

Jocie Resnik '21

Certificate in
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion



**WESTTOWN
SCHOOL**

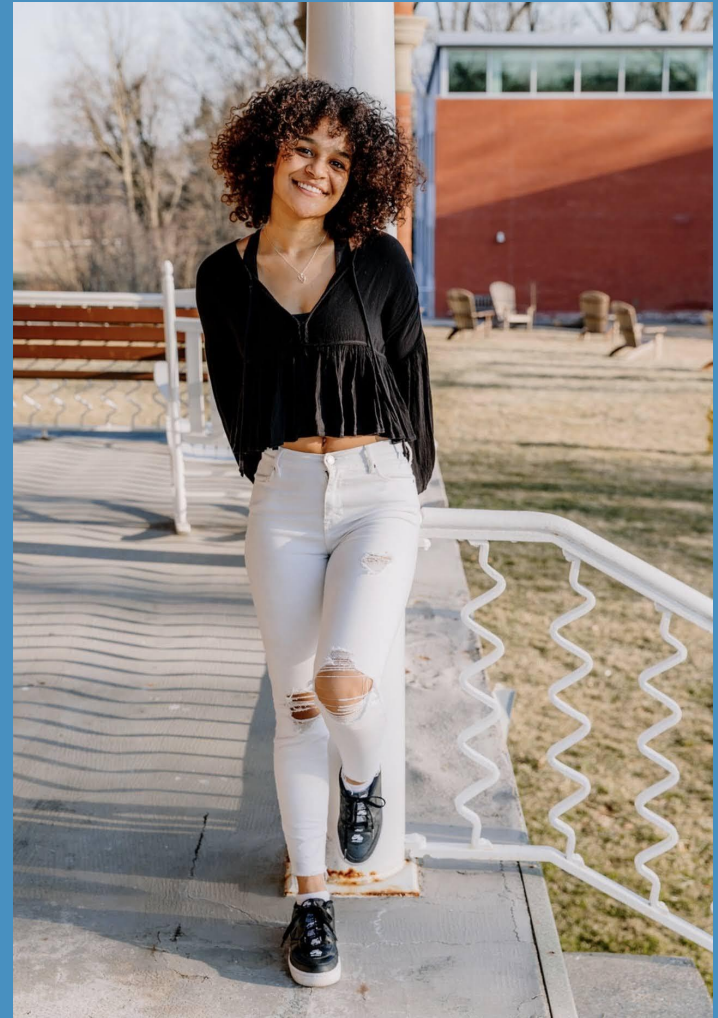
Jocie Resnik

Senior

West Chester, Pennsylvania

Entered Westtown in 2015

Deep Dive in Diversity, Inclusion, and Social Justice



Personal Statement

I wanted to participate in this deep dive because of my own experience as a student of color at Westtown. I saw this deep dive as an opportunity to learn more about the student experience at Westtown in terms of diversity and to see where we are as an institution on inclusivity. Not only did I want to be able to learn from this experience but I wanted the community to gain more insight as well. I thought it was essential now more than ever to use my deep dive to benefit the school community as a whole. I will refer to recent events and experiences throughout this presentation.

Coursework Required for the Certificate

Certificate Courses Taken Junior Year

- Contemporary Fiction: Women Speak

Certificate Courses Taken Senior Year

- African American Experience
- Environmental Justice
- Modern Africa
- Nonfiction Writing
- Religion, Revolution & Resistance

Project Work Required for the Certificate: 1

Exploration of Systemic Racism Using Film Miniseries *When They See Us*

I watched the miniseries *When They See Us* and the accompanying Oprah Winfrey documentary as a part of my Nonfiction Writing class. I wanted to learn about mass incarceration from a personal perspective. Since the movie is based on a true story of four young boys, I found it even more relatable to recent events of police brutality. The movie specifically wasn't required for my class, but I think it should be. With the number of young Black male students in our school, I think this movie would be a good way to get them more invested in social justice and would be more relatable to them.

Project Work Required for the Certificate: 2

Peer Interviews about Their Experiences at Westtown and Their Recommendations

Since I wanted my deep dive specifically focused on the student experience and how to improve that, I reached out to a few of my peers and asked them one of these questions.

1. The Westtown Bubble: Do you think that Westtown prepares its students of color for the discrimination and harshness of the outside world?
2. Cancel Culture: How do you think Westtown can include white students and faculty in conversations about race in a more productive way? How do we get rid of this feeling that race conversations are a direct attack or punishment?
3. Feeling Heard: Does/Has Westtown created a space where you specifically have felt heard and fully comfortable being yourself? Why and/or how?

Project Work Required for the Certificate: 2

Peer Interviews about Their Experiences at Westtown and Their Recommendations

1. **Student 1 (Class of 2021):** “I feel like I've been sheltered... I don't think my race has ever been addressed at Westtown.” and “I do have worries being that my parents are white.. I'm going to be on my own and just seen as Asian.”
2. **Student 2 (Class of 2021):** “... they have all these initiatives happening, which they aren't telling the students and they should ... I think most white students are afraid to talk about race because they don't want to get called out for it.”

Project Work Required for the Certificate: 2

Peer Interviews about Their Experiences at Westtown and Their Recommendations

3. **Student 3 (Class of 2022):** “I think it's much more valuable to teach black/brown kids about how the world will treat them than it is to teach white kids what not to say so that we all feel more comfortable.”
4. **Student 4 (Class of 2022):** “Yes, I believe people have listened to me and gave me the platform to get what I had to say off my chest but I never felt “heard.” This is mainly because I have not seen anything change by what I have said or have suggested. This is not just an administrative problem either. I believe the culture at Westtown has allowed us to not care or brush off what our peers have to say. People will listen respectfully, but they are not retaining and actually thinking about what anyone says.”

