

*Black, Brown, Red, and Yellow...
should simply be the color of skin
covering human hearts, minds, and spirits,
yet has such enormous significance in our country,
past to present.*

***Listening to
Students of Color***

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**Listening to
Students of Color...**

“There aren’t many students like me here. Some people are surprised to see me here. I haven’t experienced any prejudices yet. There is no diversity when it comes to the professors.”

—18 year-old Black Female who is new to college

“It’s difficult b/c a lot of people think we will drop out after the first semester or year of college. I noticed differences when it comes to opportunities.”

—Mexican American, 18 yrs, 1st year

“Not any different than any other demographic. Not once have I ever felt discriminated against while attending Sac State.”

—Female Filipino

“Being a student here at Sac State can be very fun and stressing at the same time. Since I’m Mexican, I am a minority and always looked down upon by my peers. But, I honestly like that, I don’t try to be a follower but rather lead my group of friends.”

—18-year old/Mexican/Male/First Generation/Athlete/with good grades

“It is at times frustrating. Many times professors assume because of my race I am stereotypically shy. I believe this makes it more awkward to deal with or get to know me. I understand this behavior may not be intentional however I feel there can be something done about this.”

—Asian

“I feel accepted for all of who I am, including my race.”

—Hispanic

“it’s a culture shock.... I usually am the only black male in my class. Not enough Black students go here”

—20 year old Black male

“I am happy to know that this school will not reject me because of my race. It invites me with arms wide open.”

—Latina, 19, overcoming depression

“I think that people sometimes look down upon me or think that I am not as intelligent because of the color of my skin.

I would like to share the experience of getting to know the black community here at Sacramento State and how it is such a small community but I feel that more African-American students should get involved.”

—18 yrs old. Jamaican. Female. New to College

“Culture clash, writing challenge, biased info of middle east.

(I like) debates with my teachers (and) learning new points of view.”

—Middle Eastern

“Pretty hard. I feel as if people who are white and rich can join frats and not people of color.”

—First year, Latino, first generation, full time

“I have noticed that there seems to be a larger population of other Asian American students here at CSUS. It doesn’t affect me though as far as racial discrimination goes.”

—Japanese/Chinese American

“I’m just a student who happens to be Hispanic. Perhaps there might be some subliminal prejudice that I have foreseen, and the opportunities are different for me than other people because of my citizen status.

Seems lonely & empty at times.”

—an 18 year old Hispanic freshman

“My experiences of being a black man has been hard. I am looked at as being uneducated & a person here for financial aid. I don’t even receive financial aid.”

—Black, Male, 23 years old.

“I think it is good. I feel like the more educated a person is, the less chances there are of being ‘racist.’”

—Latino, Catholic, 19, Non-US citizen

“There are not that many other Indian people.

Everybody loves me. (I like that) People remember me a lot easier. (I don’t like) Racist Indian people.”

—Indian

“Multicultural upbringing. Challenges are not feeling like I belong to any group & never meet anyone like me.

I love how multi-cultural CSUS can be. I can feel the diversity on campus & I know I’m a part of that.

I do get positive social responses from young people as I speak several languages.

Fraternitys don’t talk to me cause I’m not white.”

—American/Persian

“Unvaluable, unappreciated.... Other races are being put on a pedestal”

—Black

“As a female Mexican student at CSUS, I feel comfortable and confident when I am on campus. The U.S. might consider me a minority, but I don’t consider myself that. I have the same opportunities to succeed like everyone else here on campus.”

—a female Mexican

“Difficult at times dealing w/stereotypes & expectations but also easy. Sometimes expectations are high, sometimes they’re low.”

—3rd year Black & Filipino Female from Santa Clara

“Certainly a different culture than where I come from, but wouldn’t consider it a negative thing.

I’ve been able to participate in leadership, and fought to have a prayer room here.”

—Arab American/Muslim

“Being a minority discourages with people.

I notice there are a lot of students who are latino and white, with me being a minority theirs hardly any common ground.”

—No student specifics given, other than what is stated above

“(My experience is) Same as just like any other person of my race”

—African American

“I feel like I am a minority in Sacramento State. With my race, I feel like nobody gives me a chance to speak out for when I have to say something. Asians are known as the ‘silent’ ones.”

—Asian Pacific Islander

“To be a Hispanic/Latina attending sac state is a big privilege and at my age and years of college experience, I’ve learned to appreciate myself, my campus, and most importantly my education.

I’ve noticed that we are the minority on campus in comparison to Asians, and whites therefore I’ve been witness of discrimination and racism. Those two factors belittle my rights to be here.”

—Latino who is 21 years old and is a third year at Sac State

“I would love to share the...experience: Being a proud, educated, and equal black student at sac state. So many places can be so discriminatory but sac state does a great job of spreading equality to all groups.”

—No student specifics given other than what is stated above

“It is interesting to compare how I am viewed & treated in comparison to my counter parts. I also learn a lot from the diverse cultures around me.

I have noticed in my social work groups at school how I am 95% of the time the only Indian and the 5% there is another Indian we are complete opposites.”

—A 21 year old East Indian Male

“At times it could be challenging because you don’t know if someone is judging you on your race or not, but for the most part it is not bad.

Having so many resources to use at any time is very helpful and has helped me succeed at the university.”

—African American, 18 years young.

“It is pretty cool, I have friends of other race and ethnicity. I like it here.”

—I am an 18 year old Hmong girl who had lived in Sacramento, CA my whole life.

“At times I feel like I’m discriminated based on my ethnicity since I am a minority.... Personally, being in college is by far one of the hardest obstacles I’ve endured

I like my job and organization here at CSUS. I feel like they both have opened many doors to new possibilities which have made me more confident.”

—Mexican-American, female, 21

“Feel comfortable, this school is very diverse. Campus was easy to get around as a new student. I like that they have a prayer room for Muslims.”

—19 years old/Middle Eastern

“Being black really makes me feel like there are many odds against me to try to keep me down but I just wake up everyday knowing that I want to make difference in my life and my families life.

Something that I notice is that people really take stereotypes into their daily lives.

