving forward from challenges involves re-establishing trust



## Filling the Gap: The humanness of change

- The institution and its administration must remember that equity is a human, and largely singular, experience
- As seen in this idea of the “American Dream” there is no homogenous possibility that moves the institution forward
- Supporting diversity administration especially around the institutional location of those positions
- Creating feedback loops for minority and junior voices when strong opposition to change arise especially when in response to decisions that create equitable and inclusive institutional access
- Acknowledging, addressing, and doing the work of healing where harm has occurred



## The Humans: Institutional Challenges

- Inclusion means including a multiplicity of identities and ideologies in ways that allows constituents to feel that “this is their college” – this includes community members who sit in opposition to the institutional position on diversity, equity and inclusion
- Support, resource and compensate the folks who are doing your DEI work formally and informally – no one should be doing free and/or additional labor including emotional labor
- Identifying, qualifying, quantifying and addressing the “soft intangibles” how people feel about the institution is how they experience the institution.
- Activate your faculty – the great usefulness of hard scientists to critical race and gender studies scholars



## Helpful literature

- AAC&U. *Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence. A Campus Guide for Self-Study and Planning*. 2015.
- Ahmed, Sara. *On Being Included. Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*. Duke, 2012.
- Frenk, Julio. “Why we need a ‘scholarship of belonging.’” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 5/15/2016.
- Glassner, Barry and Morton Schapiro, “Diversity on campus sparks protest? It’s a sign of progress.” *Los Angeles Times*, 8/25/2016.
- Roquemore, Kerry Ann. “Why Mentor Matches Fail.” *Inside Higher Education*. 2/3/2016. <https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2016/02/03/most-mentoring-today-based-outdated-model-essay>
- Smith, Daryl. *On Diversity’s Promise for Higher Education*. Johns Hopkins UP, 2009,2015.
- Teaching Tolerance, *Critical Practices for Anti-bias Education*. 2016: [https://www.tolerance.org/sites/default/files/2017-07/PDA%20Critical%20Practices\\_0%281%29\\_0.pdf](https://www.tolerance.org/sites/default/files/2017-07/PDA%20Critical%20Practices_0%281%29_0.pdf) .
- Yancy, George and Maria del Guadalupe Davidson (Eds). *Exploring Race in Predominantly White Classrooms: Scholars of Color Reflect (Critical Social Thought)*

# Lessons Learned at Lawrence (the Controversy)

- The national controversy
  - What should the practice of free speech look like in higher education?
- The controversy at Lawrence University
  - Film viewing, “Can We Take a Joke” produced by Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE)
- Situation leading up to the viewing and the aftermath
  - Students for Free Thought, letter in Lawrentian, alumni response

# Lessons Learned at Lawrence (Introspection)

- Campus community not as skilled at civil debate and dialogue as I assumed
- Need to refocus our discussion from free speech to creating optimal educational speech spaces, that are both challenging and emotionally safe, not an either/or but rather both/and
- Students from marginalized groups don't always understand their own agency and power within the "marketplace of ideas". We need to empower them to engage.
- Having easily accessible, transparent system of reporting bias is critical in times of controversy.

