The College of Public Affairs and Community Service: An Action-Oriented College

In 1973, the University of Nebraska at Omaha created the College of Public Affairs and Community Service (CPACS). Urban Omaha community leaders proposed a college dedicated to solution oriented programs that could respond to the continued civil unrest and social injustices exposed by the Civil Rights Movement. The University of Nebraska at Omaha was pressed to action and created this college. The current vision and mission of CPACS includes using inspirational teaching methods, innovative research and transformative service, all with the goal of creating an equitable and just society. In this moment in our country’s history, the intention and action of CPACS’ vision and mission has never been more meaningful and critically needed.

CPACS leadership teams include the dean’s office, the department chairs and directors, and the dean’s advisory board. We acknowledge the pain and suffering that many of our communities of color are experiencing. We assure you that our commitment to social justice has not wavered from the college’s original mission. We acknowledge the worth and dignity of all people, and believe that in our academic programs, we teach and model these values to our students and each other. We engage in dialogue on complex societal issues such as poverty, housing and food insecurity, violence, abuse, systemic racism and oppression, diversity, equity and civil rights. We empower students, faculty, staff and community partners to take action to expose and dismantle these inequities through teaching, research and service.

We must be open toward solutions, no matter how difficult the conversations are. Arnold Mindell, whose book “Sitting in the Fire-Large Group Transformation Using Conflict and Diversity” writes that racism refers to the use of mainstream rank against people who do not have enough social power to defend themselves. Racism is always social abuse. Mindell calls for us to “sit in the fire” to experience how those impacted by these insidious acts of racism and oppression are daily realities. It rests on us collectively, and is our responsibility and charge to advocate for positive change that is inclusive and equitable. Without pressure, there is no change.

If the present environment, in addition to historical ones, makes us feel uncomfortable, then it is time to act. Have honest and candid conversations regarding racist acts that lead to heinous and unnecessary violence against people of color. It does little to align with people who think like us. Our mandate in CPACS is to walk the path and take actionable steps toward social justice. The action is to “sit in the fire.”