

MCM DEPARTMENTAL DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION ACTION PLAN

September 1, 2016

Departmental Context and Historical Overview

The Department of Modern Culture and Media considers issues of diversity, inclusion, and transformation central to its scholarly and pedagogical mission. Established first as a center in 1987 to foster research and teaching that crosses disciplinary lines, MCM is uniquely committed to working at the intersection of critical theory and creative practice and to exploring the ways in which cultural conventions operate in relation to social constructions of power and privilege, normativity and marginality, and inclusion and exclusion. Modern media of print, photography, film, video, television and digital media lie at the core of the MCM program, though MCM has defined itself less in terms of a particular cultural or critical canon and more in terms of a constant interrogation, unsettling, and reworking of scholarly and artistic conventions. It thus welcomes the opportunity afforded by the DDIAP process to reassess and to establish new goals; to revise its curriculum, programming, and modes of student recruitment; and to put in place a new hiring plan.

The Department of Modern Culture and Media has been very engaged in developing its Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan. We discussed the initiative and assembled the committee at our end-of-year retreat in May 2015. We then began discussing the issues at our faculty meetings in the fall of 2015 and formed a committee to begin working on the plan; that initial group consisted of three faculty members and one graduate student. We organized a variety of discussions among faculty, students, and staff (including a department-wide “town hall”; meetings with the Chair, Director of Graduate Studies, and our graduate students as well as a meeting with the full faculty and graduate students; and meetings with our Department Undergraduate Group [DUG] to which all undergraduates in our courses were invited). Last year’s department programming—such as a conference on “Television, Race, and Re-Visioning the American Dream,” a “Cinema and Black Cultural Politics” lecture series, a “Transnational Gender and Media” colloquium series, and a symposium and archive exhibit on “What is a Refugee Crisis?”—also led to important conversations around issues of diversity, inclusion, global racism, and anti-racism work. In the spring of 2016, we expanded the DDIAP committee to include an undergraduate student and a staff member. This six-member committee met regularly over the course of the spring and together wrote the plan. Additional input was solicited from students via meetings with undergraduate and graduate student representatives on the committee as well as via online climate surveys (to our undergraduate concentrators, to undergraduate non-concentrators taking MCM core courses that semester, and to our graduate students), and information from these meetings and surveys were all incorporated into the document. The DDIAP was then reviewed by the faculty via both in-person meetings and online discussion, with extensive discussion at our end-of-semester retreat in May 2016, at which point we formally adopted the plan. Revisions were made in the summer of 2016 after correspondence and meetings with, among others, the Provost; the Vice President for Academic Development, Diversity and Inclusion; the Deans of the Faculty, College, and Graduate School; the chairs of Brown’s humanities departments; and the 2016-17 MCM Departmental Diversity and Inclusion Committee.

As indicated by our historical data, the numbers of undergraduate concentrators and undergraduate students enrolled in MCM courses from historically underrepresented groups (HUGs), as well as HUG faculty, is higher than the numbers for the University as a whole. Since the graduate program is so small, the demographics vary greatly per year. In the past, MCM has addressed issues of diversity in various ways, from:

- Target of Opportunity Hires: MCM faculty members and the MCM department as a whole have nominated several HUG scholars for both Humanities Initiative and TOO positions over the past five years.
- Courses such as the upcoming first-year seminar “I Don’t Even Know Why They Call It Color TV: Television and Race in America”; the sophomore seminar “What is Colonialism—Archives, Texts, Images”; the mid-level courses “East Asian Internet Cultures” and “What is Revolution?”; the advanced undergraduate course “Nation and Identity: The Concept of National Cinema,” “Race and/as Technology,” “Civil Disobedience,” and “Photography and Human Rights”; and the graduate courses “Cinema, State Violence, and the Global” and “Queer Theories.”
- Special events such as 2015-16’s “Cinema and Black Cultural Politics” lecture series (February 2016), which led to a prospective hire of a HUG scholar (February 2016); the “Transnational Gender and Media” lecture series (2015-16), which will continue into 2016-17; conferences such as “Television, Race, and Re-Visioning the American Dream” (December 2015); “What is a Refugee Crisis?” (March 2016); individual lectures and artist’s talks; film series such as the Africana Film Festival (co-sponsored by Africana Studies) and the French Film Festival (with French Studies).
- A key texts seminar for faculty and graduate students (initiated by graduate students), in which a diverse set of critical methods was discussed Spring 2015.
- An annual graduate student lecture to address issues of diversity, inclusion and transformation, sponsored by MCM’s Forbes Center for the Study of Media and Culture.

