



MEETING REPORT

Young, Gifted & @ Risk Symposium The Steve Fund at Washington University in St. Louis, 2016

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INTRODUCTION

Young, Gifted & @ Risk 2016 at Washington University was led by Dr. Sean Joe, Associate Dean for Faculty and Research and Benjamin E. Youngdahl Professor of Social Development at Washington University and Dr. Annelle Primm, Senior Medical Advisor to the Steve Fund. This is the third in a series of annual conferences developed by The Steve Fund and launched at Brown University in 2014 by the Steve Fund and Professor Tricia Rose, Chancellor's Professor of Africana Studies and Director of the Center for Study of Race and Ethnicity in America at Brown University. Professor Rose created the fitting name of the conference series, "Young, Gifted, &@Risk."

The focus of the 2016 convening was to illuminate the mental health and emotional well-being challenges of college students of color and to increase awareness of mental health, mental illness and emotional well-being in this population. This focus is closely aligned with two of the Steve Fund's core pillars, "Building Knowledge and Thought Leadership" and "Promoting Awareness and Dialogue." Washington University's George Warren Brown School of Social Work, BJC HealthCare, the Center for Social Development, Missouri Foundation for Health, the Race and Opportunity Lab, and the Washington University School of Medicine supported the meeting. Notably, the Brown School of Social Work is a leader in the study of mental illness and social justice for diverse populations. Specifically, it is recognized for substantial contributions to racial diversity in health, education, community and student achievement. Meeting attendees traveled from local, regional and national destinations to attend this meeting and they received a plethora of information regarding current research in college student mental health and culturally-relevant strategies for supporting student success. Overall, the meeting was a space where participants shared ideas on addressing clinical care, research, and administrative

and policy enhancements necessary for reducing unmet mental health need and improving the college experience for students of color.

The day began with remarks by Dr. Holden Thorp, Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs. Dr. Mary McKay, Dean of the Brown School; Kelvin Westbrook, Chair of BJC HealthCare Board; and Mr. Evan Rose, Co-Founder and President of The Steve Fund stressed the import and timeliness of the Steve Fund's mission - promoting the mental health and well-being of young people of color. Mr. Rose was followed by Dr. Sean Joe, the Benjamin E. Youngdahl Professor of Social Development and a leading researcher in African- American suicide prevention and intervention. Throughout the day, the plenary sessions and concurrent workshops reflected the Steve Fund's mission; to build awareness and dialogue; to generate new knowledge about the challenges to mental health and emotional well-being and to identify and examine promising practices for student of color mental health.

The meeting included a series of 3 plenary panels as well as breakout group discussions focused on the lived experiences of diverse students, helping families identify student mental health needs and the mental health status of special populations like veterans and graduate students. Following, we summarize the highlights from the Young, Gifted & @ Risk symposium at Washington University in St. Louis. We hope that the knowledge shared at this conference is a useful source of support and guidance for leaders, administrators and practitioners in institutions of higher learning regarding the unique strengths, needs and challenges of racially diverse students. We provide a summary of the plenary panels and concurrent workshops including relevant "takeaway themes" for consideration.

PLENARY PANELS AND CONCURRENT SESSIONS

Plenary 1: Marginality, Belonging and Success: The University Experience and the Mental Health of Students and Emerging Adults of Color

The first plenary panel was entitled, **Marginality, Belonging and Success: The University Experience and the Mental Health of Students and Emerging Adults of Color**, and focused on the academic environment at competitive colleges and universities in the U.S. and how the “feel” of these environments impacts the mental health and well-being of racially diverse college students and emerging adults. Dr. Allison Lockard, Assistant Professor at Bucknell University (formerly of the Pennsylvania State University’s College Student Mental Health Program), spoke to the trends in the college student mental health landscape based on findings culled from U.S. college and university counseling centers. She reported that students of color utilize college mental health services differently from white students because they view the university environment differently. She also described research reporting the top mental health concerns facing students of color as anxiety, stress and depression.

