

VOICES

SUMMER 2013 issue

ACPA's Commission for Social Justice Educators: *[providing] a collaborative home for college student educators working in the areas of diversity and social justice education*



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(pictured left to right)

bottom row: Corey Rumann, Yolanda Barnes, Brian Arao, Virginia Olin, Stephanie Bondi, Rylee Bondi-Rumann, Peter Nguyen, Deborah Slosberg, Sharon Chia-Claros.

middle row: Denise Boneta, Elizabeth Martinez, dre domingue, robbie routenberg, Gabe Barela, valerie a. guerrero, Jordan Turner, Anthony Bettendorf.

top row: Venson Curington II, Reggie Blockett, Sarah Glassman, Erica Thompson, Brian Reece, Marc Lo, Kayla Nuss, Christian Bello Escobar, finn schneider, Vu Tran.



Think social justice educators don't know how to have fun? Not so with the Commission!
(pictured here at ACPA's Annual Convention in Las Vegas, March 2014)
Take a look at our website to learn more about how to join our community:

<http://www2.myacpa.org/social-get-involved>

**Learning and Growing Together: 2013
ACPA Annual Convention Reflection**

Kelvin Rutledge, M.A. Candidate, Florida State University

The Lights. The Glitter. The Glam. The Cameras. And all of those people.

Las Vegas, NV was the perfect back drop for the annual conference as it presented a challenging intersection of social, political, and economic climates. The juxtaposition of the conference was fascinating—a conference that promoted challenge and support, innovative techniques and technology, and inclusive practices intersecting with cab driver riots, advocacy for the preservation of Native American history, and the ethical and moral dilemmas of “The Strip.” I walked into an environment that promoted inclusivity and protection of all expressions through posters and presentations while dealing with the array of objectifying media and commercial business of Las Vegas. Furthermore, I felt invigorated by the passionate experiences that people shared during the conference while I felt frustrated of the negative associations of being labeled a black man in Las Vegas. However, upon overall reflection, Audre Lorde (1994) said it best: “It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences.” From a personal social justice lens, I truly believe this is where the annual conference stepped in for the better.

Whether it was the powerful words from the keynote speakers, the practical application of educational sessions, or the conversations that happened within the four walls of commission and standing committee meetings, it was apparent that there was always a commitment to social justice being a piece of the foundation of our work. These conversations point strongly to the conceptual ideology of idea of the cycle of socialization, the implications of institutional and cultural socialization, and how this honestly impacts our work. Although we conceptually acknowledge the unequal roles within the dynamic system of oppression (Harro, 2010), there was a distinct passion of creating inclusivity through meaningful mediums. The conversations and presentations were not just about equality and modern day practice; it was about understanding the interconnectedness of our

work and the beauty that it could potentially bring.

This was even more enhanced by the interaction outside of the educational and formal settings of the conference. The dialogue between graduate students and professionals went deeper than just “how did you like the session?” or “didn’t that make you stop and think?” It was an ongoing process of learning how did everything fit and work together and the meaning of these ideas for us as individuals. The dialogue encouraged a deeper grasp of learning and connectivity—something that is not always done well in the classroom. Additionally, the dialogue challenged the way we want to cultivate our experiences and become more relevant. The informal piece, honestly, was just a critical to the development of the social justice application from the conference as well.

Overall, I can say my ACPA 2013 experience was more than just a conference, a relationship starter, or a mechanism for professional development as a first year graduate student. It was a reminder that we, as professionals, have a constant obligation to serve our students by being called to action. It was a reminder that we must create the critical discourse that our campuses need for development while being the support system to allow our students to thrive. It was a reminder that we have a chance to be the game changers within the cycle of socialization and what that means for the future. Most importantly, however, it was reminder that building communities of well-being is a continuous process involving the holistic development of social, psychological, institutional, and systemic factors in an environment—the cornerstone of our work. I hope the annual conference pushed, provoked, and challenged all mindsets; it was an experience I will never forget. #acpa2013.

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A Thank You Note

Deborah Slosberg, Coordinator for Local Community Service-Learning,
University of Maryland

I remember the exact moment when I realized not everyone got into student affairs work to do social justice work. I was standing in line at Wendy's in the student union with another person in my graduate program cohort. I think we were talking about how we lacked a connection to some people in our program, and it hit me, like a lightning bolt. Some of the people in our program were there because they had had a good time in their fraternity or sorority or they'd enjoyed helping staff put on late night programming and they wanted to provide that experience to others. Not everyone, like me, saw college as an opportunity to engage students in conversations around power, privilege, and oppression. "How naïve," I think now, but what a realization it was.