Although these efforts have been important, the events that have unfolded on our campus and elsewhere over the past few years have made it clear that MCM can and must do more to increase the diversity of its student body and faculty and to better equip our students to address these issues. Our particular foci, as the rest of the document develops, are:

- Using our existing vacancy and future retirements to create a cluster of excellence within MCM in the fields of media-based critical race studies and digital media (please see the hiring section).
- Working with the Graduate School to attract and recruit a more diverse pool of students into our Ph.D. program and to support ongoing students.
- Revising our core curriculum, in particular our main introductory course, to better address questions of diversity.
- Introducing mentorship programs to support HUG and first generation students interested in concentrating in MCM.
- Creating professional ties between alumni and current students to make MCM more attractive to first generation students and others not familiar with media theory and production.
- Creating a standing committee to address these issues and assess the ongoing implementation of MCM’s DDIAP.

Faculty and Programming

As scholarly work examining the deleterious effects of racial stereotyping on the academic success of HUG students has made clear, one of the most effective ways to combat unconscious racism in the classroom and to provide an atmosphere in which students can thrive is by hiring and maintaining a cluster of HUG faculty.

To accomplish this, MCM is currently pursuing a hire that will diversify our faculty to fill its current vacancy (a position initially earmarked by the department for a Digital Media hire). This hire is key to MCM's DDIAP at all levels: from revisions to our curriculum to plans to diversify our student and faculty population to buttressing our existing relationships with other departments, especially Africana Studies, Theatre Arts and Performance Studies, and Gender and Sexuality Studies (as faculty members in all these units have expressed enthusiasm and support for our candidate's scholarship). Having this scholar on our faculty would also allow MCM to maintain its excellence in film studies; for decades, MCM has been internationally renowned for its leadership in this area, and the scholar we are pursuing—considered one of the current leading voices in studies of cinema and race—would keep us at the forefront of this field.

We also seek to establish a center of excellence in media-based critical race studies by preponing our next retirement in film studies. Coming from an open junior faculty level-search, this new hire would be in the field of Digital Media and Critical Race/Global Studies to complement the work of Professors Tony Cokes, Wendy Chun, Kelly Dobson, and, if all goes according to plan, our new hire noted above. This position in Digital Media and Critical Race/Global Studies will expand the demographics of MCM graduate students and undergraduate concentrators. During our town hall meeting to discuss MCM's DDIAP on March 18, 2016, undergraduate concentrators and graduate students not only expressed their deep support for a hire in Cinema and Black Cultural Politics; they also advocated strongly for more courses in Digital Media. (Currently we have only one faculty member who specializes in this field, while over 20% of our enrollments are in digital media-based courses). They also highlighted that digital media-related courses attract first generation college students and STEM concentrators to MCM. These classes are among our most diverse in terms of demographics and disciplines, and they were singled out by respondents to our non-concentrator and concentrator surveys as particularly effective in addressing these issues. Additionally, we will work with the Brown Arts Initiative to pursue an interdisciplinary HUG hire to help shape the future of production in MCM. (MCM has already proposed several names to the BAI.)