Dr. Ebony McGee of Vanderbilt University presented next on the university experience of high achieving students of color in STEM fields. She focused her remarks on describing the “extra layer of hostility” that high achieving students of color encounter in fields that are traditionally thought to be “out of their reach.” She further illustrated how lack of representation in STEM fields contributes to invisibility and stressors for this population. Dr. McGhee also provided context for how young people facing such stressors cope. As an example, she cited the well-researched “John Henryism” phenomenon from the work of sociologist Dr. Sherman James. John Henryism is defined as an active form of coping utilized primarily by African-Americans as a means of striving over stressors. John Henryism has been demonstrated to have high mental and emotional costs for African-Americans. Dr. McGhee concluded by describing some of her efforts in building interventions to stem the tide of academic stress on high achieving students of color in STEM.

Dr. David Rivera of Queens College in NY followed Dr. McGhee as the final speaker on the panel. He addressed the substantial role of campus climate and its impact on diverse students. His presentation included real world examples under the theme, “When people are not fully seen, it harms dignity.” Dr. Rivera illustrated this point with a description of the negative impacts of the dismantling of a diversity program at a prominent university. He further discussed the impact of covert vs. overt bias and provided an example of the negative impacts of institutional non-responsiveness to student racial traumas. Some of Dr. Rivera’s key points included the import of recognizing that diverse students do not seek marginalization and instead are seeking “mirrors” in the campus setting that reflect who they are as individuals and members of cultural groups. He also stressed the impact of micro-aggressions as a barrier to student of color help-seeking.

The takeaway themes from this first plenary panel included: 1) recognizing the increased need for mental health services among students of color; 2) understanding the unique mental health needs and coping strategies among high achieving students of color; and 3) the impact of campus climate on the mental health and well-being of diverse students.

Plenary 2: How Culture, Mindset and Identity Shape and Affect Mental Health Among Young Adults

The second panel, entitled ***How Culture, Mindset and Identity Shape and Affect Mental Health Among Young Adults***, featured behavioral scientists who addressed the intersection of culture, perspective and racial/cultural identity development with mental health for students and emerging adults of color. Dr. Andres Pumariega, First Vice President of the American Association of Social Psychiatry (and a practicing psychiatrist) began with a discussion of two concepts related to intercultural interactions, acculturation and assimilation. He described acculturation as the process of blending one’s culture of origin with the dominant societal culture. He then described assimilation as fully losing one’s culture of origin to take on the mores and norms of the dominant culture. Dr. Pumariega stressed the differences between the two as well as the benefits and

drawbacks of each. He also highlighted the impact of extremism (or having no connection to culture of origin or the dominant culture) and how this practice fully alienates students of color from those around them. He concluded by demonstrating how culture shapes the college adjustment experience of students of racially diverse backgrounds.

Dr. Amy West, a scholar at the University of Illinois – Chicago, is recognized for her innovative research in Native American student mental health. Dr. West presented her research on risk and resilience factors related to native youth mental health. She provided key background information regarding Native American culture and its unique benefits for young people, including fostering a sense of belonging, ties to extended family, access to an involved community, cultural pride and spiritual health. Notably, Dr. West shared data related to a student developed campus program designed to create a greater connection between students and alumni. Dr. West concluded by stressing how student activism can serve as a catalyst for academic institutions by helping them identify culturally-relevant mechanisms for teaching students of color racial coping skills relevant for the university setting.

Dr. Rahul Sharma, of Argosy University, closed the second plenary by reflecting on his clinical work with racially diverse college students. He stressed the detrimental impacts of micro-aggressions and stereotype threat as well as the significance of understanding individual privilege and its relationship to improving campus climate. Dr. Sharma described his love of cooking and used the metaphor CHI (pronounced Chai, like the warm beverage) to teach attendees about how best to approach supporting college students of diverse backgrounds. He indicated that CHI stood for Compassion, Humility and Insistence. Dr. Sharma provided multiple examples of how to embody CHI in advocating for students of color on campus. He encouraged attendees to embody CHI in all of their interactions with students and faculty and to work in such a way as to demonstrate the value of CHI to the academic institution. Dr. Sharma closed by stressing the importance of vigilance in living out the values of CHI on college and university campuses.