Since then, I have worked hard to create a community of social justice educators to support me in the work that I do. I was excited to take my current position as a Local Community Service-Learning Coordinator because I knew I would be surrounded by a solid community; our mission, after all, is to "promote positive social change through transformative learning and community engagement." However, I have realized that it is not that easy. At work, we are almost entirely consumed by the day to day operations of our positions. While we do have higher order conversations every other week, I realized I was going to need more. I was going to need a community that would pull me out of my work life to see the bigger picture of what it means to be a social justice educator.

I had heard of ACPA's Commission for Social Justice Educators and even been to a couple of their open meetings at Convention. When the call came out for nominations for the directorate board, I knew I had to nominate myself. Now, with a year of my three-year term under my belt, I am so grateful for this opportunity.

This year at convention I struggled with being in Las Vegas. In the first few hours I was there I spent 35 dollars on dinner (normally the cost of my groceries for 3-4 days), was followed by a man asking repeatedly if someone in our group was gay, and watched a woman get screamed at by some drunk companions. I hated Vegas. We were stopped on the street to be handed fliers by folks wearing t-shirts informing me they could get us a girl in 20 minutes or less – only to find out later that these people themselves were likely trafficked human beings. It was inaccessible at a socioeconomic level and at an ability level and it was inaccessible for those with attention deficit disorder with all the flashing lights and loud music. The list goes on...

The Commission helped me have a group of folks I could talk to about all the problems I was having with Las Vegas. More important than that however, the Commission gave me people to talk to who reminded me that our students live in Vegas and so do our faculty, staff, and administrators. Less than five miles away from the strip is the University of Nevada Las Vegas and a fellow social justice educator gently reminded me that those were her students only partially clothed taking pictures with strangers to pay their tuition.

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A Thank You Note (continued from page 3)

It is not acceptable to simply stop at saying “I hate Vegas” or “I’ll never come back.” In fact, I was reminded that it was my privilege to say such things while others cannot.

I am ever grateful for the community of folks I have found in the Commission for providing me with a network that can both support and challenge me as I explore new issues and continue to learn and grow myself. I think without the Commission I’d still likely be doing the work I am currently doing but I know for a fact that I wouldn’t be growing and changing as much as I am with the Commission. In fact, a few days after getting back from convention a student was excitedly sharing that she was going to celebrate her 21st birthday in Vegas. As the conversation progressed it came out that she is from Las Vegas and my student leaders and I are hoping she will do a presentation on the sex trafficking being done on Vegas during our training session on gender and sexual assault, all to add to the complexity of a place.

The Commission has helped me learn that what happens in Vegas should definitely not stay in Vegas; in closing I have two things I would like to leave you with. The first is to say thank you. Thank you to all of you who choose to be social justice educators and continue to challenge me and help me grow and learn. Thank you even if I do not know you for doing this work with others. Thank you for being part of this community. I would love for any of you reading this and wishing you could be more involved to contact me or any of the CSJE directorate board to learn more about how you can get involved and find support and continued growth as I have.

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Want to get more involved in the Commission of Social Justice Educators?

- Make sure you’re getting the CSJE Listserv at <http://www.myacpa.org/comm/social/pages/get-involved.cfm>
- Follow us on social media! We’re on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/ACPA.CSJE> and Twitter at https://twitter.com/ACPA_CSJE.
- Submit an article to the Voices Newsletter by visiting our website to see the Publication Guidelines (<http://www2.myacpa.org/social-newsletter/publication-guidelines>) and emailing Elizabeth Thompson (at elizabethrthompson@gmail.com) and Deborah Slosberg (slosberg@umd.edu). We’re always on the lookout for new writers to the Newsletter!
- Have you read the CSJE Blog (<http://acpacsje.wordpress.com>)? Would you be interested in writing a post? Please contact Valerie Guerrero (vguerrero@allegheny.edu) and Denise Boneta (dboneta@nyu.edu). Blog posts range from approximately 800 – 1,200 words, focusing on any topic of social justice education. Posts go live every Tuesday morning at 8:00 am CST and are due the Thursday before.

Increasing Discourse on Multiraciality

Adam Ortiz, M.Ed., House Director, Hampshire College

Being at ACPA this year confirmed for me that discourse on multiracial issues is growing in higher education. As Chair of the Multiracial Network and a multiracial person myself, I feel as though my brain is always processing the meaning and implications of being multiracial. I learned from my student affairs colleagues in Las Vegas that I am in good company. Three particularly salient topics that I encountered are:

Creating spaces on campus for multiracial people to share narratives

Many multiracial people never have an opportunity to engage in conversations about multiraciality with their families or friends who may identify as monoracial. Creating intentional spaces on campus for multiracial people to come together, process their experiences, and find solidarity is an effective way to support multiracial students. I have begun to practice this with positive results. This semester I collaborated with two community members to build a three-part dialogue series for multiracial people and the attendance level was high. We focused on the topics of relationships, family, and

privilege. As beneficial as it was to have a theme, students noted that they just appreciated having a place to process in the company of others. I encourage others in the field to consider this type of programming.