In programming, MCM will continue to make use of its endowment funds from the Malcolm S. Forbes Center for Culture and Media to support programming that represents diverse topics, approaches, and materials in contemporary media and cultural studies, including academic talks and symposia, conferences, film festivals and visiting artists, and alumni programs. Topics such as critical race theory, diaspora and post-colonial studies, intersectionality, aesthetics and social change, and queer and feminist critique are integral to contemporary cultural and media analysis, and opportunities to bring to campus scholars specializing in these areas arise across the spectrum of departmental programs. Recipients will be required to include a section on diversity and inclusion in their final reports about their use of Forbes funds. We will use other departmental resources as well to support programming that engages with issues of diversity and inclusion, power and privilege, and race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality. For example,

MCM and the Department of English jointly sponsor the annual Roger B. Henkle Memorial Lecture; this year, we have invited renowned artist Carrie Mae Weems, whose award-winning photographs, films, and videos have been displayed in over 50 exhibitions in the United States and abroad and focus on racism, gender relations, politics and personal identity, and the struggles facing African Americans today.

This example of the Henkle lecture is one instance of our collaborative work with other departments and units; we have also recently partnered with the Cogut Center for the Humanities, the Pembroke Center for Teaching and Research on Women, the Center for the Study of Race and Ethnicity in America, Middle East Studies, East Asian Studies, and others in putting on conferences, lecture series, screenings, and exhibits. MCM will expand its efforts to work with other departments and units, including Africana Studies, American Studies, Ethnic Studies, the Center for the Study of Slavery and Justice, and the Center for the Study of Race and Ethnicity in America, to widen and diversify the potential audiences for those events. We also host or (co-)sponsor film festivals and series such as the Africana Film Festival, the French Film Festival, the Feminist and Women's Media Festival, and Magic Lantern Cinema, create vital ties between departments and the Providence community, and we will collaborate with other departments and centers to organize film screenings that focus on social and cultural engagement, broadly conceived, for the University as a whole and for the Providence and Rhode Island community. We most often work with a local theater, the Cable Car Cinema, for festivals and series, and they attract large and diverse audiences from Brown, RISD, and the Rhode Island community. Magic Lantern, a screening series of independent and experimental film, videos, and digital media productions, also partners with local artists who design and silk-screen its accompanying poster project, and various local artists have shown their work through this series. Besides film/video festivals and screening series, MCM has also offered other programming that links Brown to the local community. For example, two conferences organized by MCM graduate students—the February 2016 conference “Seizing the Means of Reproduction” (which explored reproductive labor and social reproduction as contested sites of struggle and included powerful theorizations of racial capitalism, the welfare state, and neoliberalism) and the upcoming “Captive Genders” conference (which will address the impact of mass incarceration and the prison-industrial complex on transgender and gender-nonconforming people)—involved (or soon will involve) not only globally renowned intellectuals but also local artists, archivists, and activists. We hope to continue such efforts, especially working with the Brown Arts Initiative to design programming that will engage with issues of representation and difference, power and privilege, and diversity and inclusion and that will appeal to students across campus and beyond.

Programming directed towards our alumni—and with the goal of introducing current Brown students to the diverse individuals who have concentrated in MCM and demonstrating the wide range of work lives to which an MCM degree may lead—is a powerful way to draw students from underrepresented backgrounds to MCM and to the arts and humanities more generally. In May 2016, we sponsored a Commencement Forum entitled “Transforming Media, Transforming Brown,” that brought back alumni—specifically, filmmaker Rodney Evans, filmmaker Yoruba Richen, producer Christine Vachon, and film/media scholar Homay King—to speak to the transformation of media forms in relation to issues of diversity and inclusion; the speakers addressed such issues as black cinema, queer film and video, low-budget film, media and politics, and the relation between theory and practice. Planning is also under way for a fall 2016

alumni symposium, “moving media@brown,” a two-day event in October featuring panels, roundtables, screenings, and workshops that address the relationships among media practices, diversity and social justice. This two-day event extends the Forum conversation and also features alumni whose work embodies a commitment to questions of inclusion and change. Many of our alumni (Rodney Evans, director Todd Haynes, and artist/scholar Coco Fusco) have visited Brown at the invitation of MCM in the past, giving lectures, speaking in classes, and conducting workshops for our students, and we look forward to continuing this tradition.