I like how csus has many different nationalities and backgrounds. It makes me want to know where people are from and how their stories are different from mine.”

—I am a native American and African American student. I am 19 years old and a challenge for me was playing rugby and trying to keep my grades above a 3.0 and I did it.

“The fact that I’m Mexican it makes me feel less smart than other races.

I honestly want to be more connected with the campus. I work and study most of the time, so there’s nothing else I can possibly do. I’d like to join clubs and be able to share lots of experiences.”

—age 18, Mexican

“I have had numerous challenges in my 4 years here. I have experienced a few discriminatory faculty members that have made my experience very unenjoyable.”

—a 22 year old Black female

“The way I am treated in class is the same as everyone else’s race. When I raise my hand I am called on and respected.

I like the atmosphere and the view of my classmates.”

—Hispanic/20 yrs old/Female

“It’s different because the school is really dominated by white people. I had to deal with Asian stereotypes and racial slurs.”

—Filipino/male/20

“I feel welcomed yet outcasted. Sac State makes sure to include everyone and have a safe environment yet most of my classes contain anywhere from 85 to 95% whites. I feel that maybe more diverse faculty could help as well as accepting students for what they’ve earned not just their name or race.

Sac State makes sure to include students in different organizations and events. I like the Sac State environment. Everything doesn’t feel as fast paced and it feels like a united community rather than people paying to receive education.”

—Hispanic, 18, female, schizophrenia/depression, first member in family to go to College

“First, being African American I already feel like everyone looks down on me as if I’m not articulate or am ‘dumb.’ I have one of the highest grades in my...class and am a 3rd year who takes 5 classes each semester and still maintains a 3.4 gpa.

I was put in a group of 5 women for my...class. 2 white, 1 mexican, 1 asian, 1 indian. I could tell they looked down on me. I received and still receive the highest test grades and got us all our interviews for our presentations.

(I like) GETTING INVOLVED ON CAMPUS (I am in CWC scholarship program.)”

—younger African American female w/a short attention span & hard of hearing

“I think it’s awesome to be this race and going to college. I love sharing my culture with other types of races. It makes me proud to be Filipino.

When I entered Sac State I didn’t know anything about my culture. I didn’t know the common stereotypes or anything. I decided to join Samahung Pilipino to meet new people. In my two years of joining that club, I’ve learned a lot about the culture. I even participated in traditional dances. That club made me a better person.”

—Filipino

“There is not as many African American students as the other races here. It is good because I get to be in a diverse culture environment, it would be nice to have more people like me.”

—African American

“Being a Hispanic student at CSUS is just like being any other type of student. Everyone is treated equal + that’s what counts.

Some people believe that being Hispanic in a university is more challenging than being a white student. It is not! There’s a reason why we’re here.”

—Hispanic

“It can be difficult to connect with people of my race.”

—African American female Age 19

“Sometimes when it comes to specific circumstances people might make me feel uncomfortable. The way I look is offensive to other people and they create stereotypes. Some people are disrespectful and do not help at all.

Professors sometimes pay more attention to other students just because of the way they look.

Majority of the students and professors are very friendly with people from all over the world. People from different countries.”

—22 years old, Mexican, from small town, learning English

“First generation college, Mexican (maybe), (and my major) are the factors that I think have had an effect on my experience and perspective.... (My) major might have had fundamental effect, but I think I mention it b/c its defined me as a person and is very time-consuming and difficult. The Mexican part has kept me aware of racism/sexism that is institutionalized and in the minds of my fellow (classmates in my major), especially.

There is strong sentiment against (equity programs) and race-focused scholarships. There are white students and some students of color (and some professors) that do not like the resources aimed at increasing the number of students of color. They see it as unfair since they sometimes come from similar financial backgrounds but do not get the same amount of help. This has fostered a quiet resentment among the...majors and has permeated (?) into recruitment for jobs. Its hindering/debilitating to progress.

There are some professors who are awesome and some administrators who are amazing.”

—Straight, Male, Hispanic, 1st gen. College

“Being a first year student here in CSUS is very challenging. Students here are white which is the majority which makes it very intimidating as well as being 18 or being a freshman.

CSUS showed me how to get involved and made me figure out who I am.”

—Filipino/Male/18

“I do not feel singled out because of my ethnicity. I feel comfortable walking around campus without having to worry about someone treating without disrespect. There is no one here (or it seems to be) that is racist in any way. Everyone is nice and comforting.

I like the resources CSUS gives to help us through college. If we ever have a problem, someone is always able to help”

—Black – 18 years old

“There’s nothing particular I like to share other than my race & cultural background. It is both a challenge, and something that you embrace because the goal is not to always fit in. You should be your own person and fit out.”

—Asian Indian

“Latina: Being part of a minority I’m expected to downplay my culture in order to fit in. People think that I’m ‘exotic’ or ‘interesting’ when they talk about me. The only thing they focus on is how I got to college, when it’s expected of me to become pregnant and drop out.”

—Latina / 19 / First generation college student

“It’s very limiting. Often times in classes I am looked to as the spokes person for a particular demographic with little support from teachers.

Just constantly feeling alone, or like a radical.

(I don’t like) The lack of knowledge about diversity. Cultural sensitivity often means cultural avoidance. In an academic institution is the best place to facilitate meaningful conversations about race, gender, sexual orientation. The opportunity is often lost.”

—black female, dyslexic, returning to college

“I feel equal to everyone else, have not been discriminated or treated unfairly.”

—Mexican, 18 years old, Straight, 1st Generation College Student

“For the most part, it’s a pretty good experience for an African-American kid. There was never a time where I felt social injustice during my tenure at Sac State so far.

The African-American journey at Sac State is an inspiring experience. So many people would love to be at a 4 yr University and get a degree.”

—African-American

“It is hard!! I don’t have any professors that have the same skin color as me. Many professors do not understand the life of a low income/first generation student.

Thankfully, equity programs have helped me (such as CAMPS & EOP). I am now graduating from Sacramento State...and it has only taken me 4½.

Faculty diversity would be much appreciated!! I will be pursuing a masters degree in higher education & leadership policy, so I can one day make a change.”

