On Campus

Columbia Receives $5M to Develop Racial-Justice Curriculum

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Bruce Western (Courtesy of Racial Justice and Abolition Democracy Curriculum Project)

A team of Columbia scholars has been awarded a three-year, $5 million grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to develop a college-level curriculum focused on racial inequalities in the US criminal-justice system. The multidisciplinary curriculum, which will include full syllabi and teaching materials for both in-class and online instruction, will be available for use across the nation in universities and colleges, prisons, and community settings, according to the project's leaders. They say that it will be suitable for advanced undergraduates or a one-year master's degree spanning the humanities, arts, social sciences, policy, and law.

The effort, called the Racial Justice and Abolition Democracy Curriculum Project, is being led by Bernard E. Harcourt, a Columbia legal scholar and political scientist who is the founding director of the University's Initiative for a Just Society, which brings critical theory to bear on current social issues; and Bruce Western, a Columbia sociologist who heads the University's Justice Lab and its Square One Project, both of which promote research on issues pertaining to race, poverty, and social justice in the US.

Harcourt and Western say that a diverse team of Columbia scholars will collaborate with community-based organizations across the US in designing, developing, and testing the new curriculum.

"Institutions of higher education have a responsibility to redress the gross racial injustices that today permeate our society — injustices that they themselves have contributed to over past decades and centuries," reads a statement on the project's website. "Far too often, these institutions talk about racial injustice and even teach about it, but do not concretely work with community partners to actually redress the patterns and practices of racial discrimination."



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