

Columbia School of Social Work

Office of Sponsored Projects

2023-2024 Strategic Plan

Background

Inspired by the widespread Black Lives Matter demonstrations in 2020, the Office of Sponsored Projects (OSP) initiated a project to make OSP anti-racist. OSP staff members have all been involved in related work in other settings, but hadn't previously considered how racism and white supremacy impact our work at OSP or what we can do about it.

Following Barbara Love's "developing a liberatory consciousness" [framework](#) (awareness, analysis, action, accountability), we have spent a significant amount of time on analysis. We have read about the [racial disparity](#) in research grant funding, particularly the extremely low number of awards made to Black researchers. We have learned about the [characteristics](#) of white supremacy culture as described by Kenneth Jones and Tema Okun and thought through how they show up in our work.

And we have gone through a strategic planning process to define and clarify the role of OSP using an anti-racist approach and to develop and implement practices to transform OSP into an anti-racist office. We know that this will be an ongoing process and are excited to share our anti-racist strategic plan for 2023-24.

Vision

OSP envisions an anti-racist research environment.

The research environment includes faculty, researchers, administrators and support staff, and students, as well as research participants and others affected by the implementation and outcome of research. It also includes institutional and organizational partners, and funding agencies. Our research environment also includes the offices within Social Work and at Columbia that support and facilitate research.

An anti-racist research environment at the Columbia School of Social Work is one which reflects the diversity of NYC, provides equitable access to resources and support; contains spaces and opportunities to discuss issues of importance to the community including issues of power,

racism, oppression, and privilege; and includes structures of accountability fused with ongoing dissemination of policy and trainings. At CSSW, we envision a greater sense of community and shared organizational culture that values transparency, open communication, and accomplishments at all levels. We recognize that everyone got here on their own path and that everyone needs the space to grow and develop in the way that makes sense for them.

In an institution like Columbia, the barrier to change can be very high. Academia and research are inherently hierarchical and tend to replicate structures of oppression. The field of social work has a problematic history, including paternalism and racist policies. Even in diverse environments, the aforementioned inequities affect people of color more. We understand that race is socially constructed (not biological) and therefore racial disparities are caused by racism (racist systems, white supremacy), not by inherent differences between races. We therefore plan to more closely examine structural barriers as well as our own implicit biases, and explore ways that OSP can challenge racism and systems of oppression in our daily work.

Mission

OSP supports researchers and grants, and facilitates connections among people, resources, and opportunities to move toward an anti-racist research environment.

We provide comprehensive pre-and post-award services to faculty and researchers at the School of Social Work, including proposal and budget preparation; grant and financial management; regulatory oversight to ensure compliance with sponsor and University policies; and consultation on a wide range of administrative, financial and compliance issues. OSP serves as the primary point of contact with University central grants administration offices on behalf of researchers and the School. OSP also provides training, guidance and mentorship to CSSW grant and center administrators. We work with all types of funding – government, foundation, contracts, gifts, institutional, and others.

Columbia has extensive infrastructure and support for faculty conducting research; however, this leads to a large and unwieldy bureaucracy that can be difficult to navigate for everyone and that contains implicit and explicit barriers for people of color in particular. OSP provides protection, guidance and support navigating this labyrinth, especially for new and junior faculty and non-traditional PIs.

In this role we find ourselves enforcing policies and procedures over which we have little control, and we don't have direct input into faculty hires or student admissions. We hold that there are hurdles to policy change given the inherent white supremacy characteristics within the grants environment but we understand we have influence over our own office. For that reason, we engage in ongoing activities to hold ourselves - individually and as an office – accountable.

Strategic Priorities

The following strategic priorities are areas in which OSP can help move CSSW toward being an anti-racist research environment.

- Facilitate access to resources for researchers of color and anti-racist research
- Eliminate white supremacy characteristics and incorporate collaborative approaches in organizational culture and policies
- Advocate for anti-racist policies

Activities

We have many ideas about how to move toward an anti-racist research environment. The following are activities, grouped by strategic priority, that we will focus on in 2023-24; with a reassessment mid-2024.

Facilitate access to resources for researchers of color and anti-racist research

- Provide grants management services to CSSW faculty and researchers, especially new and junior faculty, and non-traditional PIs
- Clarify and communicate that OSP offers support, protection, facilitation, and help finding solutions, including sharing information about resources available through the School and University
- Provide mentorship for career development for research administrators and support staff - in 2023 we will identify and implement one or two specific activities in this area
- Develop and provide guidance specifically for CSSW researchers to clarify how CSSW implements University practices and procedures

Eliminate white supremacy characteristics and incorporate collaborative approaches in organizational culture and policies

- Review the characteristics of white supremacy and how they show up in our work, both as an introduction to this work for new staff and a way of seeing what may have changed since 2020
- Create more informal and semi-formal spaces and opportunities for people to interact across project/center and other professional boundaries

- Compile and analyze data on racial inequities in funding at CSSW
- Prioritize people of color for future OSP hires including through mentorship
- Regularly report on OSP's status and the progress on our strategic priorities

Advocate for Anti-Racist Policies

- Advocate for activities that OSP can't implement directly, but will move us toward an anti-racist research environment
- Consider which School/University policies we'll need to work around or advocate against in order to effectively employ this and other aspects of the strategic plan

OSP Structure

The Office of Sponsored Projects is a central administrative unit of the School of Social Work, reporting to the Associate Dean for Research. OSP staff includes a director and three grants managers.

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