Race, Ethnicity and the Student Experience

Campaign for Racial Awareness and Equality (OUSU)

Wednesday 1 October 2014
What is CRAE?

The Campaign for Racial Awareness and Equality (CRAE) is the only group at Oxford dedicated to creating a more just and inclusive student experience at the University through action and engagement with racial diversity and difference.
CRAE’S RESEARCH
2014 Race Summit data

• 100 Voices Campaign: Black and Minority Ethnic Students of Oxford Speak Out:
  • Participatory action project, consisting of 70+ in-depth interviews, each up to 2 hours long
  • Questions on family, background, social life and educational experience

• 2014 Student Race Survey
  • University-wide student survey, 528 respondents
  • Quantitative and qualitative questions on student experience concerning race and ethnicity
Four themes identified:

• Lack of diversity in the student body
• Curriculum that fails to capture the diversity of non-Western thought, people and cultures
• A pervasive culture that struggles to welcome differences in race and ethnicity
• A strong sense of social isolation among BME students
Environment

- 5.5% of white respondents: yes
- 59.3% of BME respondents: yes (12% of total)
"I was told of an incident during the college photoshoot where, upon seeing the two students he was going to be photographed with, a tutor responded 'ah excellent, a woman and an ethnic'."
Student diversity

“There is no denying that Oxford is just so white… Other than calling racists out when you can, and supporting and encouraging black (especially) and other non-white applicants, what can you do? When I have brought black applications to Oxford as part of my college's outreach, they were shocked by the whiteness of the city and the university. It deterred them. They played the "count the black people" game and came up with a total of eight people in the whole day.”
Discussion and openness

- White respondents: 61.7% no
- BME respondents: 81.2% no
Curriculum diversity

“It means that BME students are made to feel inferior and our identities are subsumed, almost as if to say there are no academics from other backgrounds that haven’t made huge developments in their field. It’s said implicitly in the curriculum we study. After a while we begin to accept these things as being natural when we shouldn’t... you accept the idea that Europeans and Eurocentric voices are the most authoritative and legitimate!”
Welfare

- White respondents: 69% yes
- BME respondents: 39.1% yes

White respondents: would you feel comfortable talking to your college's welfare and peer support group about race/ethnicity?

BME respondents: would you feel comfortable talking to your college's welfare and peer support group about race?
Oxford Culture

“Last year, a pair of students blacked up for a bop, apparently completely unaware that this offensive.”

“I feel like sometimes porters are especially distrustful and cautious when they see a black face. In one incident in particular, I showed my Bod card as requested but the porter insisted on me handing it in and then collecting it when I left the college. I had never heard of porters doing this before and no one I know has been asked to do the same.”
Social isolation

- White respondents: 64.3% yes
- BME respondents: 42.5% yes

White students: do you feel that there are enough, if any, safe spaces to discuss race and ethnicity at Oxford?

BME students: do you feel that there are enough, if any, safe spaces to discuss race and ethnicity at Oxford?
Social isolation

“I think that fact that the college system potentially isolates people of color doesn't help either. It's hard to speak up about something being racist when you may be the only person of color in that JCR meeting.”

“There are very few institutional spaces in Oxford where you can have a regular black gathering that is supported and funded and has its own infrastructure of history.”
So what’s happening?

• Ideas and Outcomes:
  • Pro–Vice–Chancellor Professor Sally Mapstone’s commitment to curriculum review
  • Proposal to work out having a BME fellow in every college
  • Proposal for a peer mentoring scheme
  • Greater awareness and networking among interested people
Other CRAE projects

• Establishment of a BME rep in every JCR and MCR
• Establishment of a BME fellow in all colleges and departments
• Racial awareness workshops for all incoming freshers and staff
• In-depth investigation into BME-specific welfare
• Continue to encourage and work out strategies to increase BME staff hiring and retention
• Continue to work for an equal and representative curriculum across all divisions and disciplines
• Continue to develop and refine strategies to support and encourage BME access
How to get in contact:

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QUESTIONS?