THE 2014 - 2015 ANTI-RACISM MSW THESES: AN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Executive Summary

Introduction

In anticipation of the 20th anniversary of Smith College School for Social Work’s Anti-Racism Commitment [ARC], the School commissioned a set of research projects to look back upon and examine how the commitment has evolved over time, and its felt impact on the School’s curriculum, faculty, students, and alumni. First, the resident faculty, through a series of internal discussions, broadly identified topic areas they considered important to examine. MSW and doctorate students were then given the opportunity to narrow the focus further to topics most salient for them. Six MSW students were selected to conduct studies from the final list of topics as individual theses under faculty supervision during the 2014-2015 academic year. The intent: Examine the School’s efforts in upholding its now twenty year commitment to “becoming an anti-racism institution” and offer recommendations to further the process (Smith, 2011).

This document is the Executive Summary of the findings and recommendations made within each and across the six theses. The first section of this summary provides a glimpse into the methodologies used within each project: the theses’ titles, research methods, and sources of data. The second section highlights and summarizes findings from each of the projects. This section begins with alumni reflections, connecting the ARC’s twenty year evolution with alumni’s evolving sense of its impact on their professional and personal development. For this section, the three theses involving alumni respondents (Foster, 2015; Gonzalez, 2015; Mason, 2015) are discussed in aggregate. This summary then presents findings from Forman’s (2015), Budhan's (2015), and Wesson's (2015) theses, examining the MSW required course curricula, the anti-racism field assignment [ARFA], and the SCSSW biannual progress reports, respectively, to gain insight into more current and specific manifestations of the ARC. Finally, the summary con-
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Includes with three comprehensive recommendations based upon recurring themes that emerged across studies. As current MSW student researchers, we hope the School will consider the recommendations put forth when re-evaluating efforts to uphold the commitment and setting out potential future directions.

Methodologies of the Component Theses

First, a brief overview of the six “anti-racism theses” on which this executive summary is based:

Megan Foster: In “The perennial blessing: An exploratory study of the influence of Smith College School for Social Work’s Anti-Racism Commitment,” Foster interviewed fifteen alumni who graduated after 1995 individually or in small focus groups. Of her fifteen participants, twelve identified as White, and three identified as people of color - one as biracial, one as African American, and one as Filipino-American. All participants were practicing clinical social work in the last year.

Nina Gonzalez: In a “Survey on Smith College School for Social Work’s Anti-Racism Commitment,” Gonzalez used a mixed methods survey to collect qualitative and quantitative data from 270 alumni respondents. Within her sample, 214 respondents identified as White; 48 respondents identified as people of color: Black and/or African American (n=16); Latin American (n=9); Hispanic (n=7); American Indian or Alaskan Indian (n=7); Asian Indian (n=6); Chinese (n=5); Korean (n=4); Filipino (n=1), and Vietnamese (n=1). Additionally, 97 of the sample graduated between 1995 and 2004, while 167 graduated between 2005 and 2014.

Hannah Mason: In “Alumni of Color’s perceptions about the Smith College School for Social Work Anti-Racism Commitment: Examining twenty years since its adoption,” Mason conducted
semi-structured phone interviews with 15 current and past Council for Students of Color leaders. Of her participants, six graduated between 1996 and 2005, and nine graduated between 2006 and 2015. Respondents identified as Black and/or African American (n=7), Asian (n=3), mixed race (n=3), and Latino (n=2).

Katie Forman: In “Smith College School for Social Work’s required MSW curricula and the School’s Anti-Racism Commitment: A qualitative content analysis,” Forman performed a qualitative content analysis of the 13 required MSW courses’ curricula (17 curricula in total).

Jennifer Budhan: In “An examination of Smith’s Anti-Racism Commitment: Twenty years of the Anti-Racism Field Assignment,” Budhan reviewed the Anti-Racism Field Assignment [ARFA] requirements from 2001 and 2014, and performed a qualitative content analysis of 80 randomly selected student ARFA proposals and final reports (40 from 2001 and 40 from 2014).

Eve Wesson: In “The work towards being an anti-racist institution: A qualitative content analysis of Smith College School for Social Work’s progress reports,” Wesson reviewed the seven bi-annual internal reports faculty fill out every two years highlighting anti-racism relevant work by the School and individual faculty, in total amassing reports from 1999 to 2011.

