
CRUCIAL CONVERSATIONS

PEABODY STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES WITH RACE

May 18, 2015

OUR 2014-15 END-OF-YEAR MESSAGE TO PEABODY

This past year has been tough for issues of race and ethnicity around the world, around this nation, and here at Vanderbilt. While these challenges have been ever-present throughout human history and have certainly never diminished in importance for those actively engaged with this work, this year has featured several high-profile events that have triggered widespread discussions about who we are as a school, a nation, and a global community.

Crucial Conversations has also had a challenging year as we moved into the phase of our work that forces us all as a community to really think about who we are and how to create our ideal Peabody in light of our history and existing institutional structures. In this end-of-year message, we wish to highlight some of the work that has been done over the last year. While this is not a comprehensive list of all things that have taken place across campus, we hope to give people some idea of the steps that *Crucial Conversations* and the broader campus community have taken to move forward.

We want to thank all people who participated in our events and conversations, ranging from our diverse array of team members, to the attendees at our second *Crucial Conversations* event at the end of January, to the participants in our smaller listening sessions. Our January event's turnout was greater than last year's, for both students and faculty. We had a lot of good discussions and gathered even more feedback on the challenges that people are facing on campus, as well as potential solutions to these challenges. (A more complete summary of this feedback can be found on our website.) We found similar feedback in our smaller listening sessions, and we also heard general support for more intentional dialogues moving forward.

Beyond planning events, *Crucial Conversations* members have also been working on research and policy that could change the institutional structures here at Peabody. In this time, we have drafted initial plans for reviewing curricula and coursework and collected data on faculty diversity across Peabody's campus, among other initiatives. Of particular note is the ongoing development of an intergroup dialogue program, named "Peabody IDEAS," that we hope will pilot next fall. In this program, developing in partnership with other organizations, we hope to provide a space for people to have more intentional discussions about identity while also developing the skills for understanding, respecting, and interacting with people from all walks of life.

We have also seen action on the part of Peabody College and several departments across campus; much of which has been at least partly a result of our work. At the beginning of the year, we had the opportunity to participate in training for adjunct faculty and PhD instructors. In addition, several departments (as we understand it, three out of the five) have developed formal committees that have been tasked with addressing the issues students and faculty have raised within their own departments. These committees have dedicated themselves to a variety of tasks meant to address these challenges, including (but not limited to): soliciting more feedback from students; reviewing both undergraduate and graduate student curricula and coursework, especially for required introductory classes; establishing regular social opportunities for students and faculty to explore these issues; changing the way we recruit students and faculty of color; and training faculty to understand issues of diversity and power as well as to be conscious of these dynamics within the classroom. Lastly, the Peabody Office of Professional and Graduate Education (POPGE) has hosted several events meant to bring people of different backgrounds to the same table to learn more about issues of race and ethnicity, including the recent Iris Book Club where students and staff read and discussed Beverly Daniel Tatum's book,

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Can We Talk About Race? (We also note that several *Crucial Conversations* team members participated in the Center for Teaching's "Teaching, Difference, and Power" series, and our work was highlighted in their April symposium.)

Finally, more generally, we have seen more conversations, both formally and informally, across campus about the power that exists in these challenges and how we can move forward as a community. We are happy to see these conversations happening, and we hope that they continue.

Many things are changing, for which we are grateful. However, we want to reiterate to the campus community that we want to approach the development of this ideal community thoughtfully and comprehensively. Not only are we committed to getting things done, but also to getting things done the right way. Change takes time, and while we will continue to push for steady work on addressing these issues, we also hope people will take the time to be reflective about their practice in this work. In particular, we want to make sure that the way that power is arranged is conducive to the kinds of cross-perspective conversations and learning that needs to happen in order to move our community forward.

We need to hold each other accountable for the work that we do, and we appreciate all those who are watching our work and are also doing their best to change things within their fields of influence. This work requires being brave and stepping up to the plate to challenge each other to live our values. We are excited about what is going to happen next, and we look forward to working with all of you over the coming year. If you have any comments, questions, or would like to become more involved, please feel free to contact us (peabodycrucialconversations@gmail.com) or visit our website (my.vanderbilt.edu/crucialconversations).

Keep moving, Peabody.

Wishing everyone a wonderful summer,
The Crucial Conversations Team