Curriculum

MCM is devoted to the analysis of and intervention into the construction of media and culture. Our courses thus interrogate issues of power and privilege in modernity and in media formations and emphasize critical reading and reflection on the multiple historical and cultural forces that have shaped modern culture, offering diverse perspectives on the theorization and production of media texts. However, we can further develop by (1) encouraging a greater emphasis on such questions of power, difference, diversity, and intersectionality in all of our courses; (2) including more material from diverse perspectives, cultural producers, and traditions in our syllabi; and (3) making our contributions to these learning goals more visible by encouraging all MCM faculty to be aware of and to aim for the option of specifying their classes as Brown’s Diverse Perspectives in Liberal Learning courses.

To foster such development, the department plans to conduct a careful review of our curriculum, tasking our Curriculum Committee to focus closely on this issue in AY2016-7. Through these efforts, we plan:

- to revise our main introductory course, in consultation with graduate and undergraduate students, to be more diverse and inclusive in order better to address questions of power and privilege. MCM faculty will also be encouraged to apply for UTRAs so that the undergraduate students can continue this work over the summer.
- to create new courses, starting with first year seminars, devoted particularly to questions of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, nation, and/or globality in the media and cultural formations that we study.
- to institute a once-a-year meeting with all graduate students and faculty, in which graduate courses offered that year are discussed.
- to encourage more MCM faculty to be first-year advisors. We have had very promising results with MCM faculty who have served as CAP and/or first-year advisors, particularly if such advisors indicate their interest in working with underrepresented minority or first-generation students as advisees.
- to create opportunities for feedback on courses during the semester (such as through mid-semester written evaluations, in-class discussions, and/or meetings with students during faculty office hours) so as to have a better sense of their progression.
- to have the DGS work more closely with graduate students to ensure that the syllabi they create for their sophomore seminars address questions of diversity and inclusion.

We are focusing on our main introductory course and on freshmen seminars in response to our non-concentrator and concentrator surveys.

In addition, we have approached the Harriet W. Sheridan Center for Teaching and Learning to request that they lead us in a workshop for our faculty, postdoctoral fellows, and graduate

students on questions of inclusive pedagogy and diversity in the classroom; they have agreed, and we look forward to this workshop in November 2016. Finally, each year we will hold MCM “town hall” meetings with our faculty, postdoctoral fellows, graduate students, undergraduate students, and staff to continue to discuss ideas for expanding our curriculum, encouraging inclusive pedagogy, and fostering a supportive and intellectually generative MCM community.

Undergraduate Students

Alongside evolution of the curriculum, programming, and faculty of the department, representation of HUGs within the undergraduate population of the department is directly affected by the efforts and initiatives made by the department to develop a culture and academic community that is inclusive and supportive of students from diverse backgrounds. This involves addressing the informal social cues that exclude undergraduate students from underrepresented backgrounds as well as the formal policies and initiatives of the department that create norms that favor those students already represented. To this end, multiple initiatives will be implemented over the next 5 years, many of which will be implemented in the next semester, to evolve the department’s culture and community, creating space for students from underrepresented groups to pursue the critical theory, media studies, and media production work they are interested in. In particular, we will focus on:

- Supporting the growth of mentoring programs within the department, namely the Meiklejohn program and the Matched Advising Program for Sophomores, both of which can play critical roles in creating an inclusive department culture. More informally this involves encouraging participation of concentrators in events centered on diversity, inclusion, power, privilege, and social justice that reach out specifically to incoming first-year students such as the pre-orientation programs the *Third World Transition Program* (aimed at students of color) and *Excellence at Brown* (aimed at first-generation college students). In general, in survey responses, concentrators emphasized the need for MCM to engage in more mentoring programs.
- Fostering a new mentoring program for students enrolled in our introductory courses. This program, which directly responds to requests by students in our student survey, would pair a senior or junior with a first year student to help them navigate MCM.
- Reducing the costs of taking MCM courses by encouraging its faculty to participate in the already existing partnership between the DUG and the First-Generation, Low Income Partnership (FLIP) Lending Library. We will supplement this by including photocopies of articles used in our core courses. Alongside this work to be done at the beginning and end of each semester, the department will encourage instructors to make available to students information about any required textbooks and the syllabi of their courses for the upcoming semester by preregistration near the end of each semester. We will also investigate ways to further supplement the costs of production courses, which use costly film stock.
- Developing and recommending the inclusion of paragraphs on resources available to students in syllabi through the Office of Institutional Diversity (OID), Title IX Office, and Academic Support Services (ASS) alongside the information already provided on Student and Employee Accessibility Services (SEAS).