Within each of these theses, students discussed their unique identities and positionalities as MSW students; as White-identified people (four of the six) or people of color (two of the six); and as people with a variety of differing social locations. Students discussed how these identities and positionalities influenced their evaluative lenses and inevitably resulted in some biases in their data reporting.

Collectively, these students examined seven bi-annual reports, 17 required MSW course syllabi, 80 completed Anti-Racism Field Assignments, and surveyed or interviewed 300 alumni.
Summary of Findings

A collective summary of the thesis findings are provided below, divided into five sections. The first two sections pertain to information and themes from alumni respondents spanning the last twenty years: (1) Alumni views of the ARC’s impact on them personally and professionally, and (2) Alumni views of the disparities between the educational and community experience of White-identified students and students of color. The three remaining sections review more current and explicit manifestations of the ARC: (3) Summer 2014 required MSW course curricula; (4) The Anti-Racism Field Assignment (comparing projects completed in 2001 and 2014); and (5) SCSSW’s reporting and evaluative practices as pertaining to the ARC (drawing from the SCSSW biannual progress reports).

Alumni Perspectives

ARC’s Impact Over Its Twenty-Year Lifetime

We begin with alumni perspectives based on graduation year to highlight how changes made within SSW since the inception of the ARC parallel alumni’s reflections on their personal and professional development while at Smith and beyond. As would be expected, both implicit and explicit improvements made over the years to SCSSW (via curricula changes, increased students, faculty, and administration of color, and increased resources/supports on campus) seem to coincide with more favorable responses of alumni over time regarding the School’s commitment to becoming an anti-racism institution. For example, Gonzalez (2015) found a statistically significant difference between alumni who graduated between 1995 to 2005 and 2006 to 2014 regarding how impactful they found the ARC as students based on graduation year, with respondents graduating after 2005 feeling significantly more influenced by the ARC. Although about half
(50%) of Gonzalez’ 270 respondents stated that, initially, the ARC was a deciding factor in their decision to attend Smith, upon graduation, 91% of respondents “agreed” to “strongly agreed” that the Anti-Racism Commitment [ARC] is necessary, and 81% “agreed” to “strongly agreed” the ARC is effective (Gonzalez, 2015, p. 43).

Alumni’s racial identities generally factored largely in alumni respondents’ reflections of the ARC based on years at SSW. More specifically, alumni of color who graduated in the more distant past reported the school environment and educational experience at SCSSW as unsafe, using words like “triggering,” “betrayed,” and “traumatized” (Mason, 2015, p. 44). In contrast, more recently graduated alumni of color (particularly from 2011 onwards) more frequently expressed appreciation for the ARC right away after graduation (Mason, 2015). In general, the majority of the 300 alumni surveyed or interviewed (Foster, 2015; Gonzalez, 2015; Mason, 2015) called the ARC “really thoughtful,” “a bold stance,” and “an excellent unobtainable goal (but that’s what a goal is supposed to be)” (Mason, 2015, p. 37).

Findings across alumni responses (n=300) suggest that the ARC contributes to the development of clinically-relevant knowledge and skills, including (in no particular order):

➢ A deepened curiosity and openness to the complexities and individuality of the human experience;

➢ Heightened awareness of the influence of race and racism in the lives of one’s self and others, as well as the barriers within social structures and institutions;

➢ Heightened attention to one’s own experiences of power, privilege, and oppression;

➢ Increased confidence in dealing with racism in one’s personal life and within their clinical practice or agency;
➢ A bent for social justice; and

➢ Increased ability to sit with discomfort and a “not-knowing” stance.

According to the Smith alumni, these clinical skills seemed to be more pronounced in students who graduate from the SCSSW program. Gonzalez (2015), for instance, quoted one respondent who stated: “Graduates from other programs seem to know that racism exists but do not feel responsible for, or committed to, its end” (p. 48). Additionally, respondents observed non-Smith graduates typically as lacking the foundational and historical context necessary to effectively discuss racism; were more likely to remain silent about the challenges involving racism (particularly regarding racial diversity and its effect on working with clients); relied more heavily on tokenizing and/or ascribing stereotypes to clients; and less passionate about anti-racism work (Gonzalez, 2015). Of similar note, Mason (2015) highlighted an example given by one of her participants:

At my job, when doing assessments, there’s a question about culture, and people just skip it. They’re like: “that’s not important.” People don’t really know what to say for that or they’re confused and so they skip that question. Whereas at Smith they would say that that’s an important question to ask, talking about race (p. 63).

