THE STEVE FUND

MEETING REPORT

Young, Gifted & @ Risk Conference

The Steve Fund at the

University of Pennsylvania, 2017

Introduction

Young, Gifted & @Risk 2017 at the University of Pennsylvania is the fourth 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 conference was moderated by Gordon Bell and attended by 350 people.

The Steve Fund is grateful to Morgan Stanley for its generous support of the 2017 Young, Gifted & @Risk Conference.

The focus of the 2017 convening was how cultural identity and belonging play into mental health and emotional well-being for students of color. The event was held in Houston Hall, America's first student union center. The conference is the only event of its kind in the nation and was free to attend. Scholars, campus administrators, mental health practitioners, students, community members, and families converged to discuss issues and solutions for students of color.

It was supported by the University of Pennsylvania and Penn's Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS). Under Penn President Amy Gutmann, Penn has deepened the school's commitment to inclusion, innovation, and impact. As an Ivy League institution, Penn is known for its devotion to intellectual curiosity and research, as well as to a commitment to creating a diverse community of scholars. Nearly half of all undergraduates self-identify as students of color, while 12 percent are international and 12 percent are the first in their families to attend college. CAPS staff have a wide range of expertise, including multiracial identity issues and counseling, LGBTQ/QQIPAA identity and care, women's issues, gender issues, and trans health. Therapy is offered in Spanish, Mandarin, and Cantonese. Since 2014, CAPS clinicians have pioneered and expanded the I CARE Gatekeeper program, training more than 2,000 students, faculty, and staff how to intervene in situations of distress.

The meeting consisted of two plenary panels as well as breakout group discussions. The conference included the first public presentation of the Equity in Mental Health Framework, a set of 10 actionable recommendations to help colleges and universities support and enhance the mental health of students of color. The Equity in Mental Health Framework is a partnership of the Steve Fund and the JED Foundation.

The following is a summary of the highlights from the Young, Gifted & @ Risk symposium at the University of Pennsylvania. 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.

Notable Quotes

"I came in realizing there is no more important issue than the one we're talking about today. I can think of nothing more important and nothing I've spent more time on."
– Wendell Pritchett, Ph.D.
Provost | Presidential Professor of Law and Education | University of Pennsylvania

"I belong here. You belong here. Throughout my career as a student and in my job, I still get messages that I don't belong, that I was lucky, and that I was given an unfair advantage. We have to help students deal with that feeling and help them understand they do belong."
– Antonia M. Villarruel
Professor | Margaret Bond Simon Dean of Nursing | School of Nursing | University of Pennsylvania

"It's one thing to believe in social justice. It's another to be socially just when you only have 60 seconds to make a decision."
– Howard Stevenson, Ph.D.
Constance Clayton Professor of Urban Education | Professor of Africana Studies | Human Development and Quantitative Methods Division | Graduate School of Education | University of Pennsylvania

"As we praise our students and acknowledge them, we also need to check in and say we value them for who they are. What they do only needs to enrich their lives and their souls. Nothing else. Students often don't know what enriches their lives and souls"
– Valerie DeCruz, M.Ed.
Director | Greenfield Intercultural Center (GIC) | University of Pennsylvania

"We need to normalize stress. White folks don't have a monopoly on stress."
– Alfiee Breland-Noble, Ph.D., MHSc
Senior Scientific Advisor | The Steve Fund | AAkOMA Project Director & Associate Professor of Psychiatry | Georgetown University Medical Center

"Hate crimes are a mental health issue. They are especially devastating because you are selected for that act of violence because of who you are."
– DJ Ida, Ph.D.
Center on Race and Social Problems | University of Pittsburgh

Executive Director | National Asian American Pacific Islander Mental Health Association (NAAPIMHA)

"The children of immigrants are the most vulnerable. They are disconnecting some from their family culture but haven't fully rooted in another culture. There is a conflict of personal achievement versus family relationships."
– Andres Pumariega, M.D.
Chair | Dept. of Psychiatry | Cooper University Healthcare | Camden, NJ

"Resilience doesn't mean immunity to emotional suffering. Someone who is resilient still needs space to hurt and heal."
– Jeannine Cicco Barker, Psy.D., ATR-BC
Staff Psychologist | Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) | University of Pennsylvania

"Our campuses are set up in monoculture ways, but identity is a state of becoming and understanding yourself. You have the right to identify yourself in whatever way you see fit."
– Lauren Reid, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Psychology | Arcadia University