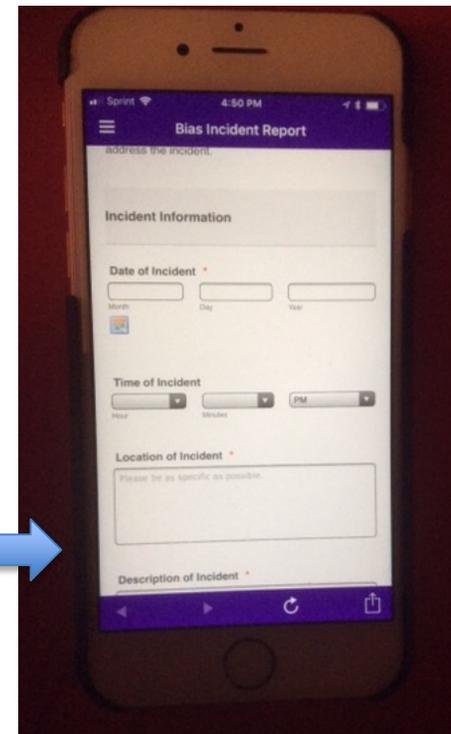
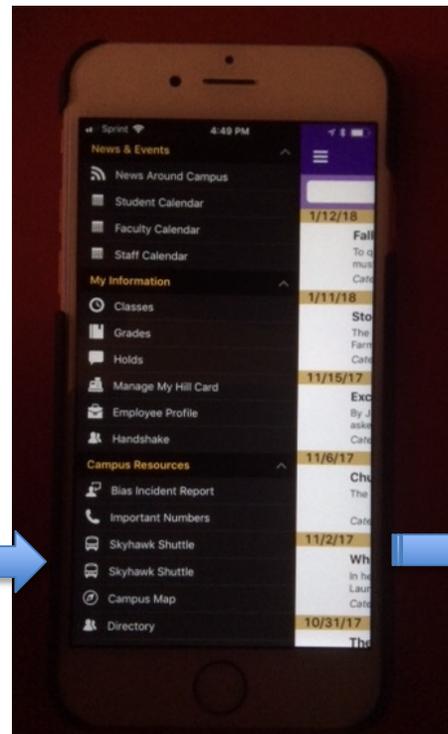
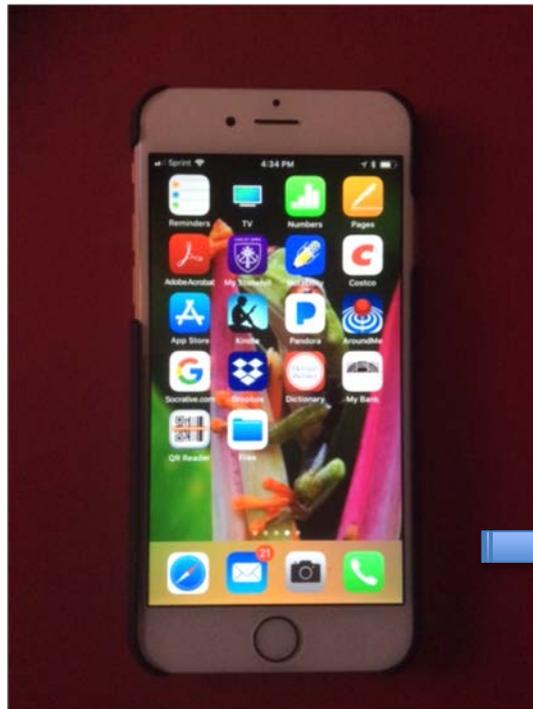
# Lessons Learned at Lawrence (Transformation)

- Providing several intentional opportunities for faculty, staff and students to learn skills for facilitating intergroup dialogue and practice dialogue across difference.
- Having conversations in new faculty orientation and individual meetings with departments about creating Democratic Speech Spaces (AAC&U) and managing hot moments.
- Held diversity conference focused on inclusive pedagogy in August.
- Ongoing discussions regarding diminishing and responding to microaggressions in the classroom.
- Planning workshop before the start of the fall term on handling difficult conversations in the classroom.



# “Mobile App to report bias incidents”

Maria A. Curtin, Ph.D.





- What is the controversy?
  - Idea that every student would be reporting a bias at anytime just because they feel uncomfortable
  - Faculty fears needed to be addressed especially for those teaching controversial or sensitive topics
  - Questions that had not been asked before...
    - Where do bias incident reports go
    - How are they handled
    - Who keeps a record of these
    - How does being reported affect the faculty member's record



- Resolution:
  - A triage system developed where bias incident reports automatically go to:
    - The Director of Intercultural Affairs
    - The Dean of Students
    - The Dean of the Faculty
  - Bias incident Prevention and Response Team (BIPRT)
- Moving forward:
  - Workshops for students, staff, and faculty to be active bystanders offered regularly.