Across studies, Smith alumni suggest Smith graduates as more likely than non-Smith graduates to “go there” with clients — to bring up the topic of race in agencies, clinical work, and their non-professional lives (Foster, 2015; Gonzalez, 2015). Smith students are less likely to rely on euphemisms like “culture” and “diversity,” and are more generally attuned to racial micro-aggressions (Mason, 2015). Additionally, alumni reported that Smith students maintain a greater nuanced perspective of their clients, consider their own power and privilege, and practice critical self-reflection (Foster, 2015; Gonzalez, 2015; Mason, 2015).
Disparities Between the Educational and Community Experience of White-Identified Students and Students of Color

In addition to the notable differences between respondents’ reflections based on graduation year, respondents’ racial and ethnic identities were significant factors in the alumni’s reported experiences of SCSSW and the ARC. Similar to the findings of a previous SCSSW student thesis (Curtis, 2010), surveyed White-identified alumni tended to credit their SCSSW education with heightening their self-awareness around areas of privilege and oppression as well as with improving their awareness about the impact of one’s environment (Gonzalez, 2015). While some students of color experienced these same areas of growth, they also credited their SCSSW education with strengthening their self-advocacy skills, largely as the result of needing to confront racism within the program as it occurred (Foster, 2015; Gonzalez, 2015; Mason, 2015).

The findings highlighted two major concerns: the disparate learning experience of and the imbalanced learning environment felt by students of color. Mason’s (2015) respondents — 15 alumni of color and former leaders in the Council for Students of Color — most explicitly vocalized these concerns; however, these findings are also captured within Forman (2015), Foster (2015), and Gonzalez’s (2015) research. Primarily, some respondents noted that Smith, despite its Anti-Racism Commitment, teaches from a White normative model, i.e. the curriculum on racism is predominantly geared towards the learning of White students. Respondents referred to case examples and educational material generally as featuring White clinicians, and the theory taught as written by and for White people (Mason, 2015). Beyond theory, several respondents of color also noted that material on racism was predominantly aimed at teaching the concepts of race and racism to White students. One alumni of color noted the different learning needs: “I
don't even feel like it's something that I need to be educated about because it is my lived experience, whereas for some White students, not even racism itself but race in general isn't something that has been on their radar” (Mason, 2015, p. 42).

When educational material did feature people of color, they were often the clients (paired with White clinicians) from stereotypical social locations, i.e. a poor Latina woman experiencing domestic violence (Gonzalez, 2015; Mason, 2015). Respondents from both Mason’s (2015) and Gonzalez’s (2015) studies also highlighted the tendency for race related issues to be described within a Black-White and/or White-people of color dichotomy, with little attention to racial issues that exist among communities of color. The alumni of color respondents generally expressed wanting training on how to: (1) work with White clients as a clinician of color, or (2) work with clients of color from non-stereotypical social locations, for example: working with a wealthy Latina woman as a Black male clinician.

Another discussion topic that emerged across theses related to Smith’s psychodynamic focus. Many respondents, across racial and ethnic identities, expressed appreciation for this theoretical framework and foundation, and reported using this framework within their ongoing clinical practice (Foster, 2015; Gonzalez, 2015; Mason, 2015). However, some respondents noted an inconsistency and/or infrequency in which the Eurocentric components of theories were problematized (Mason, 2015). One respondent summarized that psychodynamic theory is “a very White middle class way of healing” and does not always reflect the communities social workers serve in current times (Mason, 2015, p. 42). Based on the curricula review (Forman, 2015), many of the theory based courses introduced critiques via in-class discussions, readings, and assignments; however, this too was inconsistent across courses, and certain curricula only introduced
critiques and/or anti-oppression, anti-racism, feminist, or post-modernist theories at the course’s end.