—Latino, 23, Graduating Senior

“I have not experienced any negative experience regarding my race or culture during my years here at Sac State.”

—Filipino, 26 yrs old.

“It isn’t hard. Sac State is a very diverse campus. I believe every ethnic group is well represented here. If anything, I have a problem with those who fall into some of the negative stereotypes/perceptions that I get boxed into because we are all the same (black males).

I like meeting new people, the staff, the events, the entire campus as a whole.”

—African-American male, 28, heterosexual. Married, father, Christian

“I often feel as if I am multi-lingual in college. Being that I am from a poor neighborhood & African American, I always feel as if I put on this ‘face’ to make sure I am in the right environment & fit in properly.

In most of my classes, I am one of 3 to 4 max student who share my race. It was very interesting & felt comforting & different when I took a class within a learning community & it was w/ a large # of those who share my race.

Sac State allows you to be yourself. College is very independent & pushes you to form your own out-look of the world.”

—4 yr/female/African American

“More challenging being perceived as many stereotypes (that) describe Latinas.”

—19-year-old-Latina

“To be honest, it is scary. It is scary to know your worth and intelligence, but know that you may not have a fair opportunity/chance of showing what you are truly capable of based on the certain stigma—or society’s low expectation of the behavior and attitude of black people.

I would like to share what an honor it was to have Dr. Cornell West come out and speak to us during such times where racial tensions are on fire.”

—an African American woman

“Everyone is super friendly. It does not matter what color you skin is or what language you grew up speaking. Everyone is willing to help if you ask politely.”

—Hispanic male 22 y.o.

“Challenging. In (some) classes they expect me to know everything.... In (one) class my professor stopped the entire class to hear my opinion on the pepsi commercial. In (other) classes with me and one other student being the only black/African Americans, the students turn to us for all the answers or on our opinions on anything regarding blacks.”

—black African American, 21 year old, 4th year

“I am comfortable here, feel safe and there hasn’t been a ‘racist encounter.’

(I like that) I’m still here and hopes to graduate are still alive.”

—Asian

“Criticize for the complexion of my skin color, us Hispanics tend to be demoralized.”

—Hispanic age 23

“Some people who are older seem to dislike diversity in their workplace, relative to nonverbals and subtle cues that I have felt. None explicit enough to want to challenge them tho.

I love the fact that technologic competency has little to no racial preference 😊

*I feel like ‘others’ predominately caucasian individuals have been given preferences in greek life organizations as well as in particular classroom settings with regards to naturally attributed credibility (*This is just a feeling and in no way easy to prove.)”*

—Mexican American 22

“I try to teach through example how to be kind to all, regardless of race or culture.”

—Native American

“Society says people of my demographic are confined to a low standard of performance, however everyday I work at cracking that glass ceiling. By the time I graduate, I will have shattered it.

The staff here are extremely friendly & are usually willing to bend over backwards to help students. As someone who was not born into greatness, I had to work for it. Seeking help from others is a good way to do it.

I like that I have a good support system at this school.”

—a female, 21 years old, Black/Hispanic

Students of Color

The Campaign for College Opportunity, in its 2019 report “Our California: Addressing Racial Equity,” notes the following:

In the next quarter-century, half of the nation’s population and over half of its workforce will be people of color, and in the next decade in this state, 65% of the population will be people of color.

Right now in California’s K-12 school system, about 70% are students of color, and those who go into higher education will likely start at a community college, based on studies of college enrollment.

When in college, the achievement gap remains—and in some cases has increased for many students of color—and “racial gaps persist even after controlling for income and other relevant circumstances.”

The American Council on Education, in its 2019 study “Race and Ethnicity in Higher Education,” analyzes over 200 factors in postsecondary educational outcomes, and concludes:

“There are myriad factors that inform educational access and success.... Yet it remains the case—as the data from this and other studies show—that race is a prevailing factor in many educational outcomes.”

[For further information, please see:

The Campaign for College Opportunity, [“Our California: Addressing Racial Equity” \(PDF\) \(2019\)](https://collegecampaign.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Racial-Equity-WP_FINAL.pdf)

https://collegecampaign.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Racial-Equity-WP_FINAL.pdf

and the [American Council on Education, “Race and Ethnicity in Higher Education: A Status Report” \(2019\) \(PDF\)](https://1xfsu31b52d33idlp13twtos-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Race-and-Ethnicity-in-Higher-Education.pdf)

<https://1xfsu31b52d33idlp13twtos-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Race-and-Ethnicity-in-Higher-Education.pdf>]

Students of color include Asian Americans, Black and African Americans, Indigenous Peoples, Latinos, Middle Eastern Americans, and Pacific Islanders. With these backgrounds come rich, vibrant cultures, unique perspectives and practices, and beautiful languages and communication norms. With these skin colors also come bias, inequity, and adversity.

Scientists tell us that we are all descended from the ancient peoples of Africa, with degrees of darkness or fairness of skin that we have an age-old adaptation of migration to different regions around the world with varying sunlight. We share 99% of the same genetics and have the same fundamental human needs for sustenance, safety and security, belongingness and love, and the desire to grow and flourish. The color of our skin should simply be that, like hair or eye color, yet instead has taken on such enormous significance in society, resulting in terrible disadvantage, hardship, and harm for millions of people over the centuries and up to this day.

Some might think that racial stigma and injustice all largely ended with the gains of Civil Rights, the return of sovereign lands, the unparalleled diversity of the American people in this modern age, and the election of the first person of color to the presidency—but the prevalence of implicit bias, microaggressions, and more says otherwise.

Implicit Bias

Implicit bias refers to the attitudes and associations that we hold regarding groups of people that operate below our awareness. Unlike explicit acts of prejudice and discrimination, implicit bias is unconscious, deep-seated within us and activated automatically without intent or control.

Mahzarin Babaji, a leading researcher in this area and co-author of the book, *Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People*, has called implicit bias the “thumbprint” of culture on our minds, meaning that society, media, family, and peers instill within us stereotypes and beliefs of groups. We learn this early, as young as six years old or sooner. We are also hard-wired to favor our in-groups, those people like us in terms of such things as race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, ability, and more.