The takeaway themes from this plenary panel included 1) the importance of understanding how intercultural interactions and coping strategies impact the lived experiences of students of color on campus; 2) the utilization of racial identity and culture as natural pathways to positive coping in students of color; and 3) the necessity of expanding our knowledge of cultural privilege and the import of embodying the principles of openness and advocacy in support of students of color.

Plenary 3: Promising Strategies for Mental Health on Campus and Beyond for Young People of Color

The final plenary of the day, entitled **Promising Strategies for Mental Health on Campus and Beyond for Young People of Color**, focused on the presentation of innovative and tested strategies currently in use by colleges and universities to meet the emotional and educational needs of racially diverse students. This session also included the presentation of a new framework developed exclusively to serve the needs of students of color in university settings.

Dr. Kari M. Wolf, Chair of Psychiatry at the Southern Illinois University School of Medicine, presented a description of and outcomes related to her work as medical director for a community based mental health service for students at an Historically Black College in Texas. She carefully described the need for the program, the planning and creation of the program, and provided examples of the services offered. Dr. Wolf concluded with thoughts on the benefits and drawbacks associated with the development and implementation of the program and lessons learned that may benefit other campuses seeking to develop their own mental health service delivery programs.

Dr. Byron Clift Breland, President of San Jose City College and a psychologist, followed Dr. Wolf. He addressed the substantial role of community colleges in meeting the educational needs of racially diverse college students. His presentation was data-rich and reflected his view of the critical role that community colleges play in helping to build resilience, identify strengths and teach diverse students “how” to engage in the academic endeavor of higher education. Dr. Breland’s key points included recognition that diverse students

may feel marginalized in academic settings ill-equipped to receive them. He also stressed common mental health problems that his faculty report among students, like depression, anxiety and low self-concept related to preparedness for postsecondary education. Dr. Breland closed by stressing the critical need for focusing on scaling up measurable strategies that increase equity in education for racially diverse students.

Dr. Alfiee M. Breland-Noble, Associate Professor of Psychiatry at the Georgetown University Medical Center and Senior Scientific Advisor to the Steve Fund, presented on a partnership between the Steve Fund and the JED Foundation created to build a theoretical framework and set of practical recommendations for use by colleges and universities to address the mental health needs of students of color. Her presentation focused on background of the partnership, a brief overview of why the work was necessary and a description of the partners involved (including the McLean Hospital College Mental Health Program). Dr. Breland-Noble also described the scientific process used in the development of the framework to collect data to support the building of the recommendations. She concluded with an overview of suggested practices related to the recommendations themselves (i.e. student need assessment, program development and implementation and program evaluation).

Dr. Jeanne Manese, Counseling Center Director at the University of California at Irvine, discussed a pilot study she conducted with alumni of counseling and career services at the school. She stressed the import of understanding beneficial practices already in place as a foundation for building stronger programs for students of color. In describing her pilot study on this topic, she indicated that one of her goals was to capture and characterize the positive and negative features of the undergraduate experience as described by alumni of color. Overall, her lessons learned included new insight into the kinds of programs and services currently benefitting racially diverse students and ideas on gaps that must be filled to address of color emotional, mental health and career development needs.

This plenary highlighted findings describing benefits and challenges associated with programs designed to meet mental health need in students of color. Additionally, the presenters articulated a set of key themes

relevant for understanding the emotional and educational well being of college students of color. These themes included the import of self-evaluation by administrators and senior leaders to undergird mental health and emotional well-being program development for under-served students. Secondly, the presenters highlighted practical steps that colleges and universities might take to assess student need in anticipation of program development. Finally, presenters reflected on the practical application of innovative mechanisms for engaging students in assessment and use of mental health supports in the academic environment.

A new addition to this year's symposium was the hour-long *Ideas and Innovation* session. In this part of the symposium, participants gathered in small breakout groups to share their ideas as follows.