Regarding the imbalanced learning environment, students of color frequently reported feeling unduly burdened to enact the ARC (Mason, 2015). Specifically, interviewed alumni frequently mentioned numerous occasions that “hurtful, tense, or inappropriate incidents regarding race and racism in the classroom” could have been minimized with better faculty intervention (Mason, 2015, p. 40). These respondents noted resident and adjunct faculty alike who included issues of race into the curricula, yet would gloss over the topic or resort to examples using racial stereotypes. Other professors steered the conversation away from racism, potentially because of discomfort in managing difficult interactions. As a result, students of color often felt expected to speak in order to fill awkward silences and/or bring attention to the incident. Generally, these students were the only student of color or in the minority in the class. Alumni also felt expected to maintain professionalism when caught off guard by racial micro-aggressions, having to “comfort” White students’ feelings of guilt or discomfort. Not only were micro-aggressions left unprocessed, but the lack of facilitation stifled further and deeper conversations about race and racism (Mason, 2015). Given that nearly 55 percent of Gonzalez’s (2015) 270 alumni participants “agreed” to “strongly agreed” that the ARC created tension between students, impacting their sense of safety when interacting with other students, attention should be paid to the types of discomfort experienced and how faculty facilitation can manage discomfort to maximize and equalize learning for students of color and White students (p. 43).

As antidotes to these issues, alumni of color respondents found student-of-color-only learning spaces (for example: the Perspectives of Clinicians of Color section of the “Racism in
the U.S.” course) as crucial, and similarly cited appreciation for classes that critiqued and adapted historically White theories to use with clients of color (Mason, 2015, p. 41-42). In addition, respondents of color spoke of the Council for Students of Color as a space for students of color to focus on their own experiences of racism, free from the task of educating or comforting White students — some referring to Council as a place to “recharge” (Mason, 2015). Mason’s (2015) respondents further identified the following school structures as “essential to the success of the ARC”: school-wide events discussing race, racism, and oppression (via lectures, symposiums, guest speakers), support from faculty and the administration (particularly ones who attended Council meetings or held open office hours), the Anti-Racism Task Force, the Bertha Capen Reynolds Fellows, and the Unlearning Racism group.

**Recommendations to Specifically Address this Imbalance.** Alumni’s concerns with poorly managed classroom dynamics could be addressed with: (1) Improved required training and/or recruitment of faculty (adjunct and resident) who are skillful at facilitating dialogue around race, racism, and social justice and are conscientious of micro-aggressions within the classroom, and (2) better preparation of White-identified students for engaging in cross-racial dialogue. Focusing on the latter recommendation, the School could consider: (a) further detailing the ARC in the School admission process; (b) requiring White-identified accepted students to undergo an online course or participate in a two-day orientation that introduces the concepts of anti-racism social work, White privilege, and engaging in cross-racial dialogue; and (c) requiring race and racism-related courses every term. These final three recommendations specifically target developing White students’ willingness to take risks in the classroom. The aim, therefore, is to alleviate any
undue burden on their fellow students of color. In general, these findings reflect the School’s on-going charge of considering how, rather than which, students benefit from the ARC.

In summary, alumni data indicate that much has been done in the last twenty years to improve upon the ARC and the educational and environmental experience of students of color, including the creation of separate learning spaces, on-campus resources, identity-based student groups, and lecture series, to name a few. Continuing to increase the number of students, faculty, and administration of color, hiring faculty with anti-racism track records and improving faculty facilitation skills, and strengthening White students skills at cross-racial dialogue are our recommended next steps.

Required MSW Course Curricula

The following section is a review of the Summer 2014 required MSW course curricula with an eye towards how thoroughly and explicitly each curriculum integrated tenets of anti-racism social work throughout their course introduction, learning objectives, readings, and assignments. Specifically, this section identifies curricula that most clearly fostered critical thinking skills (particularly in regards to identifying applicability of theory and technique); developed dialogical skills, and infused the voices, perspectives, and experiences of those previously marginalized from the social work canon. This section also calls to attention curricula that could benefit from further evaluation. Overall, it is worth mentioning that all curricula made efforts to develop students’ critical analysis skills via an array of learning formats, acknowledged the course as a beginning step in building ongoing knowledge and skills, and provided ample learning opportunities that facilitated tolerating ambiguity in the clinician-client dyad and challenging normative values. It is also recognized that curricula do not accurately capture how racial and
other issues are attended to in the classroom; discussions could range beyond or fall short of what is explicitly stated on syllabi.