Project Work Required for the Certificate: 2

Peer Interviews about Their Experiences at Westtown and Their Recommendations

5. **Student 5 (Class of 2021):** “moving the conversation to them...somewhere they can't hide from it” and “Asking specific questions on how race affects their daily lives, they have the privilege not to think about it.”
6. **Student 6 (Class of 2022):** “Yes, Westtown is progressively better than some places but I personally don't think Westtown is the place the school thinks they are ... Westtown has a pattern of not listening to their students, specifically women and women of color. They downplay our experiences as if they aren't valid and don't deserve to be heard. Westtown needs to do better and be better for their community.”

Extended Project for the Certificate

Deeper Understanding of Restorative Justice and How It Could Be Used at Westtown

In my religion class, one of the units focused on restorative justice. After learning about its past usage in schools as well as its pros and cons, I wanted to explore the idea of using this at Westtown. By definition, “restorative justice is an approach to justice in which one of the responses to a crime is to organize a meeting between the victim and the offender, sometimes with representatives of the wider community.” In practice, it really means finding a form of justice that is beneficial to the perpetrator, the victim, and the affected community. So often it's forgotten that even those who are not involved may still feel affected by what has occurred.. The false idea exists that this is letting people off the hook or giving them an easy way out; punishment may still be necessary in some cases, but in others education or personal reflection may be more beneficial to actually getting the student’s mindset to change along with their behavior. I do think that restorative justice could have a place within Westtown’s disciplinary process.

Critical Reflection for the Certificate

When They Call You a Terrorist: A Black Lives Matter Memoir

I've read this book a number of times, and each time I take something new away. The book is a personal narrative from one of the founders of BLM. The book takes you through the journey of her life while also talking about the core values of the movement. I learned more about the whys of the movement, instead of just the whats, which is essential to understanding the value and purpose of BLM. I would suggest that this book be required in at least one class every Westtown student takes.

Immersion Dimension

US Meeting with 8th Graders about Clubs & Affinity Groups in US

As someone who came through Westtown's middle and upper schools, I know there is a gap between the 8th grade and the upper school. In the past, we've had buddy systems in place, but only for a day or singular event. My hope and plan is that in the future, communication and the relationship between 8th graders and upper schoolers can be stronger.

The idea would be for US affinity group leaders, US student leaders, and others who feel inclined to visit the 8th graders periodically throughout the year. This could be done in groups or in partnership depending on interest. My suggestion would be to send a form to the 8th graders to gauge their interest and to see which upper schoolers would be helpful for them to talk to. After US students explain either their club or leadership position, I think continuing conversation should just be casual and up to what the 8th graders want to know.

Extracurricular On-Campus Opportunity

Membership in the Following DEI Clubs or Affinity Groups:

BSU (Black Student Union): Head Senior Year

Freshman, Sophomore, Junior, Senior

BWAG (Black Women's Affinity Group)

Sophomore & Junior

MSU (Mixed Student Union)

Sophomore & Junior

SOCA (Students of Color Association)

Freshman, Sophomore, Junior

Capstone Project (1 of 2)

Analysis of Events at Westtown This Past School Year

1. Black @ WT
 - a. Allowing racist behavior to exist in our school with impunity
 - b. Unintentional policing of Black students (discouraging the Black community)
 - i. Dining room
 - ii. Dress coding
 - iii. Dances
 - c. Lack of interest shown in making real change at Westtown
Communication is little to none or it is unhelpful

Capstone Project (2 of 2)

Analysis of Events at Westtown This Past School Year

2. Silencing in the Meeting for Worship Space

How do we want to use the Meeting House?

- a. “Individual seeking doesn't force people to confront their whiteness.”
- b. “I have been in so many Westtown Meetings which were about issues facing the community. Meeting for Worship should be all about helping the community.” - former faculty member

3. Asian Students Silenced

How do we continue to lift up one another?

- a. Joint affinity group meetings
- b. Understanding each other's feelings and the perspective of Westtown

Personal Reflection (Part 1)

Before I share my personal reflection and suggestions for Westtown, I want to say this: I am in no way attacking the administration or teachers at Westtown. I know that the events of this past year have not only affected the students of color but the teachers and faculty of color as well. Westtown has always been a place where I thought I could be comfortable and I thought I was heard. As many of my peers have said, that's not true. Over my time at Westtown, I've come to love this place but have also come to resent the way it treats my peers and me. It's with great disappointment that I say we honestly haven't done enough, and this change that we all so desperately want and need isn't going to happen overnight. I say all that to recognize that I know some of the suggestions I have for Westtown will take time. That's going to feel unsatisfactory to some people, but in order to make deep and lasting changes, it's going to take time.

Personal Reflection (Part 2)

1. Westtown needs to cleanse the narrative that race conversations are optional, while also making them spaces where white students and faculty don't feel attacked. I've heard from my white peers that they want to feel more comfortable talking about race and how they also feel students of color need to be more willing to understand what they have to say.
2. My second suggestion would be for Westtown to follow through with their words and to be more transparent. One of the biggest asks that I've heard from students, parents and various community members is that there needs to be more transparency. This school claims to do a lot of work behind the scenes creating councils or initiatives, but nobody knows about them. To the greater community, it appears as if Westtown hasn't followed through on their word or that they don't care, when that's not the case.

Personal Reflection (Part 3)

I want to end by saying this. I know my suggestions aren't exact and I know that they alone will not change Westtown for the better. Including students and parents in conversations about what needs to change at Westtown will help tremendously. Hearing directly from people these decisions or initiatives will give everyone a better sense of what our school needs.