

OFFICE OF DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION HOLDS WEBINAR ON RACIAL TENSIONS

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After nearly two weeks of nationwide protests, the Office of Diversity and Inclusion hosted a panel discussing ways that Ohio State can address racial injustice Monday. Credit: Joseph Schmittgen | Former Lantern Reporter

After nearly two weeks of nationwide protests, the Office of Diversity and Inclusion hosted a panel discussing ways that Ohio State can address racial injustice Monday that drew almost 2,000 viewers.

The panelists discussed increasing access to higher education for underrepresented and low-income groups, employing diverse faculty and staff, and placing an emphasis on self-education of racial injustices. The conversation comes after the recent high-profile deaths of black Americans due to police use of force and criticisms of systemic racism in many institutions.

The panel included leaders from the College of Social Work, Office of Diversity and Inclusion, the Wexner Medical Center at Ohio State, Strategic Enrollment Planning and the Department of English.

In an introductory statement, University President Michael V. Drake expressed his gratitude that people are having conversations about and sharing their experiences with racism.

"This is an important discussion of the critical issues that face and that have faced us day in and day out, year in and year out, century in and century out since the founding of our country and we need to continue to do what we can to make progress moving forward," Drake said.

Jacquelyn Meshelemiah, associate vice provost for diversity and inclusion, said the 400-year history of racism in America is not a new issue despite recent incidents.

"We are in a period of time where people are saying 'enough is enough' and it's time to seize the moment and do something different to address racism in this country," Meshelemiah said.

Stephanie Sanders, associate vice president of strategic enrollment planning, said she actively works to bring diverse representation to the Ohio State student body. However, recruiting students from different backgrounds is only part of expanding access to higher education, she said.

"We have to recognize all the reasons that students are not equal in their K-12 experience. That is racism and inequity alive and well," Sanders said. "We must make sure that all students, regardless of their background, regardless of where they were educated in K-12, that they have access to all that the university has to offer."

Don Pope-Davis, dean of the College of Education and Human Ecology, said he has doubled down on recruiting some of the best faculty of color.

"The way you can recruit and retain students of color is to have faculty and staff look more like them, so they can see representations of them," Pope-Davis said.

Not only does hiring a diverse faculty help to retain students, but it ensures that the university looks more like the state of Ohio and the larger society, Pope-Davis said.

According to the spring 2019 15th-day enrollment report, of the 58,491 students at Ohio State's Columbus campus, 3,744 — 6.4 percent — were black, and according to Ohio's 2018 American community survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau, 14.3 percent of Ohio's population is black.

In addition to discussing changes at Ohio State, the panelists offered guidance for self-education on racial issues.

One proposed educational solution includes releasing syllabi from African American and African studies professors so that resources — including books and films — that are normally restricted to a university setting can be circulated more broadly to the public.

Pope-Davis said individuals must also reflect on their own experiences so that they aren't viewing the information and experiences they're seeing as being separate and unrelated to themselves.

"If you do not have the ability to self-reflect, it is difficult to change," Pope-Davis said.

Combatting racism takes more than simply avoiding things that are offensive or using racial slurs, Andrea Williams, associate professor of English and moderator of the panel, said; it is an issue that predates the establishment of Ohio State.

"Challenging white supremacy and racism is everyone's issue, it's everyone's responsibility," Williams said. "It will be necessary for us to extend this both with our words and our actions."



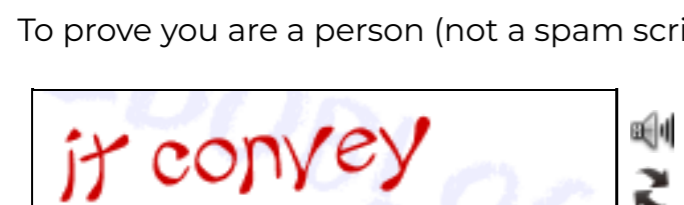
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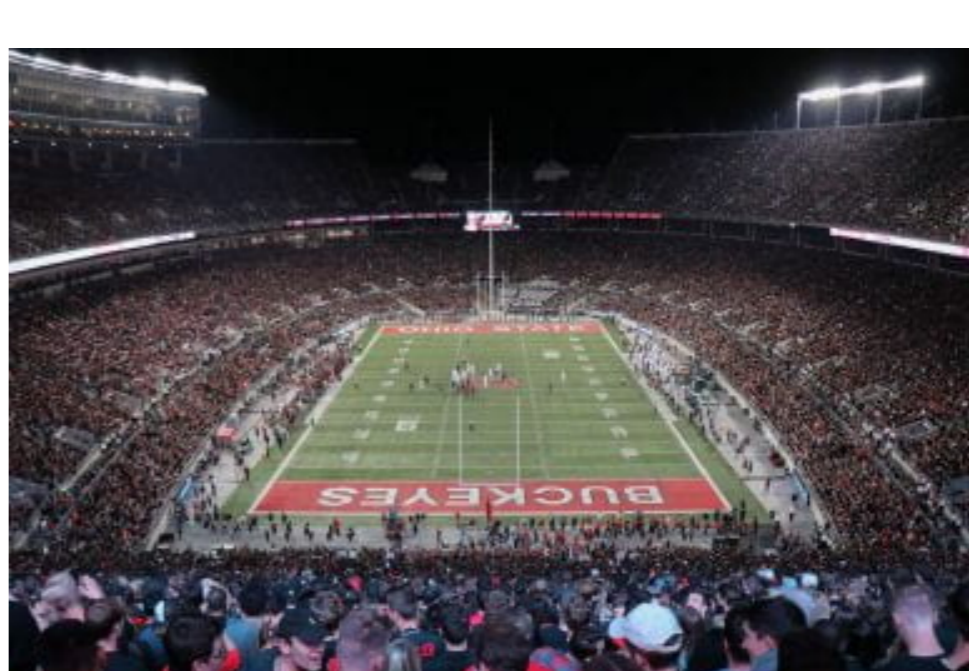
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