

Supporting BIPOC Colleagues

by Joshua Rashon Streeter

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The more visible focus on Black Lives Matter during 2020 and corresponding responses by Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) illustrates the need for systemic, institutional, interpersonal, and individual change. This provides historically and predominantly White institutions, like JMU, the opportunity to move forward in a new way—an urgent, necessary, and long-overdue push.

We do not live, work, study, or teach within a post-racial society. Racism is entrenched within the educational systems and professional fields of study that we have grown up in, inhabit, and uphold. Now is the time to take responsibility as members of a complicit society. Individually and collectively, we must work to uplift and center BIPOC students, faculty, and staff at JMU.

As a critical pedagogue and teaching faculty associate in the Center for Faculty Innovation (CFI), much of my scholarship considers how to use culturally responsive and anti-racist pedagogies in the classroom. However, in this cultural moment, it is imperative to remember the BIPOC faculty within our departments and in other schools and centers across our campus whose presence is a disruption to the system.

Don't Contribute to Erasure

There are BIPOC faculty members at JMU (not to mention the many other BIPOC employees who disproportionately inhabit service positions in dining, housekeeping, and facilities). We must acknowledge that these faculty members are here and have overcome many barriers to attain an academic position at JMU. Many of these BIPOC faculty members have performed invisible labor for years to advance in their careers and/or to support BIPOC students. We must recognize their (our) presence and contributions while continuing to support efforts to diversify teaching staff at the university.

Keep working to understand: Read, reflect, and dialogue with others about [“Want to Retain Faculty of Color? Support Them as Faculty of Color” \(Mercado-Lopez 2018\)](#) and [“Why are there so few Professors of Color?” \(Asare 2019\)](#).

Support, Champion, and Move Back

To create change, we must develop new ways of working *with* BIPOC faculty members, [not build structures, systems, or pathways for them](#). First, support and champion the ideas that BIPOC faculty bring to the table. Make sure they are heard. It is critical to understand that you are not “giving” BIPOC faculty a voice—they have a voice; instead, you are providing space and uplifting their contributions. Then, move back to allow these ideas to come to fruition. This requires giving up power and dismantling structures that have existed within the university and professional fields for decades.

Keep working to understand: Read, reflect, and dialogue with others about [Characteristics of White Supremacy Culture](#) and [“White Dominant Culture & Something Different”](#).

Intent vs. Impact

As we continue to collaborate, we all must consider [intent vs impact](#). Well-intentioned behaviors and language are not enough. Individuals must consider the impact that their choices have on BIPOC faculty

without becoming defensive. This requires a commitment to ongoing self-reflection, the very hard and taxing work to become a social justice practitioner. This means acknowledging bias, naming aggressions, and understanding the social construction, and privileges, of Whiteness.

Keep Working To Understand: Read and dialogue with others about [So You Want to Talk About Race \(Oluo 2019\)](#).

Actively Anti-Racist Teaching

As a historically and predominantly White institution, we must do better. It is on all of us, and I mean ALL, to [decolonize our syllabi](#) and continually work to be [active anti-racists](#) and [actively inclusive](#). This means researching and identifying texts, videos, and case studies that feature the work, ideas, and perspectives of BIPOC, and consistently and pervasively utilize them in the classroom. Additionally, center BIPOC faculty while you teach. This includes assigning a BIPOC colleague's article or book in your class and highlighting the work of BIPOC faculty across campus, in the community, and within the field intentionally during class lectures and discussions. Finally, [shutdown, stop, or question racist beliefs, actions, and comments verbally in the moment](#). While this takes practice, it is one of the best ways to support BIPOC colleagues who may or may not be in the room with you. These actions move from [performative allyship to action](#) and together will alter the culture within your classroom.

Keep Working to Understand: Read and dialogue with others about ["What White Colleagues Need to Understand" \(Brazas & McGeehan, 2020\)](#) and ["Dear Professor": On Anti-Blackness and Learning" \(Learning Scientists for Racial Justice, 2020\)](#).

Conclusion

Support comes in many forms. Above all else, I recommend asking BIPOC faculty what they need or want: *What might you need? How might I support you?* However, understand that this is a culture shift and possibly even a radical act.

When asked these questions, I am often unsure of how to answer and need time to think. Simultaneously, I am very grateful for colleagues who genuinely want to support me as I move through and work within a historically and predominantly White institution.

As a university, *how can we normalize centering BIPOC faculty and taking care of one another?* It has been said that [the most important anti-racist work you will do is in your own home](#). I believe that we must engage in anti-racism work within our "house," working alongside our BIPOC faculty. For then, truly, we might be able to make JMU a home for all.

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