To begin, Forman (2015) highlighted elements of certain course curricula that could be used as a guide for all curricula writers. For fostering the development of a critical lens, Forman pointed to the “Problems in Biopsychosocial Functioning” curriculum. This curriculum introduced course material from a critical lens in the first class, with class objectives such as: (1) “Appraise the values and assumptions underlying” theories and diagnostic tools, and (2) Consider the influence and impact underlying our own “normative unconscious”, and then continuously wove this critical perspective throughout the syllabus. For inviting critical dialogue into the classroom, Social Welfare Policy’s curriculum dedicated an entire section to “Classroom Norms” which was then reviewed during Class One. This section stated the importance of different perspectives, the expectation that disagreements arise, and detailed the means to have productive, meaningful conversations — an explicit attempt to encourage White students to take risks and alleviate the burden of students of color to speak. The course further upheld this commitment to fostering a candid, thoughtful learning environment via: (1) a thorough grading rubric for class participation, and (2) dedicating 20 percent of students’ final grades to participation. Finally, for integrating perspectives of people of color, Forman (2015) found that only four of the thirteen course curricula featured twenty-five percent or more of its weekly required readings by authors of color: “Racism in the U.S.,” “Sociocultural Concepts,” “Social Welfare Policy,” and “Problems in Biopsychosocial Functioning.” Generally, courses featured fewer than one required reading per class as written by a person or people of color.
To further align required course curricula with the ARC, Forman (2015) recommended course chairs and professors review their curricula with the following points in mind:

- Each course description features a tailored narrative that explicitly links the course’s content to anti-racism social work practice and the ARC, and then consistently integrates these anti-racism learning objectives throughout the course objectives, readings, and assignments.

- The diverse perspectives of people of color are included in weekly discussions and educational material — including theories, case material with clinicians and/or clients of color, as well as from international and non-academic views.

- Critiques of “normativity” and applicability, anti-racism theories, and social justice oriented perspectives are explored weekly.

- Featured reading materials, objectives, and assignments that promote normative and/or cultural competency perspectives are appraised.

- Students are provided with both a framework and opportunities to practice and gain confidence in engaging in deep, sometimes difficult, conversations (i.e. role plays).

Forman (2015) further encouraged course chairs to review the following four curricula and/or curriculum sections in an effort to strengthen and make consistent ARC’s educational tenets:

- Child Development: Detail assignment expectations and review reading assignments.

- Research Methods: Make objectives and readings more aligned with anti-racism and social justice practice.
Family Theory: Revamp curriculum to more effectively reflect the diverse realities of today’s families; course material and readings largely featured a Eurocentric cultural competence lens.

Group Theory and Practice: Be more explicit in identifying how the values of anti-racism education interface with group therapy practice and review reading assignments.

In addition to Forman’s (2015) review of the curricula, alumni respondents provided recommendations to further the School’s anti-racism education (Gonzalez, 2015; Mason, 2015; Wesson, 2015). Specifically, the respondents noted the frequency with which racism was viewed/presented as a White versus people of color (particularly Black and/or African American) binary. As stated earlier in this summary, students recommended additionally attending to inter-racial experiences beyond this binary. Many respondents also spoke of wanting more information in classes on Latino, Asian, Middle Eastern, Native American, immigrant/refugee, and biracial and/or multiracial identities, as well as increased attention to cultural differences that exist within racial groups. Lastly, respondents noted the importance of continually highlighting intersections between race, class, and gender.

Anti-Racism Field Assignment and Social Justice Practice

This section details Budhan's (2015) findings upon reviewing the 2001 and 2014 Anti-Racism Field Assignment [ARFA] requirements as well as 80 completed projects from those years (40 from each year). Overall, Budhan (2015) found that the ARFA requirements have changed only minimally over the past fifteen years; meanwhile, agency settings, the racial makeup of the clinical staff and clientele, and the type of projects completed have changed quite significantly in that time. Further, Budhan (2015) and Mason (2015) found that students’ racial and
ethnic identities played a major role in the type of project completed and one’s sense of “safety” when introducing and completing the ARFA. The following demographics and anecdotes are provided to contextualize and potentially inform future directions of the ARFA.