"Safe spaces aren't only physical spaces. They are places that make people welcome, so we should think about them as a process -- and who is involved in the process of creating them."
– Vanessa Volpe, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Psychology | Ursinus College | Adjunct Fellow | Penn Center for Public Health Initiatives

"We want our institutions to be culturally competent. Not that you're just here today, but that they can be where you are tomorrow. It's not just about bringing people in and letting them rot on the vine. We need our schools to give them Miracle-gro."
– Alfiee Breland-Noble, Ph.D., MHSc
Senior Scientific Advisor | The Steve Fund | AAkOMA Project Director & Associate Professor of Psychiatry | Georgetown University Medical Center

By the Numbers

In 1985, **18%** of student felt overwhelmed by all they had to do. Last year, that number was **41%.**

43% of Black students strongly or somewhat agree that they feel isolated

Asian American, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders have roots that go back to more than **20 countries.**

Only **9%** of Native Americans complete college. Their suicide rate is **2.5 times** the national average.

89% of first-generation low-income students who enter college leave after 6 years without a degree.

Welcome Remarks

Dr. William Alexander, Director, Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) at the University of Pennsylvania introduced **Dr. Wendell Pritchett,** Provost and Presidential Professor of Law and Education, University of Pennsylvania and **Dr. Antonia M. Villarruel** (RN, FAAN), Professor, Margaret Bond Simon Dean of Nursing, School of Nursing, University of Pennsylvania.

Dr. Pritchett noted that students of color confront unique challenges throughout their lives, and college campuses no different. They are more likely to feel overwhelmed, yet less likely to seek help, which is disastrous for young people themselves, but also for their family, friends, teachers -- all of us.

"I came in realizing there is no more important issue than the one we're talking about today," he said. "I can think of nothing more important and nothing I've spent more time on."

Dr. Villarruel noted that Penn's commitment to diversity is reflected in people of color holding high positions at the school. She also recalled her personal experiences as an advisor to students of color and as a first generation college student herself.

"I belong here," she said. "You belong here. Throughout my career as a student and in my job, I still get messages that I don't belong, that I was lucky, and that I was given an unfair advantage. We have to help students deal with that feeling and help them understand they do belong."

Evan M. Rose, President of the Steve Fund, called attention to the diversity of perspectives in the room – counselors, researchers, students and parents were in attendance. He gave an overview of the Steve Fund's programming and announced the Equity in Mental Health Framework, a collaborative effort with the Jed Foundation. **Dr. Valarie Swain-Cade McCoullum**, Vice Provost for University Life, University of Pennsylvania, applauded the Framework and wrapped up the welcome remarks by thanking Penn CAPS.

Plenary Session 1: Keynote

Keynote Speaker
Dr. Meeta Kumar, Director of Outreach and Prevention, Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS), University of Pennsylvania, introduced the keynote speaker, **Dr. Howard Stevenson,** Constance Clayton Professor of Urban Education, Professor of Africana Studies, Human Development and Quantitative Methods Division, Graduate School of Education, University of Pennsylvania. Dr. Stevenson's talk was titled "**The Color of Smear: Mentally Healthy and Risky Comeback Microaggressions from the Good Old Days**." The talk emphasized the need for better racial literacy for all Americans and the importance of seeing racial encounters as nonthreatening. Using a metaphor of many blindfolded people touching different parts of an elephant – and all coming to different conclusions about what it is – he illustrated that in racially-charged encounters, people often don't understand the full picture and can perceive it as more threatening than it is. He also spoke to how young people of color decide to self-isolate to prove they are strong enough to handle the racism they deal with alone, and how a lack of community can prevent healing.

"It's one thing to believe in social justice," he said. "It's another to be social just when you only have 60 seconds to make a decision."

Response Panel
- Caleb Terry (Parent/Family Member Perspective)
- Meghana Nallajerla (Undergrad Student Perspective)
  Candidate for B.A. in Psychology | Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies | University of Pennsylvania '18
- Shantee Rosado (Graduate/Professional Student Perspective)
  Doctoral Candidate | Department of Sociology | University of Pennsylvania
- Valerie DeCruz, M.Ed. (Administrator Perspective)
  Director | Greenfield Intercultural Center (GIC) | University of Pennsylvania

Shantee Rosado responded by talking about her personal experience as a first generation Puerto Rican/Dominican queer woman from working poor background pursuing her PhD. She spoke to the challenge of reconciling her position at Penn with her activism and to the broader theme of students of color dealing with the emotional response to national events, even while schools reinforce productivity over all else.