The study of implicit bias is fairly new, and the findings only now gaining greater awareness, transforming how we may see ourselves and our society in relation to race.

Implicit bias is in each of us.

We know this to be scientific fact. Research summarized in *State of the Science: Implicit Bias Review* shows:

Even when we completely disagree with a stereotype of a group, we can still hold unconscious biases in relation to that stereotype.

Even when we sincerely believe we are and strive to be “color-blind,” our implicit bias actually *increases* (due to a theorized “rebound” effect that occurs when we attempt to suppress any thought of race or stereotypes and so become even more aware, or hyper-conscious).

Even when assessed for implicit biases against one’s own race, people can still hold negative assumptions, meaning that people can hold unconscious bias against their own cultural group.

Even judges, professionally committed to acting impartially and treating all equally under the law, have implicit biases.

And even the experts in this field of study, researchers and scholars, will tell you that they, too, hold implicit biases.

If you still think you don’t hold implicit biases, try some of the quick and easy online tests offered by the Harvard researchers to test on implicit bias regarding race, ethnicity, skin color, and more at [Harvard’s Project Implicit](https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit) <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit>.

Implicit bias is pervasive.

There have been hundreds of scientific studies on implicit bias utilizing a variety of methods, the most popular of which are the Implicit Association Tests (IATs). One version of the IAT times how long it takes someone looking at a computer screen to associate black and white faces with positive words (such as happiness, joy, and spectacular) versus negative words (such as terrible, angry, and failure). The premise is that the face receiving the fastest positive associations would show a positive implicit bias (because it is easier and therefore faster for the association to be made) and negative implicit bias for the other face (because the associations don’t come as quickly if deemed counter-stereotypical).

The methodology may seem unusual, but the time differences have been shown to be statistically significant, the methodology valid and reliable, and the findings serious: “Extensive research has uncovered a pro-White/anti-Black bias in most Americans, regardless of their own racial group.” And while the bulk of this type of research to date has focused on these two racial groups, studies show implicit biases against other people of color, as well, including Latinos, Indigenous Peoples, Asian Americans, and Middle-Eastern Americans.

Implicit bias has significant consequences.

Such subconscious favoritism for one race and bias toward another can adversely shape perceptions, feelings, thoughts, communication, decisions, actions, interactions, and experiences with others in daily life.

Researchers study how implicit bias is prevalent in a variety of situations, and with significant consequences:

In education—

Implicit bias can result in greater perceptions of disruptiveness in some students with more frequent and stronger disciplinary action taken, less expectation for academic success and, thus, less assistance and encouragement from teachers and staff—and in college less likelihood of being chosen for mentoring, internships, or research projects with faculty, as well.

In the working world—

Implicit bias can prevent people from getting an interview, and being selected for the position or promoted to a higher one once on the job, and lower performance reviews.

In healthcare—

Implicit bias can decrease the likelihood of some people receiving the best medical treatment or medication.

In housing and consumerism—

Implicit bias means being shown less options when looking to rent/buy housing, offered less financial incentives, and having denied more often loan applications or insurance claims. Implicit bias also means some pay more for certain products and services, too, in consumerism.

In law enforcement and the justice system—

Implicit bias increases the likelihood of being found guilty by a jury and receiving higher sentencing, and being pulled over and detained by law enforcement, or even shot.

In this last regard, another study on implicit bias is instructive: Research participants are told to shoot any armed person in a videogame and to not shoot any unarmed person who was holding an object, such as a wallet, cellphone, camera, or can of soda; the people in the video game, armed and unarmed, were white and black. The premise here is that there will be an assumption of black criminality, in keeping with cultural stereotype. The researchers found that black armed individuals in the game were shot more than white ones, as were black unarmed individuals over white ones. College students were used in this study, but later police officers were chosen instead as the research participants, because the videogame offered a simulation of law enforcement work in high pressure situations where decisions are made in a split second. The results were the same.

In all of these ways, implicit bias has grave consequences in the key realms of societal life: housing, healthcare, education, work, consumerism, law and order, and more. It should also be noted that just because implicit bias is not conscious on the part of the perpetrator doesn't mean that the person on the receiving end is unaware. The physiological and psychological effects of bias and discrimination experienced have been well-documented, including physical aches and pains, higher heart rate and blood pressure, nausea and ulcers, disturbances to eating and sleeping, and feelings of anxiety, depression, low self-worth, hopelessness, and helplessness.

With awareness of implicit bias may come new understandings of self and society. We may think we live in a post-racial era now where all people are treated equally regardless of color, but implicit bias research has proven otherwise. We may think we live in a society where hard work and good character are always rewarded with success and achievement, but implicit bias study helps to explain this “myth of meritocracy.” And we may think we, ourselves, are completely without stereotypes or bias, but science says no—human beings hold inherent assumptions and attitudes toward others below the level of our awareness that operate nonetheless in our daily interactions and actions.

Implicit biases can be unlearned.

With continued time and practice, implicit bias can be unlearned and gradually replaced with more positive associations, however. This is called “debiasing.”

General guidelines include:

Re-train your brain—

Decrease your exposure to racial stereotypes (in movies and television programming, for example) and increase your exposure to counter stereotypic images (such as individuals in positive contexts and valued roles).

Expand your connections—

Becoming acquainted and forming relationships means we get to know people as people and see past stereotypes. “Intergroup contact” has substantial potential to dispel stereotypes, lower prejudice, and increase understanding about each other's group.

Have the right mindset—

Having a multicultural perspective, taking the time to actively think, appreciate, and talk about the value of diversity, can prime your unconscious mind to follow your conscious thoughts and words.

Guard against first impressions—

When meeting or making decisions regarding others, don't “go with your gut.” Wait, re-think, ask yourself why you see or feel as you do.

Don't try to be color blind—

Research shows that trying to ignore racial differences and repress stereotypes can actually make these loom larger in your mind, rather than reducing them, as discussed earlier. Instead, openly acknowledging biases and then telling yourself why they are incorrect or unjust is the better way to counteract them.

Open your eyes—

See the unique differences of the individual and the cultural background of that person. Actively seeing and being sensitive to cultural difference is more effective than trying to ignore difference and not see color.