Ideas and Innovation Breakout Sessions:

Six breakout sessions were held, aligned with the meeting theme of ***Thriving in a Multicultural College World***. The sessions encouraged strong participant interaction and openness in sharing personal experiences relevant to the topic of discussion. Following, we briefly describe each session.

Session A, Students/ The Lived Experience, was led by Maya Terry, a Washington University student, and co-facilitated by Marva Robinson, Ph.D., D.J. Ida, PhD., and Merry Manson, also a student. The session focused on the student voice and illuminated student perspectives on what it feels like to be a member of a "numerical minority". Participants discussed the gaps in services to support the mental health and well-being of students of color on college campuses and proposed strategies and programs needed to address unmet needs.

Session B, focused on the topic of **Family**, was led by Meeta Kumar, PhD, and co-facilitated by Maya Terry's father, Caleb Terry and Gordon Bell, CFA, family member from The Steve Fund. This session encouraged participants to discuss their concerns about the mental health and well-being of their children who are preparing to enter college as well as those currently enrolled. The session provided a unique opportunity for

learning about the types of on-campus and off-campus resources and supports available to help families maximize student adjustment and prosperity in the college setting.

Session C for Faculty, Teaching Assistants and Graduate Students was led by LaShawnda Fields and co-facilitated by Vincent Flewellen and Ryan Lindsey. This session focused on the lived experience of marginalization, isolation, microaggressions, imposter syndrome and stereotype threat that may also be prevalent among faculty, teaching assistants and graduate students. This session provided an opportunity for understanding the challenges and pressures faced by people of color in these roles and coping mechanisms employed by this population.

Session D for Veterans, led by Steve Byrnes and Jennifer Goetz, was particularly timely given that the event occurred on Veterans Day. This event allowed for an in-depth discussion of the mental health needs of military personnel, among whom college-aged adults and people of color are represented at disproportionately high rates. This panel sought to raise awareness about the mental health needs and multi-layered challenges young veterans of color encounter as they reintegrate into civilian life and pursue a college education by focusing on strategies to foster well-being and successful academic achievement.

Session E was led by Thomas Brounk, Ph.D. and focused on **Administrators and Counseling Center Staff**. **In this breakout** participants explored current challenges faced by University leaders in developing and maintaining an on-campus environment conducive to learning, harmonious interaction, and a positive sense of well-being. Participants shared ideas on innovations in resources and supports necessary for assisting administrators and counseling staff in handling competing priorities and fostering a healthy campus environment.

SUMMARY AND NEXT STEPS

The third Young, Gifted & @ Risk symposium provided participants with a wealth of opportunities to learn, share and discuss nationwide efforts by students, families, colleges and universities to address the increasing need for mental health and emotional support of students of diverse racial backgrounds. The meeting generated many new ideas and provided opportunities to participants to gain insights into current best practices in this space. Following, we highlight key opportunities relevant for students, families and university administrators

First, students in attendance at the conference voiced the significance of meetings like Young, Gifted & @ Risk as a safe space for sharing their perspectives. The Steve Fund believes in the import of centering the student voice and encourages colleges and universities to build upon the convening model to provide regular opportunities for students to express themselves and inform campuses about their emotional well-being and mental health needs. Second, parents and families can benefit from the findings of this event by noting key messages and using them as a template for structuring conversations with their students on mental health and emotional well-being. Additionally, parents can benefit by availing themselves of resources to support their students (e.g. conference proceedings, Steve Fund website, on-campus resources). Finally, administrators benefit from the opportunity to share their success stories in meeting unmet student need, yet they were also able to voice their concerns about some of the challenges they face in serving students of color (e.g. competing demands for time, resource allocation, rising unmet mental health need, etc.). The Young, Gifted & @ Risk convening is a starting point and suitable venue for these conversations, and we encourage administrators to continue to share their learnings with us.

In closing, The Steve Fund was pleased to offer this special conference and bring together some of the nation's top minds to speak to the mental health needs of racially diverse students. We believe strongly that ongoing discussions on the topic of student of color mental health will only serve to benefit students and improve the college and university experience for all.