

Statement about "The Race Card Project" at Bethel University

Feb. 14, 2020

MISHAWAKA, IND. -- Last Friday, Bethel University began a campus-wide activity called The Race Card Project,* an exercise that has been used by schools, businesses, churches and even the military to foster a dialogue about race. The purpose was to encourage honest conversations about racial issues and show the true spectrum of perspectives on our campus. We can't address what we don't acknowledge, and so we asked for openness and honesty from our students, faculty and staff as they submitted cards with a six-word expression of their perspective on race and culture.

As expected, some of what was expressed through the project has been difficult to hear. Conversations about racial issues are messy and require us to openly listen and honor each other's history and experience. Our intent was to display all "Race Card" submissions – even if they had perspectives that were hard to hear – unless they contained profanity, threats, or were otherwise destructive.

Today we chose to remove one of the cards because it was damaging to our community. We are grieved by the sentiment expressed on the card, which was dismissive of a complex and challenging history that continues to impact us all today.

We're proud of our students who have responded thoughtfully to this particular card and to the project as a whole, and are channeling their energy into furthering our community's pursuit of understanding one another.

This week has been "I Heart BU" week, where we've been sharing on social media all of the things about Bethel that we love. And true community is built in our willingness to go hard places with each other and acknowledge difficult realities. 1 Corinthians 13:12 says, "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known." We see dimly, and we must be committed to accepting the help of God and others to help us see more fully.

We don't want relationships formed at Bethel to be superficial. We long to see God's kingdom expressed in our relationships "on earth as it is in heaven." And so we are grateful for the work our students, faculty and staff have done this week – honestly sharing their perspectives and thoughtfully responding, even when the discussion is difficult.

On Monday, submissions from The Race Card Project will be displayed outside of the auditorium prior to chapel. The stories will also be used in further learning formats around campus, for example, woven into some chapel worship times, class discussion topics or campus forums.

Throughout this semester, we are also undergoing a diversity and inclusion climate audit as part of our ongoing Diversity and Inclusion agenda. The Diversity and Inclusion agenda at Bethel University is an institutional response to achieve academic and institutional excellence for God's

glory. Through excellence, we can address the needs and inequalities of historically disadvantaged individuals or groups, while fostering a learning environment and inclusive community for all students, faculty and staff to succeed in an increasingly diverse society.

This agenda is important now more than ever. In the last five years, Bethel's student population has grown from 20 to 33% students of color. While their experiences during their time at Bethel may vary, data shows that they complete their education at a higher rate than at peer institutions. According to data from the most recent IPEDS (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System) report, Bethel University is a leader among its peers in graduating students of color. Bethel's overall graduation rate of 71% is 10% higher than that of our peer comparison group, which consists of nine schools in our region with similar size, mission and demographics. IPEDS data also shows that graduation rates among students of color were also higher overall vs. our peer comparison group – 29% higher for Asian students, 21% higher for Black or African American Students, 19% higher for Hispanic/Latino students and 37% higher for students of two or more races. And we are committed to the continued work of growing in our understanding and love for one another.

[Read more about our diversity and inclusion efforts.](#)

*The Race Card Project began in 2010 as a small experiment encouraging people to talk about race by sharing Six Word essays on their personal experiences or observations. Turning a pejorative phrase into a productive and far-reaching dialogue on a difficult topic, The Race Card Project is now an exercise used by colleges, universities, and schools across the country to HEAR the real discussion about race, culture, and identity on campus. The Project also exists as a virtual dialogue through the website, theracecardproject.com, receiving more than 50,000 Six Word stories from all over the world. The website has been used by schools, businesses, churches and even the military to foster a dialogue about race.