Engage in perspective-taking—

Actively seek out, understand, and empathize with multiple points of view and contexts for personhood and life circumstances.

Learn more—

Information abounds on the topic, and implicit bias training is increasing in law enforcement, government, the justice system, healthcare, business, and education.

Guidelines for decision making situations (disciplinary, employment, and the like):

Strive for optimal conditions—

Some decision making situations make implicit bias worse. Time urgency, pressure, stress, distraction, controversy, and scope or complexity of information are all known to increase the likelihood of implicit bias. Try to prevent or minimize such circumstances or, when not possible, remember this greater potential for implicit bias in decision making in order to lower the likelihood.

Be self-aware—

Think ahead and go into the situation at hand knowing what your biases are in order to guard against them.

Make “blind” decisions—

Remove any indicators of race when making decisions about a person, such as names or pictures shown.

Establish a set of criteria for decision making—

Stick to it.

Be metacognitive—

Think about your thinking and articulate the reasoning process for decisions made, if only to yourself, to prevent going with your gut or intuition.

Ask “what if...?”—

Check decisions by asking yourself how you would evaluate the person in question if they belonged to a different social group (e.g., Caucasian or other race different than your own).

The prior suggestions are helpful, but temporary, the experts caution; enduring change requires strong and persistent work.

It is work we need to do to live up to the fullest ideals upon which this nation is founded. While there are laws in place to protect against the explicit acts of discrimination and racism, there are no such protections for the implicit biases we all hold.

(Based primarily on [State of the Science: Implicit Bias Review](http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/researchandstrategicinitiatives/implicit-bias-review/), by the Kirwan Institute of Ohio State University

<http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/researchandstrategicinitiatives/implicit-bias-review/>
The 2014 edition provides more of a primer on what implicit bias is and the research done to that point, while the 2015, 2016, and 2017 editions discuss recent studies and applications)

Microaggressions

What They Are

Microaggressions are things said or done in daily interaction that demean or diminish a person on the basis of demographic factors. While a number of groups face microaggressions in terms of religion, ability, sexual orientation, gender expression, age, and more, some of the leading work on the topic was done in terms of race. Psychologist Derald Wing Sue, author of the book, *Racial Microaggressions in Everyday Life*, offers this definition: “Racial microaggressions are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative slights or insults toward people of color.” Intentional microaggressions range from racial slurs and racist jokes; to pictures, posters, and other imagery demeaning to a race; to serving a person of color last or less than others or treating people dismissively or derogatorily due to their race.

Microaggressions, however, are very often unintentional. A person may say or do something without realizing the potential underlying message sent, making each of us likely guilty at least once in our lives, as we all learn in an increasingly diverse nation. Common examples include:

Telling an Asian American “*You speak English so well*”

—can carry the assumption that all people of Asian descent are recent immigrants to the country and learning the language, when many have been in the country for generations and may not know any other language than English. For those who are immigrants, compliments on language proficiency may be seen by some as “othering,” being relegated to a group other than, even less than, the societal group held as the norm.

Asking a Latino “*What are you?*”

—using the word “what” may be seen as objectifying and the question itself “othering,” especially if the person asking is white (the inquiry may be seen as implying that the person being asked has ethnicity but the questioner does not, perpetuating the white as normative standard when Caucasian is itself a race).

Telling a Pacific Islander “*You don’t look like an Islander or Hawaiian*”

—may make the person feel that their cultural identity is being called into question and found deficient, as well as perpetuate stereotypes.

Asking an African American “*How did you get that... (job, promotion, award, internship, etc.)?*”

—may carry the implication that the person got that due to affirmative action, quotas, or tokenism, rather than from individual merit, talent, hard work, or expertise.

Telling Native Americans that “*Racial injustices are a thing of the past*”

—may be seen as dismissive of the discrimination and prejudice ongoing in our country and centuries of violence on indigenous peoples and the monumental effects thereof documented to this day.

Asking a Middle Eastern American “*Where are you from?*”

—can carry the assumption that all must be foreigners, negating any American heritage or citizenship, making someone feel like a stranger in their own country, not belonging.

Saying to a person of color “*I don’t see color*”

—may imply “you’re as good as white,” or cause that person to feel as if you have stripped them of culture, a significant social identity for all human beings, or may be seen as ignorance or invalidation of the experiences of a person of color.

Not at all Small in Scope or Consequence

While the examples given of unintentional microaggressions or the prefix of the term, “micro,” may cause one to question the harm of something so seemingly small, it is the very innocuous nature of many such microaggressions that can make them more insidious.

You may feel the sting of assumption or stereotype when on the receiving end, but find it hard to understand exactly why you feel offended or demeaned in the face of such common types of statements and questions. Tellingly, more blatant forms of racism are often better handled than microaggressions, there is research to show, because there is no uncertainty or ambiguity.

The ostensibly minor nature of microaggressions also makes it more difficult to address the situation, especially when it is a friend, classmate, work colleague, boss, or teacher, whom you know meant no harm, and you may worry that the other will become defensive or think you’re blowing things out of proportion if you speak up. Not addressing the situation, however, can be just as hard, and sometimes more so, because remaining silent in the face of affronts to you and your race or culture can leave a bad taste in your mouth and lasting scars.

The very prevalence and power of microaggressions, too, belies the name. Intentional and unintentional microaggressions are pervasive in the lives of people of color living in this country. The analogy sometimes given is of water dripping on stone, wearing it down hour by hour, day by day, year by year. Microaggressions cause significant hurt, anger, frustration, distress, or sense of injustice, and singly or in accumulation adversely impact mental and physical well-being, quality of social experience, and performance in academia and the working world.

For all of these reasons, some take exception to the term “microaggression” for obscuring the enormity of their effect on an individual and on our society, as well, in perpetuating bias and inequity, hindering interactions and relationships, and doing harm to places and spaces.

How to Handle Them

Microaggressions occur in all spheres of life, including higher education, because we are all still learning. As we go about our campus, we may either commit microaggressions ourselves, or be on the receiving end or bear witness to microaggressions said to others.

