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Department of Communication and Journalism lecture discusses how to foster dialogues around race in the classroom

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Department of Communication and Journalism lecture discusses how to foster dialogues around race in the classroom

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Photo by David Jakacky.



Abigail Martin (https://mainecampus.com/author/amartin/)



On October 19, 2020, as part of the CMJ Fall 2020 Colloquium, Laura Rickard and the Department of Communication and Journalism here at the University of Maine held "Dialoguing About Race," a lecture about race and the classroom. This lecture featured three women with inspiring backgrounds: Jaquel Eley, Amber Kennedy and Lauren Babb.

Eley, originally from Boston, Massachusetts and attending Albany State University, earned her master's at UMaine. Kennedy graduated from UMaine with a bachelor's in communications, went on to earn her master's and now works in health and wellness. Babb is a current second-year Ph.D. student in chemistry.

The lecture brought to the audience's attention that criticism can be fuel for growth and satisfaction in one's life. "Dialoguing About Race" aimed to discuss the important topic of race within the context of education in a meaningful, inclusive way.

Beginning the lecture, Eley created a safe space for discussion by explaining that being singled out isn't necessarily bad but can be empowering. She accomplished this by providing insight into a situation she experienced in middle school, setting the stage for proving that the experiences within the early years of education are impactful on people's lives.

Babb continued the conversation by explaining that there are a variety of metrics to someone's worth than just measured achievement, explaining how experiences shape one's beliefs and levels of confidence. All of the speakers then touched on how opinions and facts differ, urging the audience to understand how interpretations may vary depending on who is measuring your achievement.

A guest chimed-in and brought to the viewers' attention that the criticisms of one metric doesn't mean failure, though it certainly is difficult to work through when the criticisms are the loudest voice in one's life. It was then stressed that professors and parents establish that students have agency in the classroom.

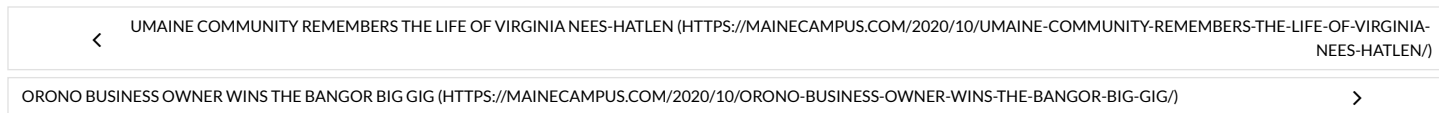
A major part of the panel focused on how to discuss race within the classroom. Additionally, the panel spoke of what to do in a situation where blatant racism occurs in the classroom setting. Understanding that there may be subcontext to one's racial beliefs that are unknown to their fellow students and even unknown to staff members is critical to a holistic approach to racial traumas.

"There isn't a right way, but not addressing the issue is the wrong way," Kennedy said.

Highlighting the importance of empathetic approaches by teachers, the hosts of the lecture addressed how to begin classroom discussions regarding race, determining that if staff members do not know how to open up the discussion of race and racism, the best, most valuable thing they can do, is at least acknowledge that inequity is there.

Additionally, staff members must acknowledge that the perspective and facts about race are important because that allows for students to feel like real people in the classroom, allowing for students to feel more comfortable and enabling this dialogue in the future.

If one wants to find information for similar events that may be happening within the upcoming weeks or months, one can do so by finding the Calendar tab on the University of Maine website. Once one is at the calendar tab, click "Online Events." At this point, you may further refine the search. To find this particular lecture, further direct oneself to "Conferences and Workshops" within the "Faculty and Staff Development" dropdown.



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