Rethinking how we incorporate multiracial identity into conversations about race and social justice education

When engaging with social justice education, particularly about privilege and oppression, we often choose to use binary thinking to process power dynamics: agent/target. While this is effective for many identities, multiracial identities can complicate efforts to use binary examples. This is because multiracial experiences are extremely heterogeneous – as ethnic identity, racial composure, and phenotypical presentation will significantly impact a multiracial person's experience. Two siblings, for example, may have the same parents and yet look completely different and self-identify in divergent ways. Our challenge is to think about ways that we can be inclusive of the spectrum of multiracial experiences while also addressing the complex issues such as how they interact with whiteness, passing, and privilege.

Paying attention to Critical (mixed) Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) has radically altered how many people think about race and racial dynamics

in the United States. Critical (mixed) Race Theory is an emerging academic focus that incorporates fundamental components of CRT into multiracial-specific discourse. Learning about and engaging with Critical (mixed) Race Theory will help us better understand the complexities of multiraciality as the multiracial population continues to grow. This is particularly relevant for those of us working within the social justice education paradigm, as Critical (mixed) Race Theory will inevitably challenge us to reconsider how we think about multiracial identity and experience.

This year the Multiracial Network celebrated its 10th anniversary at ACPA. We have the largest leadership team our group has ever had and many people in attendance at our meetings and socials. Woven through all of this was dialogue about multiracial topics and even suggestions for a book on narratives of multiracial student affairs practitioners. The message seems clear to me: people in the field of higher education are ready to begin focusing on and engaging with multiraciality in significant numbers. As we move forward the topics above will no doubt continue to receive attention as we seek to find new and effective ways to support our multiracial student populations.

An Open Letter to the ACPA Community

(cross-posted with permission from Multiracial Network Blog (<http://multiracialnetwork.wordpress.com/2013/04/09/an-open-letter-to-the-acpa-community/>))

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Dear ACPA Community:

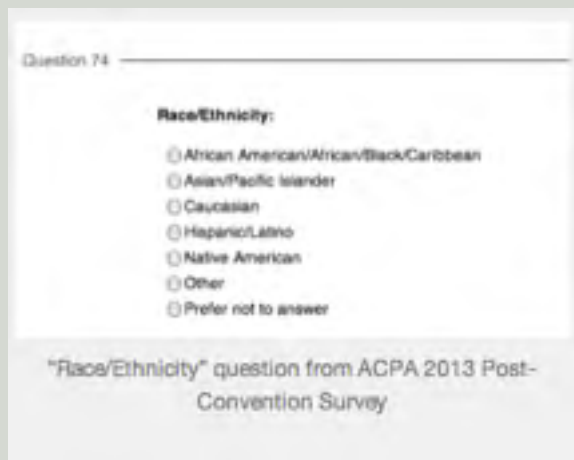
The Multiracial Network (MRN), one of five networks in the [Standing Committee for Multicultural Affairs](#), strives to help create and foster inclusive spaces within ACPA and postsecondary education with and for students, staff, and professionals who identify as multiracial, multiethnic, transracial adoptees, and having fluid racial identities. This past convention in Las Vegas was paramount for our network, as we celebrated 10 years since our founding and developed the pathway for our next 10 years of building our membership and advocating with and for ACPA members and the students we serve who identify as multiracial. It recently came to our attention that the 2013 Post-Convention Survey included a question that we, the MRN Leadership, feel the need to address as it directly applies to the history of marginality and mattering of ACPA members who identify as multiracial. While we see the importance of collecting demographic information of our members, we want to recognize and acknowledge the impact of survey question wording on participants. Question 74 was posed to collect “race/ethnicity” demographic information from convention participants, which forced participants to select one racial/ethnic category, “other,” or “prefer not to answer.”

A participant who identifies as two or more races must choose one racial identity, or choose to be “othered” in this data collection process. Not only does this question reinforce monoracialized attitudes toward race, but also serves to “other” and “alienate” a burgeoning population of our professional organization.

We also wish to acknowledge that since the original version of the survey, Question 74 has been altered to be more inclusive of multiracial-identifying people. While we as a network appreciate the swift action from ACPA, we feel this response is necessary both as a means of highlighting the importance of this question’s format and to hopefully take advantage of an educational moment for ACPA members who may encounter demographic questions like this one on their campuses.