When we commit microaggressions, try to address our mistakes constructively:

Apologize once you realize or another takes note, and take steps to repair any damage to the climate in that space and the person(s) affected.

When appropriate, take the opportunity to maximize the learning opportunity of the situation by helping all involved to understand why what was said or done could be taken offensively and to set an example for how to address such situations in the future.

Students learn so much from all we do, and perhaps never more so than when we err and then address our mistakes honestly.

We can also be proactive and learn more about the many different types of microaggressions frequently encountered by people of color in order to educate ourselves before the student has to “educate the educator.”

When we encounter microaggressions in class or out on campus, we can also address the situation beneficially.

Depending on the situation, tactics may include:

Explaining why a comment may be hurtful to a person or group (“What you said may be interpreted as....”).

Telling the person that you feel uncomfortable with their statements (“I feel troubled/saddened/offended when you say/do....”).

Asking the person for elaboration to help unpack the assumptions underlying the microaggression (“What leads you to say/ask/think/believe that?”).

Offering a hypothetical to create perspective-taking (“Would you feel the same way if the positions were reversed, or it was someone you love in that situation?”).

Seeing if anyone else would like to weigh in on the matter (“Let’s open this up to others...would anyone like to offer their thoughts?”).

These strategies, of course, will work best with sincerity of intent to constructively address the microaggression. Anything less could create defensiveness, when true learning is the goal.

It should also be noted that microaggressions left unaddressed can cause just as much harm as the microaggression itself, research shows. This makes going back to get it right important (“I’d like to go back and talk about...,” in relation to something said or done a minute, day, or week ago). Or, if ill-advised in that setting or group, then going back to the person on the receiving end to acknowledge the microaggression in private may be helpful (“I heard what was said, and I wanted to check to see how you are/let you know that I don’t feel that comment was appropriate/constructive”). Addressing it later is better than not addressing it at all.

When others are silent in reaction to a microaggression witnessed, this may be seen as tacit endorsement or feel like a high wall of blank ignorance.

This also leaves the person on the receiving end to bear the burden of speaking out against the microaggression, and this when they may feel shock, distress, anger, a sense of injustice, the need to shut down in order to protect themselves, or the futility and exhaustion of yet another microaggression against their personhood and cultural identity.

This makes it vital that more people speak out more often, in the spirit of allyship and education, to root out microaggressions from common discourse. In the words of one of the principal scholars in this field: “The first step in eliminating microaggressions is to make the ‘invisible’ visible.”

[For further information, please see [“Racial Microaggressions in Everyday Life”](https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/microaggressions-in-everyday-life/201010/racial-microaggressions-in-everyday-life)
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/microaggressions-in-everyday-life/201010/racial-microaggressions-in-everyday-life>
 by Derald Wing Sue.

Further examples of, and strategies to address constructively instances of, microaggressions may also be found in
[“Tool: Interrupting Microaggressions” \(PDF\)](http://academicaffairs.ucsc.edu/events/documents/Microaggressions_InterruptHO_2014_11_182v5.pdf)

http://academicaffairs.ucsc.edu/events/documents/Microaggressions_InterruptHO_2014_11_182v5.pdf
 provided by the University of California, Santa Cruz]

What We Can Do

Students of color face great challenges in their studies and their lives, making it essential that we:

Make This World A Better Place for Them

We live in a world where wearing a hijab or a hooded sweatshirt can result in hate, harassment, or harm. This is true even at an institution of higher education, and even on our campus. Our university President, Robert Nelsen, has shared instances of hate occurring in our student population, including statements made to return to one's country, accusations of one's ethnic group all being terrorists, and slurs against one's race, including the "N" word.

How do we make the world a better place for all people? The question hangs over the American people these days.

The proposed solutions are many, but one answer is through *talk*. This is a simple recommendation, but an important one. It is based on belief in the power of communication, and the understanding that the socially constructed nature of race makes communication the foremost vehicle of change. And talk is something that we can all do—and should do.

If you look through the literature or training opportunities on race relations, a quick look will show the reoccurrence of the words "talk," "discussion," "dialogue," and "conversation," all with increasing frequency these days. This was true at the National Conference of Race and Ethnicity in Higher Education held a few years back in California, for example, where the importance of communication was noted in the dozens of presentations held each day, every day for a week, including key note speeches:

"The solution is talking, getting to know each other.... Relationships are key. This is something each one of us can do to make the world better."

—Reza Aslan, activist/author of *The Origins, Evolution, and Future of Islam*

"We all need healing.... Our words carry medicine."

—Matika Wilbur, documentarian of Indian Country, *Project 562*

How to Talk about Race without Starting a Riot is a presentation given nationally, as well as at that conference, showcasing a documentary about how a black journalist and filmmaker, named David Wilson, traces his family tree back to the plantation of a white direct descendent of the slave holder of his ancestors, whose name is also David Wilson. The two meet, tour the plantation home and abandoned slave quarters, and have a direct, honest discussion about slavery and race. A black man reaching out to a white one about terribly consequential matters of oppression and privilege.... Both putting themselves in a position and going to a place very few would go.... The dialogue is at times awkward, stilted, even surreal, but also powerful, meaningful, and needed. In discussing his work, the filmmaker has stated,

"We have to have a conversation about race. Race is everywhere, yet the gorilla in the room.... Who best to have or lead this discussion than an institute of higher learning?"

Straight talk about race can be difficult, thorny, even feel like a mine-field in some instances. It can leave people feeling guilty, confused, ashamed, saddened, hurting, angry, or exhausted. *But it is the way we open our eyes and hearts more fully to groups other than our own, and learn about the circumstances unique to each.*

Have that Dialogue

Not all classes or campus spaces allow for such talk, of course, but the notion here is that we need more of this in formal classroom and campus organizational settings, or informal instances in hallways and walkways, in short learning moments of talk, or longer, sustained discussion.