Meghana Nallajerla responded by talking about her experiences with sexual violence, both personally and more broadly in her South Asian community. She spoke to the difficulty of seeking help when it is associated with shame, stigma, and betrayal in your community. She also talked about the importance of cultural

centers and having supportive faculty, like a gender studies professor who walked her to a CAPS appointment.

Valerie DeCruz responded by emphasizing the strengths of students of color and the pressure they are under to meet external goals set as achievements. She noted, "*As we praise our students and acknowledge them, we should also check in and say we value them for who they are. What they do only needs to enrich their lives and their souls. Nothing else.*"

Caleb Terry responded by discussing his experience as a parent of a daughter who has a mental illness. He emphasized the importance of learning about what she is experiencing, the stigma surrounding mental illness, especially in communities of color, and how his daughter has "owned her mental illness" by starting a blog, blackgirlmentalhealth.com.

Takeaways from Plenary Session 1:
1. Racial encounters can be stressful, but community is an important part of healing
2. Supportive faculty who embrace students' identities fully and prioritize their mental health over their productivity have a positive impact
3. Belonging is more important than fitting in

Spoken Word by Excelano
Imani Davis performed two spoken word poems.

Plenary Session 2: Culture, Identity, and Mental Health

Dr. Maria Oquendo, Professor of Psychiatry, Department of Psychiatry, University of Pennsylvania, delivered introductory remarks to the panel, asking, "What is culture?" She likes to think of is as "something we live and breathe that shapes our behavior" that can have a profound effect on identity, perception, and mental health. The next set of presentations and panel discussions will focus on these intersections.

Dr. Annelle Primm, (MPH), Senior Medical Advisor, the Steve Fund moderated the panel.

Panelists: Individual Presentations
- Alfiee Breland-Noble, Ph.D., MHSc
  Senior Scientific Advisor | The Steve Fund | AAkOMA Project Director & Associate Professor of Psychiatry Georgetown University Medical Center
- DJ Ida, Ph.D.

Center on Race and Social Problems | University of Pittsburgh
Executive Director | National Asian American Pacific Islander Mental Health
Association (NAAPIMHA)
- Andres Pumariega, M.D.
Chair | Dept. of Psychiatry | Cooper University Healthcare | Camden, NJ
- Crystal Bullard, M.D.
Child & Adolescent Psychiatrist | Carolinas Healthcare System | Charlotte, NC

Dr. Breland-Noble's presentation was titled "*African American/Black Students in College: What works and what is needed to support optimal mental health.*" She started her presentation by explaining that her use of the word "Black" encompassed identities beyond African Americans, like people from Caribbean and Latin-Negro communities. Although the stressors for teenagers and college students are universal, the impact black communities in unique ways. Isolate plays a major role; 43 percent of black students strongly or somewhat agree that they feel isolated on campus. She spoke about the importance of having therapists of color so that students feel seen and heard and welcome in a CAPS office. She also noted that although 79 percent of Blacks and Latinos report a religious affiliation, faith-based mental health promotion is rare (but something her AAkOMA project works on).

"We need to normalize stress," she said. "White folks don't have monopoly on stress."

Dr. Ida's presentation was titled *Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians & Pacific Islanders: Who are we, how do we heal?* She began by talking about the huge diversity within the AANHPI community, whose roots go back to over 20 countries, who practice a wide variety of religions, and speak many languages. Despite the diversity, though, Asian Americans are often all lumped together in data sets. She noted, "A 5th generation Japanese biracial man very different than 1st generation Cambodian who survived Pol Pot" even though most research would label them both simply as "Asian American." Because of the "model minority" stereotype, an aversion to burdening their family, and an overall lack of quality care, AANHPI have the lowest utilization of mental health services, which becomes a "you don't seek services so you don't have problems" Catch-22.

"*Hate crimes are a mental health issue," she said. "They are devastating because you are selected for that act of violence because of who you are.*"

Dr. Pumariega's presentation was titled *Latino students: mental health challenges, strengths, and needs.* He opened by highlighting the acculturation stressors that Latix students face, as the majority are first generation college students. He emphasized the continuing challenge of navigating your own family culture and the dominant culture on campus as it relates to mental health, gender, and achievement. He also focused on DACA's impact on mental health: when it was passed, it reduced stress and fears of deportation; now, there are heightened fears of deportation and emboldened xenophobia and microaggressions. He closed with the importance of

culturally competent college mental health services and validating student's acculturation stressors.