Impact on Individuals

We feel it is important to note that this particular survey question is not an isolated incident. A common thread in the literature on multiraciality is how individuals are often forced to choose a monoracial identity or “check one only” (e.g., Herman, 2004; Johnston & Nadal, 2010; Kellogg & Liddell, 2012; Renn 2004). Much research has demonstrated how this experience of being forced to “check one only” can have negative impact on multiracial individuals. For instance, Townsend et al. (2009) showed how forced monoracial identification can result in lowered levels of motivation and self-esteem among multiracial individuals. Sanchez (2010) found that multiracial respondents who were forced to identify with only one race reported more depressive symptoms, likely due to the perceptions that their multiracial identity is not valued or accepted by society or the organization collecting the information. Moreover, being able to identify with multiple groups or as multiracial has been associated with positive psychological outcomes for multiracial individuals (Binning et al., 2009). This research demonstrates the significance of the ways we ask racial demographic questions, since they can send messages to individuals within our association about how their identity is valued or not, and potentially result in negative psychological outcomes. *(continued on page 7)*



An Open Letter to the ACPA Community (continued from page 6)

A personal example may help illustrate this question's impact. Below is how Rachel Luna, one of our MRN Leadership Team members, felt after responding to the survey: When I took the survey, I cringed when I got to the "race" question. I felt hurt, and even betrayed, by an organization for which I have much respect and espouses inclusion and social justice values. Particularly in the wake of MRN's 10th anniversary where we had such success with celebrating progress and raising awareness, this lack of inclusion felt like we'd taken two steps forward but one step back. A friend of mine who also identifies as multiracial was similarly impacted by this, and we chatted briefly on Twitter about it that day (see conversation below - left)



Influences on Organizational Dynamics

MRN has been dedicated to enhancing the goals of ACPA, as well as increasing education around Multiracial and multicultural affairs issues in postsecondary education. However, we must recognize the ways that the phrasing of Question 74 serves to undermine our network's existence within our organization and continues to [re]marginalize practitioners and students who feel they must choose between their multiple racial and ethnic identities. Clearly, Question 74's formatting is inconsistent with not only the

goals and vision of MRN, but also the goals and vision of ACPA. As stated in [About ACPA](#), the mission of ACPA is founding on several values including:

diversity, multicultural competence and human dignity; inclusiveness in and access to association-wide involvement and decision making; [and] outreach and advocacy on issues of concern to students, student affairs professionals and the higher education community, including affirmative action and other policy issues.

With these values at the core of our purpose, vision, and mission, we call to our professional organization and colleagues to action to find ways to increase inclusion by changing the demographic information collection questions and phrasing. We also want to recognize the ways that this question format may have a negative impact on our colleagues in communities with fluid sexual and gender identities, calling toward the need to reframe questions that may be more inclusive of multiple voices, truths, and complex ways that we might self-identify. Therefore, MRN asks that ACPA "think outside the box" when collecting demographic information from its members from this point forward.

Again, we want to note that we are glad ACPA was quick to change the format of the original question after the issue was noted. At the same time, we feel that it is important to respond in this capacity and offer recommendations so we as an organization can circumvent similar potentially marginalizing questions in our data collection. (recommendations still needed: link is here: <http://multiracialnetwork.wordpress.com/2013/04/09/an-open-letter-to-the-acpa-community/>)

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An Open Letter to the ACPA Community (continued from page

Recommendations

(continued from page 7)

Because we understand the complexities associated with this type of call to action, below we provide some recommendations for future racial and/or ethnic demographic data collection efforts by the ACPA community.

- *Clarify construct(s) you are trying to collect:* People understand “race” and “ethnicity” in different ways; therefore you should not just collapse these two constructs but actually clarify which construct you are trying to collect. Adding a definition and/or example responses could be very helpful for guiding respondents.
- *Use questions in more purposeful ways:* As Renn (2004) argued, it may be important to be asking at least two questions to meet your data needs, one related to racial “ancestry” as

well as “identity.” For instance, asking “How do you racially identify?” might get you different results from “What is your racial background?” (Johnston et al., 2009). Therefore, we ask that you think deeply about how the data will be used, and then decide how to pose the prompting of the question to collect that data.

- *Provide many more response options, as well as the ability to check all that apply:* Including a “multiracial” or “mixed” response option as well as providing the ability to mark one or more options will allow you to capture both individuals who are multiracially-identified and also those who acknowledge multiple heritages but may not identify as multiracial.
- *Use an open-ended question format:* Yes, this will mean more time for coding and collapsing these responses, but it should also gather more meaningful data, especially in terms of how people actually identify outside of the response options you’ve provided.

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