Meaningful dialogue about diversity is most likely to occur when: A supportive climate is established, openness is encouraged, respect for others is emphasized, no one person is singled out to speak as a representative of a certain type of group, and everyone understands that feeling a little uncomfortable during such discussions is sometimes a necessary part of the process of learning when it comes to the topic of race. It is also important to let everyone know: These are special discussions, requiring courage and honesty in sharing thoughts and experiences, as well as in asking questions and admitting what you don't know or understand. Truly listening is also essential, with open minds and hearts, and remembering that experiences disclosed are interpreted in different ways by different people, and helping someone to feel understood is impactful. Missteps will likely occur as we learn about and discuss cultures other than our own, and we have a responsibility to act at such times with grace and growth.

Some students might not want to say a word in such discussions, for fear of being seen as ignorant, prejudiced, or offensive. But silence may feel disconcerting or disconfirming to those who are sharing their thoughts and experiences. Silence may also be interpreted as tacit endorsement of the status quo in society or disagreement with what is being said, when, if this is the case, then open differences of opinion is typically much more beneficial, when constructively discussed. Some, too, might want to simply say they are "colorblind" and leave it at that, that they don't see and therefore don't discriminate against people in terms of skin color. But not seeing race means not seeing the racial realities of people of color or the myriad inequities and injustices permeating our society and, therefore, shutting down the discussion, potential learning, and societal reform. And some people may feel that "talking won't solve the problems." But dialogue and discussion help us to explore more fully complex issues, and voicing our perspectives and experiences, as well as learning from others, is powerful.

There are a number of ways to approach this more difficult topic of race, but one good way is through discussion of implicit bias, because it is unconscious, making no one a racist, and because it is something all human beings do, making the learning eye-opening for all. Microaggressions, too, typically makes a good point of entry into talk about race.

During such discussions, there are different roles that you may need to play: Discussion Moderator, to balance participation and draw people out; Facilitator, to encourage thought and learning; Mediator, should differences of opinion arise; and sometimes Counselor, to support any student who may be struggling at the time or after. In holding such discussions, not only will you be showing through example the communication skills needed, you will also be teaching the value of talk about tough and important issues of race.

The Hornet Honor Code would also be a nice framework for discussions, which says, in part: "We commit ourselves to actively promoting honesty, integrity, respect, and care for every person, ensuring a welcoming campus environment, and striving to help every member of our Hornet Family feel a strong sense of belonging. As Hornets, we will: (1) Promote an inclusive campus and community. (2) Listen and respect each other's thoughts, interests, and views. (3) Value diversity and learn from one another. (4) Engage daily with mutual trust, care, and integrity. (5) Support a culture of honor and adhere to campus policies for honesty, ethics, and conduct. (6) Be proud to be Sac State Hornets."

Let Them Know How Much We Need Them

Diversity on campus sets our students up for success, strengthens the institution, and enhances our understanding of society. Experience as educators tells us that cultural differences enrich and enliven academic discourse, and help students to develop the cultural competency skills necessary to successfully working with and serving different people and groups in our nation and global economy. Research shows that diverse groups and organizations show greater critical thinking and creativity, and more effective problem solving and decision making, with good communication between the different members. And theoretical work holds that diverse perspectives are essential to full and accurate knowledge of the world in which we live.

The engines of societal knowledge, however, have been fueled at far less than full capacity. Traditionally, higher education is Eurocentric, with the great bulk of research and theory so, the many disciplines for centuries built and taught from the perspective and power interests of European Caucasians. That means there are so many histories to expand and rewrite, theories to formulate, concepts to name and explicate, ways of knowing and doing to utilize, and research to conduct that asks better questions and uses better methodology in keeping with race and culture. Greater understanding of diversity helps all scholars—in front teaching or sitting at a desk in class—to more ably achieve these goals and create better knowledge and practices for all. We see environmental studies looking to Native Americans for land sustainability practices and Pacific Islander cultures for ocean conservancy, for example, and there is so much more to learn and use in other fields. Academia itself notes the perspectives of people of color largely absent but needed in scholarly work, as in, for example, standpoint theory and critical race theory:

What we know about the world is shaped by our standpoint in it, as determined by race, gender, class, and more. Different vantage points arising from membership in different demographic groups lead to different types of knowledge. This means we can all learn from one another—and some of us have more to learn than others. Those in groups with less privilege and power learn to operate within the ways and structures of the dominant group, as well as that of their own group(s). Those in the dominant group(s), however, will only know those ideologies and practices of their own group's(s') making, and, therefore, have a more limited, even distorted knowledge of their society. This makes hearing the perspectives of people of all different standpoints essential to more full and accurate understanding of each other and our world.

And it is critical that we learn diverse perspectives in order to challenge the bias that is interwoven throughout our everyday interactions and embedded in the societal institutions created by those dominant ideologies, including government, law enforcement, the justice system, and higher education. We see the racism of explicit atrocious acts that occur, but may not all recognize the unconscious bias and unintentional microaggressions that surround us, as discussed earlier in this document. Nor may we all see the myriad inequities of societal practices and structures (in education, for example, the standardized testing that disadvantages minority groups and de facto segregation of housing that leads to poorer quality schooling for those communities). This makes essential the voice of those long unheard, silenced. Critical race theory, which originated in legal studies and is now interdisciplinary, invites and honors the perspectives of people of color, in recognition that sharing lived experience helps us to see more clearly each other and the prejudice and injustice still prevalent in our country, in order to fight most effectively for societal reform. The stories of people of color counter stereotypes held of different cultural groups, identify structures and contest ideologies that perpetuate disadvantage,

and powerfully illuminate the core of humanity connecting us all. For the teller, stories are a form of resistance, healing, and empowerment, of re-writing what society says about one's cultural group and, by extension, oneself. And for all, these perspectives are the means to a better, stronger, more just society.

Help Them to Lead the Way

Students of color frequently find college to be the time of greatest racial awakening, recognition of the full nature and consequence of one's race and need to do something, to make things better. For other students, it is when first hit with the eye-opening notion of white privilege and the real obligations that come with it to take a stand and strive to help those marginalized in society.

And they will answer the call. They are the future, the vanguard, learning and leading the way to a more racially just society. They are well-positioned to do so: In the capital city of the most diverse state. At one of the most diverse universities west of the Mississippi, whose stated values include "diversity and inclusion," and whose mission is to "transform lives by preparing students for leadership, service, and success."