Dr. Bullard's presentation was titled *Native Americans: Overcoming the Odds*. Native Americans are the smallest US minority group (1.5% of the population) yet face highest rates of drug and mental health issues. The barriers to treatment have historic roots: there is a lack of trust in non-Native providers, limited access to care, and a different conceptualization of mental illness. Because Native Americans are such a small segment of the population, Dr. Bullard emphasized the importance of learning about Native culture by asking about spirituality, ceremonies, and whole person healing.

Panelists: Panel Discussion

Dr. Annelle Primm started the discussion by asking ***what themes cut across all groups?*** Panelists identified the stress of maintaining identity when negotiating a primarily white space (**Dr. Pumariega**), the need for an environment that makes it safe for students to hold multiple identities (**Dr. Ida**) and building trust with others who are caring and supportive, even if they aren't from the same community (**Dr. Bullard**).

The panel also touched on the importance of understanding university personnel understanding their own identity to better engage with students, the increased stress faced by students who come to campus without a supportive family base, and how to respond to covert discrimination.

The panel ended with an endorsement of the Equity in Mental Health Framework as a tool to help schools better address these issues, as it can be used to set guidelines and advocate to administrators.

Takeaways from Plenary Session 2:
1. When students arrive on campus, they often need to reconcile their personal identity with a primarily white environment
2. Students' identities and cultural backgrounds have a large impact on if and how they access mental health services
3. Building diverse and culturally competent counseling centers can lead to better engagement with students.

Takeaways and Action Steps

Breakout Sessions
Islamophobia and Its Impact on Wellness was led by **Fariha Khan, Ph.D. and Kameelah Rashas, M.S., MRP, M.Ed.** The session focused on how Muslim-American's feelings of exhaustion, shame, and guilt can prevent the community from seeking care. The session gave examples of how safe spaces can help, like how

Penn's prayer space used to be in a basement but is now in a well-lit room in a more central part of campus, making it more accessible.

Reconciling Perceptions: Multiracial/Bicultural Identity in Context was led by **Lauren Reid, Ph.D.** This session allowed participants to explore how campuses can move beyond their current monocultral set up. Biracial student are making sense of their identity within context and are trying to understand if that's congruent with how they see themselves. Because identity is in a state of becoming and understanding yourself, how can schools create more integrated spaces? The session emphasized that students have the right to identify themselves in whatever way they see fit.

What are "Safe Spaces" Anyway? was led by **Vanessa Volpe, Ph.D.** and **Viraj Patel, M.Ed.** This session was a focused discussion of "safe spaces" and began by clarifying that they aren't only physical spaces: they are places that make people welcome. With this broader definition, the session encouraged participants to think about who creates them and how that influences who uses them. Participants were asked to think about how safe spaces can exist in a center, a classroom, and within relationships. The session also discussed the balance between creating a safe space and still creating opportunities to learn and grow within it.

Honoring the Resiliency of First-Generation Low-Income Students and Supporting Them in Reaching their Full Potential was led by **Valeria DeCruz, M.Ed.** and **Jeannine Cicco Barker, Psy.D., ATR-BC**. This session was a conversation about the challenges and strengths of first-generation low-income (FGLI) students. It emphasized the importance of FGLI students working with administration to design programs that work for them, as Penn has done. A panel of three FGLI Penn students answered participant questions about their experience, how the institution is not designed for them, and what they are doing to help change it. The session also discussed the need to recognize that FGLI students are resilient, but resilience doesn't mean immunity to emotional suffering.

Student Activism: The Impact on Students of Color Activists was led by **Karu Kozuma, Ed.D**. He presented with **Rev. William C. Gipson**, **Rev. Charles L. Howard, Ph.D., Calvary Rogers, Meghana Nallajerla,** and **Estafanía Colón.** The conversation included administrators and student activists and touched on both the empowering and exhausting parts of activism. It also addressed legacy in activism (what current students can learn from alumni/previous generations and vice versa), self-care (how can students can give themselves permission to take a step back), and the complicated relationships between institutions and activists. The discussion concluded that administrations could learn to stand next to the students instead of being oppositional.

