

Year 2 Public Description of Work for Action Collaborative on Preventing Sexual Harassment in Higher Education

Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai

Microaggressions 101: Taking Action

Relevant Rubric Area(s): Bystander Intervention Programs

Description of Work:

An early priority of the Office of Gender Equity in 2019 was to provide educational workshops on topics relevant to improving the culture of academic science and medicine. We began with offering a workshop on “Brave Spaces”, asking people to consider how we could cultivate and invite people in to challenging discussions in open, authentic and engaged ways. With that groundwork laid, people began requesting trainings on everyday bias-based remarks and actions, and from there, we hosted our first training on microaggressions, using a gender-based lens to explore how these show up in the workspace and beginning to identify the tools and language we need to be active upstanders when we hear or witness a microaggression. At this training, we developed an Equity Action Team committed to making a digestible toolkit that would walk people through what a microaggression is while providing them with a framework for response.

COVID-19 hit and delayed the work in March of 2020, but in early 2021, we revisited the toolkit and the trainings when the Brookdale Department of Geriatrics and Palliative Medicine invited the Office for Diversity and Inclusion and the Office of Gender Equity in Science and Medicine to offer a virtual department-wide training on microaggressions. As a joint effort, these offices revamped the training to be more expansive and inclusive of a multitude of identities. At this point, the Equity Action Team working on the toolkit had determined that, after a literature review of upstander intervention models, they wanted to lead with Dr. Tasha Souza’s ACTION framework for addressing microaggressions, and the facilitators built this into the training with a relevant academic medicine example to bring the ACTION acronym to life. The training also covered how to respond if you are called in for committing a microaggression, acknowledging that microaggressions are not about intention but instead about impact and that even the most well-intentioned person may say or act in a biased-way that hurts another person.

Upon evaluation of this training, through a post-workshop survey, the facilitators found that participants saw the content as practical and important to their work. Participants cited the lack of time available for skills-focused practice as an area for growth. The Office for Diversity and Inclusion and the Office of Gender Equity revised the workshop to become a two-part series in the spring of 2021 when Elmhurst’s Pediatrics Department requested training. This allowed the facilitators and participants more time and space to practice the ACTION framework for interrupting microaggressions, and the reparative response CPR model that was co-developed by Kira Manser Keenan, Jaymie Campbell and Shannon Criniti.

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At this training, participants reviewed the models and, in small groups, worked their ways through scenarios and prompts. The facilitators grounded one scenario in an experience with colleagues and another in a supervisor's hurtful behavior. Participants practiced scripts, getting comfortable with the language and adapting it to become their own, and reflected on questions like: What surprised you? What was difficult? What felt good or promising? What do you need to learn and unlearn? In larger groups, we debriefed, acknowledging our discomforts and identifying where we need to stretch towards change.

Simultaneously, the Equity Action Team worked on finalizing the microaggressions toolkit to include a definition of microaggressions, key examples, the ACTION model, tips for reparative response, and resources for learning more. We will soon publish the toolkit on our website, and will distribute the PDF after each relevant training and through other opportunities as they arise.

It is important to note that at the trainings and in the toolkit, we always stress the multitude of resources available to our Mount Sinai community should they experience or witness bias, including Human Resources, the Compliance Hotline, Ombuds, Title IX, and Safety Net. We acknowledge, explicitly, that it may not always feel safe to deploy the ACTION framework and that, should this be the case, there are offices and individuals they should consult in, including those within the Office for Diversity and Inclusion and the Office of Gender Equity. We also stress the cumulative impact of microaggressions, and explore how the term itself may be a misnomer, as to not downplay or normalize these behaviors in our workforce.

We continue to evaluate this work through post-workshop surveys, and will continue to refine the work in order to be responsive to our colleagues' needs and current promising practices in this area.

Website for further information (if applicable): Office of Gender Equity:

<https://icahn.mssm.edu/about/gender-equity>

Office for Diversity and Inclusion: <https://mountsinai.org/about/diversity>

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