- Collaborating with the DUG to reach out to faculty in related departments to encourage them to cross-list their courses that deal with power, privilege, inequality and social justice along with providing a critical focus on media.

Graduate Students

Although historical data supports the fact that recruitment of faculty from HUGs is central to creating a more diverse graduate student community, it is not sufficient, especially since graduate students are interested in a great diversity of subjects and approaches. To ensure the effective recruitment of prospective graduate students as well as support of current graduate students from underrepresented groups, it is necessary for the Department Chair, Graduate Committee, and the Director of Graduate Study to engage in discussion about race and ethnicity—and their intersections with other categories of identity—in relation to the hidden barriers to entry into, as well as success within, the graduate program in Modern Culture and Media.

In terms of recruitment: MCM faculty will become knowledgeable about the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship Program, the Institute for the Recruitment of Teachers, The Leadership Alliance, as well as the Ford Foundation Fellowships, establishing connections with these entities and other programs that focus on preparing students from underrepresented backgrounds to pursue doctoral degrees and careers in academia. The Graduate Committee will promote the department and graduate program through the Society for Cinema and Media Studies (in the form of outreach to caucuses, SIGS, and the undergraduate community). The DGS will be in contact with the Graduate School about admitted graduate students in MCM who self-identify as underrepresented minorities. The DGS will strongly encourage those admitted graduate students to attend the Super Monday recruitment event and ensure that any broader departmental admitted student events coincide with Super Monday. MCM will continue to develop relationships with American Studies and Africana Studies, among other departments, to support admitted students' interests in those fields. The department will also strive to hire diverse faculty with research interests in the fields of media studies and critical/cultural theory who examine issues of power, privilege, inequality, and social justice. By the end of AYfall 2016-17, changes to the departmental website will be implemented to increase program transparency and provide easier access and navigation for prospective graduate students.

In terms of support for current graduate students: MCM will assess the departmental climate and implement appropriate initiatives (as they relate to curricular offerings, researching, teaching, and mentoring) to cultivate an inclusive environment. We will continue to provide opportunities for graduate students to present and receive feedback on their research in the form of the *Emerging Perspectives in Modern Culture and Media* graduate student symposia and the noontime colloquium series. We will also continue to offer job market workshops as well as more general workshops (on topics such as publishing, external funding, and networking) that focus on the professional needs of graduate students. Given changes made to the core undergraduate curriculum to reflect diverse perspectives, MCM faculty will make concerted efforts to engage questions of pedagogy (in relation to issues of power, privilege, inequality, and social justice) with graduate student teaching assistants each semester.

Professional Development

MCM will foster professional development on several fronts. To engage all department constituents in discussion, we will begin a reading group, which will meet once each semester and engage key books, films, videos, and other media in critical race theory and pedagogy (starting with a chapter of Sara Ahmed's *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*). MCM will actively promote University programs for faculty and graduate students that broaden the curriculum. Examples are the Sheridan Center's seminar on Reflective Teaching and the Dean of the College's course development funds and Sophomore Seminars initiative focused on social justice, identity, and difference. For undergraduates, MCM will investigate offering group or peer tutoring sessions for core courses. Finally, Brown's Center for Learning & Professional Development offers programs for faculty and staff, many of which focus on diversity and inclusivity, and we will explore these options.

Conclusion

MCM looks forward to implementing these proposed changes to make MCM more diverse and inclusive. We also plan to create a permanent committee to implement our plan every year and to ensure that this remains a living document. Members of this committee will hold open office hours for the community and also be responsible for creating many other avenues for feedback and improvement.