Student of Color Wellbeing at the Intersection of Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation was led by **David Rivera, Ph.D.** and **Tiffany Thompson, M.S.** The session discussed social constructs of gender and sexual identity and how society

usually addresses them in simplistic ways. The session dissected the multiverse of experiences beyond the binary and how younger generations are teaching us more about gender because they are growing up with less rigid ideas about it. How other parts of identity, like religion and socio-economic status, intersect with gender and sexual identity were addressed. The session emphasized that conversations about gender and sexual identity need to be more inclusive.

Students with International and Undocumented Statuses: Challenges, Wellbeing, and Support was led by **Yuhone He, Ph.D.** and **Kareli Lizarraga, B.A.** This session cover the importance of understanding the experiences and challenges, intersecting identities, and diversity within the broad international student community. It discussed how to build an inclusive community for everyone, especially for students who have been through intense and exhausting experiences just to get to campus. The discussion called attention to how international students have to recreate their support networks in a new country, and how well that goes depends on the receptiveness of their environment, all the way up to the political climate.

<u>**Leveraging Partnerships to Expand Resources to Students of Color**</u>
Dr. Rodolfo Victoria, Staff Psychologist and Research Coordinator at UC Irvine's Counseling Center, talked about what happens after students of color graduate in "**Leveraging Partnerships to Expand Resources to Students of Color."** He pointe out that less known about what happens after students graduate, although there is anecdotal evidence that students do struggle after leaving campus. He conducted qualitative research on student of color graduates in partnership with the UC Irvine Counseling Center, UC Irvine Alumni Center, and the Steve Fund. When he asked if they felt prepared for life after graduation, many answers were negative: they faced loans, were looking for employment, and were figuring out "how to move forward."

He pointed out that these feelings could be compounded by stress and shame if the student is first generation. There can be an overwhelming feeling that what the student has accomplished is not enough. The students he surveyed wanted more programs to prepare for transition, so UC Irvine implemented some of their suggestions, like an event all about financial literacy.

<u>**Equity in Mental Health Framework**</u>
Dr. Alfiee M. Breland-Noble, MHSc, and **LeAnna Rice, L.P.C.** presented the **Equity in Mental Health Framework**, a collaborative effort between the Steve Fund and the Jed Foundation. It consists of 10 expert-informed recommendations and implementation strategies.

Before presenting the 10 recommendations, **Dr. Breland-Noble** noted that there may not be disparities in prevalence; there are disparities in who gets care and what kind of care they get once they're in the system. Even when people of color have money, they don't seek care. Even when they do, they don't always stay in the system. The framework hopes to change this.

The 10 Recommendations are:
1. Identify and promote the mental health and well-being of students of color as a campus-wide priority
2. Engage students to provide guidance and feedback on matters of student mental health and emotional well-being
3. Actively recruit, train, and retain a diverse and culturally competent faculty and professional staff
4. Create opportunities to engage around national and international issues/events
5. Create dedicated roles to support well-being and success of students of color
6. Support and promote accessible, safe communication with campus administration and an effective response system
7. Offer a range of supportive programs and services in varied formats
8. Help students learn about programs and services by advertising and promoting through multiple channels
9. Identify and utilize culturally relevant and promising programs and practices, and collect data on effectiveness
10. Participate in resource and information sharing, within and between schools

Takeaways from Takeaways and Action Steps
1. Listening to students' different perspectives can help administrators design better academic institutions that meet student needs.
2. There is a lack of knowledge about what happens to students after graduation, but partnerships and better research can help students be successful once they leave campus.
3. The Equity in Mental Health Framework is a new and powerful tool for all campuses to systemically improve mental health care for students of color.

Closing Remarks

Dr. Meeta Kumar, Director of Outreach and Prevention for Counseling and Psychological Services at the University of Pennsylvania, delivered the closing remarks. She asked how the audience was feeling at the end of the conference. People responded that they felt motivated, empowered, refreshed, and enlightened.

Evan M. Rose, President of the Steve Fund, closed out the conference.

In closing, the Steve Fund thanks the University of Pennsylvania, Morgan Stanley, the Conference Planning Committee, speakers, and attendees for their engagement and support. The conference afforded all a unique opportunity to build awareness of the critical issues addressed, to increase knowledge, and to share important ideas that can help promote the mental health and emotional well-being of young people of color.