Based on student report, the racial makeup of agencies’ clinical staff and of clientele has changed quite significantly over the last 15 years. Between 2001 and 2014, agencies’ clinical staff have become increasingly White (in 2001: agency clinical staff were 77.1% White and 22.9% were people of color; in 2014: agency clinical staff were 90.3% White and only 9.7% were people of color) (Budhan, 2015, p.19). Meanwhile, the number of clientele of color has increased (in 2001: 50% of clients were White and 50% were people of color; in 2014: 40% of clientele were White and 60% were people of color) (Budhan, 2015, p. 19). Additionally, agency placements have changed: more students are now placed in military settings and outpatient clinics, and fewer students are placed within child/family services and community outreach teams.

Regarding the types of projects completed, students over the last fifteen years have increasingly directed their ARFA towards fellow interns and staff (an 8.9% increase) and decreasingly directed projects towards the community (an 18.4% decrease). More specifically, in 2001, 18.4% of students chose to perform a project targeting clientele and/or the community (via running a group, policy change initiatives, and altering agency space to be more welcoming to clients of color); in 2014, no one chose this option. Further, projects’ foci have drastically shifted from topics of “anti-racism” broadly to topics of White privilege and/or micro-aggressions specifically (a 36.9% increase from 2001) (Budhan, 2015, p. 20). The projects have largely become homogenized such that, 61.5% of all projects in 2014 targeted staff and/or fellow interns either via discussion or presentation (Budhan, 2014, p. 20).
It is important to note that students’ racial and ethnic identities factored largely into the student’s felt sense of safety when introducing and completing their ARFA (Budhan, 2015; Mason, 2015). Specifically, alumni respondents of color disproportionately reported feeling “unsafe” and/or “unsupported” during the process (Mason, 2015). In Mason’s (2015) interviews, students reported feeling tokenized when bringing up racism for the project. Others felt burdened by having to “teach” their agency about racism as a student of color. Several respondents shared experiences of confronting hostility in their agencies when conducting the project; one participant remarked that it “left [them] feeling totally vulnerable and frightened actually about [their] positions at the organization” (Mason, 2015, p. 43). Given that agency placements are becoming increasingly White and White cultured, safety should be a significant consideration when designing the requirements for the project, vetting placements, and in providing support.

**Ongoing Considerations for the ARFA.** Budhan (2015) raised critical questions in the hopes of stimulating future considerations for the ARFA. With a changing landscape of agencies and clientele and students’ narrowing purview, Budhan encouraged the School to consider: (1) What type of anti-racism social justice skills are hoping to be achieved by completing the ARFA, and is there a target audience? More specifically, do discussions and presentations targeting clinical staff and fellow interns capture the essence of SCSSW social justice practice, and/or should students attempt community based projects and/or initiate policy change? (2) Would having students report monthly to FFAs about ARFA progress increase both the depth of the ARFA projects and the students’ sense of safety and support? (3) Are there ways to track the ARFA’s impact via agency surveys as well as collect data regarding agencies’ openness to integrating or furthering their anti-racism social work practices? Finally, (4) Are there additional ways the School can
consider preempting conflicts that may arise during the ARFA, specifically in regards to supporting students of color who are often charged with introducing concepts that challenge established beliefs and systems as a minority? In conclusion, Budhan (2015) encouraged the School to consider how students and FFAs are prepared to undergo and be supportive, respectively, through the ARFA process; how captured data can aid in the vetting and/or preparation of agencies for the ARFA, and how guidelines for the project can be modified based on students’ racial and ethnic identities (Budhan, 2015; Mason, 2015).

SCSSW’s Ongoing Self-Reporting Practice

This final section summarizes Wesson’s (2015) findings upon analyzing the SCSSW biannual progress reports from 1999 to 2011. Overall, the reports captured the numerous efforts and thoughtful work done over the years in working towards the anti-racism commitment. Specifically, the reports highlight the substantial structural offerings on race and racism made available to students, faculty, staff, and field placement advisors, including: a variety of lectures and workshops that promote the School’s anti-racism commitment; ongoing efforts to involve faculty, staff, and students in trainings on race and racism; increased integration of literature and teachings on critical race theory and anti-racism social work education; a continued intent to recruit and retain students, faculty, and administration of color, and value placed on providing support for students of color (Wesson, 2015, p. 29-30).