Some students realize the imperative right now, activists who fight through words and actions, through music, art, and poetry, in forums, workshops, and campaigns. The work is usually fulfilling, transformative, and empowering, a labor of love, and yet also a great sacrifice of time, energy, and self. Other students may not realize they could be called in the future—this week, this year, this decade, this lifetime—to step up and educate the ignorant, right the wrongs, fight for someone or something for racial betterment.

We can help all students, no matter what the color skin or when they answer the call, to see the vital importance of social justice and nurture within them the communication and leadership skills needed to fight for race relations reform.

We do this by teaching by example when we speak out clearly and constructively against any instance of bias or stereotyping that occurs inside and outside of the classroom or office, or when we participate in the fight for equity and social justice for all on campus or in the community. Students watch and listen to all that we say and do, and sometimes we forget just how well-positioned we are to model the spirit and skills of advocacy.

We do this by creating greater awareness of inequities and social reform work through the lessons we teach, reading we give, assignments we create, and events we help plan or encourage students to attend.

We do this by noting and cultivating the passion, skills, and drive within students for social justice, through simple statements of recognition and praise. They may not realize fully or at all the leadership they demonstrate, the commitment they show, or the talents they bring to the work toward greater equity. Helping students to see these qualities within themselves gives them greater confidence in who they are and what they are doing, so important in the often uncertain, daunting nature of activist work.

And we do this by supporting student activists. We can participate in their efforts by showing up to events, working alongside them in organizations, or promoting or providing resources for their causes. We can lend an ear to a student who needs to talk through the experience, who needs to work through the emotions, the stress or exhaustion that can take a toll on activist students of color. And we can show our gratitude to students doing the hard work of social justice.

Campus Resources

For further learning and/or collaborative opportunities for students, faculty, and staff regarding race, diversity, and social justice:

Multi-Cultural Center (MCC)—

Promotes cultural understanding, inclusivity, and social justice through campus events, programs, and volunteer and personal development opportunities. Students, staff, and faculty can get involved by: reaching out to the Center for collaboration or assistance on the cultural events, programs, and projects you are creating; attending cultural events and programs (as an individual or with your club, class, or organization); recommending workshops and community building events; volunteering in different ways; or just stopping by to learn more about important issues of diversity and social justice. Also offers a welcoming place for students to come in, hang-out, and learn more about themselves and others.

Location: Library 1010

Phone: (916) 278-6101

[MCC Website](https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/centers-programs/diversity-inclusion/multicultural-center.html) <https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/centers-programs/diversity-inclusion/multicultural-center.html>

Community Engagement Center (CEC)—

Offers students opportunities to develop the skills necessary to become engaged citizens in their communities in a number of ways, including: Sac State Volunteers (one- or multiple-day service projects held throughout the year locally) and Alternative Break (shorter-term service projects in the community during college breaks), and Service-Learning opportunities and courses (where students can get hands-on learning of their subject of study through planned service projects with organizations throughout the Sacramento region that provide services to underserved and underrepresented populations). The CEC offers instructors information on the many benefits of integrating service learning into their courses for faculty, students, and the community, and the services and resources available to get started on doing so.

Location: University Library 4028

Phone: (916) 278-4610

[Website for CEC](https://www.csus.edu/experience/anchor-university/community-engagement-center/) <https://www.csus.edu/experience/anchor-university/community-engagement-center/>

Sacramento State Campus Calendar of Events—

Provides listings of upcoming events, including presentations and talks on race, cultural celebrations, and more.

[Campus Calendar Website](http://calendar.csus.edu/) <http://calendar.csus.edu/>

One World Initiative (OWL)—

Offers events and activities to help understand just how interconnected human beings are across the planet and how to take action to make the world a better place for all, each year centered on a chosen theme. Students, faculty, and staff may participate in the One World Initiative each year in different ways, such as attending events or planning events.

Location: Sacramento Hall 234

Phone: (916) 278-5344

[OWL Website](https://www.csus.edu/undergraduate-studies/one-world-initiative/) <https://www.csus.edu/undergraduate-studies/one-world-initiative/>

Dreamer Resource Center (DRC)—

Offers students, faculty, and staff a variety of information and services to support the academic, personal, and professional goals of undocumented students and students with mixed-status families. Students, staff, and faculty may attend the many different Dreamer Resource Center events and informational sessions posted on the Center's calendar. Faculty, staff, and others may also be interested in the Dreamer Ally Training to learn more how to support undocumented students in their college journey.

Location: River Front Center 1022

Phone: (916) 278-7241

[DRC Website](https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/centers-programs/dreamer-resource-center/) <https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/centers-programs/dreamer-resource-center/>

Martin Luther King, Jr. Scholars Center—

Offers events for the campus community to learn and celebrate culture, as well as a home base of support for students.

Location: Lassen Hall 2201

Phone: (916) 278-2655

[MLK Scholars Website](https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/centers-programs/mlk-scholars/) <https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/centers-programs/mlk-scholars/>

Native Scholars and Transition Program (NSTP)—

Offers a program to support Native scholars through the admissions process, and transitioning into and succeeding in college, and plans Native celebrations and events on campus.

Location: Lassen Hall 2205

Phone: (916) 278-6183

[NSTP Website](https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/retention-academic-success/native-scholars-transition-program.html) <https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/retention-academic-success/native-scholars-transition-program.html>

Serna Center—

Sponsors programs and events with a focus on the social, political, economic, historical and cultural realities and needs of Chicanxs/Latinxs students and students from other underrepresented backgrounds at Sacramento State, and works to establish a strong foundation that enriches cultural identity and develops a sense of *familia* within the campus. Students may come on in to inquire about getting connected and involved on campus.

Location: River Front Center 1

Phone: (916) 278-7241

[Serna Center Website](https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/centers-programs/serna-center/) <https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/centers-programs/serna-center/>

Student Organizations and Leadership (SOL)—

Helps students to get involved in campus life through over 300 clubs and organizations, including those that are cultural.

Location: University Union, Second Floor 2035

Phone: (916) 278-6595

[SOL Website](https://www.csus.edu/student-life/student-organizations/) <https://www.csus.edu/student-life/student-organizations/>