Wesson (2015) noted that although there is an abundance of information on the structural offerings at Smith, the reports lack: (1) consistent reporting within and across reports, (2) evaluative components, and (3) information about and feedback from students, alumni, and faculty, particularly by students, alumni, and faculty of color. To the first point, Wesson (2015) found that
the reports lacked consistency in their reporting styles (between sequences and report years) regarding demographic information, curricular changes, etc. Without clear and consistent information, the ability to fully evaluate progress, patterns, and themes is compromised. To the second point, Wesson (2015) argued that while the reports stated what the School and faculty completed and/or worked towards in the preceding two years, there was little to no information about the motives, intentions, and steps taken regarding these efforts. To exemplify this, Wesson (2015) provided two examples. First, she noted that sequence headings often focused on “efforts to improve,” yet failed to mention what informed this need for improvement. Wesson (2015) also found that while the reports mentioned the occurrence of faculty meetings, the reports failed to detail what occurred in or came from these meetings. Again, this lack of information resulted in an incomplete picture as to how and why the school is working towards the ARC. Finally, Wesson (2015) found only one instance among seven progress reports (in 2011) in which student and alumni’s voices were included. As members of the School and as annual evaluators (via course evaluations, Smith Speaks, etc.), these voices serve as an invaluable resource in steering the School’s ongoing progress; for that, it seems necessary that these voices (particularly the voices of students and alumni of color) are documented.

**Ongoing considerations for the biannual progress reports.** The student researchers recommend that the School create a committee charged with improving and standardizing the reports’ framework and evaluative intent. Also, the researchers suggest further delineating the information and evaluation to capture progress within both individual courses and across sequences via the use of a template. Secondly, the researchers recommend that the School augment its evaluative data by annually distributing an anonymous school-wide survey regarding the
ARC’s impact. Lastly, the researchers recommend making the report results accessible to the student body, as transparency increases trust and ownership, and would also set a bold example for other institutions working towards anti-racism.

Conclusion

Overall, this executive summary highlighted the areas SCSSW excels in upholding its commitment to becoming an anti-racism institution, and distinguished areas where the School should focus attention in its ongoing efforts to move forward in this pioneering journey. The student researchers’ recommendations are collectively summarized as follows:

(1) Think critically about the divergent needs of the student body based on personal identities, knowledge of and/or experience with race-based issues;

(2) Continually review explicit and implicit curricula (including: preparing faculty and administration to facilitate meaningful dialogue around issues of race, as well as infusing the voices of those previously marginalized into psychodynamic and social work canon),

and

(3) Revise the evaluation process of the ARC so that it is detailed, concrete, and transparent — particularly drawing from student and alumni experiences in addition to that of the staff and faculty.

The six student theses cover only a portion of the ways SCSSW attempts to uphold the ARC. For future studies and an even more comprehensive program evaluation, the student researchers suggest that the School further investigates the reported findings and expand onto areas not covered. Additionally, these theses are merely snapshots of current and past student experi-
ences. Therefore, the researchers recommend that the School continue to collect student and alumni feedback in an effort to establish a more comprehensive data set from which to evaluate longitudinal program efficacy.

Finally, we end with an acknowledgment. As Milem, Chang, and Antonio (2005) suggest, simply being in an environment committed to anti-racism can impact students’ attitudes and beliefs. In many ways, Smith goes beyond “simply” providing an anti-racism environment. Across the six independent student theses, the researchers found numerous ways the School fosters an environment infused with anti-racism social work practice tenets. For one, the School offers substantial and substantive structural offerings on race and racism for students, faculty, staff, and field placement advisors. The School’s ongoing commitment to bolster the number and experience of student, faculty, and administrators of color has, and will continue to, augment the curricula, the school’s evaluative process, and the culture on campus. Finally, and most notably, the School’s openness to critique and commitment to self-reflection is evident in the commission of the anti-racism theses and this executive summary, further attesting to the School’s commitment to its “working towards” ideology.
References


