

Staff discusses racial issues

HUNDREDS OF EMPLOYEES GATHER TO TALK ABOUT 'SEEING THE RACIAL WATER'

BY ELIZABETH KESSEL

Race is an uncomfortable subject. People see it, hear it and even talk about it, but nonetheless it's a sensitive topic that is hard to navigate.

At the Winter Inservice, on Feb. 10, "Seeing The Racial Water," staff members from Clackamas Community College had three hours to discuss the topic.

David Plotkin, vice president of Instruction and Student Services, was the first to speak briefly.

"We have a connection to our mission, our values and our priorities around providing access, making sure we are a relevant institution and that we provide quality for all of our students," said Plotkin.

Next to speak was Jil Freeman, department chair of distance learning. She briefly talked about how a group who traveled to a conference in November had met author and consultant Robin DiAngelo and asked her to speak at the college.

DiAngelo has more than 20 years of experience studying racial and social justice. She also has two published books: "What Does It Mean To Be White" and "Is Everyone Really Equal?"

"We are not going to solve racial issues today," DiAngelo said before starting the talk.

The inservice was similar to a TED Talk, where one speaker has a large audience, except throughout her speech she gave the audience questions to discuss

amongst their table groups.

For example, she flashed a photo of a woman and child, which looked like a nice cafe setting.

After showing the photo a few times, it was clear what was really happening in the picture. Many people were lying on gurneys after an attack. Here, she talked about description, evaluations and perception.

DiAngelo's point to that exercise was to shed light on the fact that when people see a situation that is considered unusual, their minds fill in the blanks with something different than what's happening.

Much more was also brought up such as the unconscious bias, how individuality and society are inseparable, being homogeneous, where racism is seen, prejudice and discrimination.

DiAngelo's talk fueled productive conversations. One of her questions had the staff thinking about their past experiences in school and where they grew up.

Staff had gone into this inservice wondering how they can help Clackamas, classrooms and students feel safe and able to talk about racism, especially at the current time.

DiAngelo showed that there is much more than meets the eye when it comes to racism. She was open about this difficult subject. She started the speech off strong and left the staff with new ideas to wrestle with.

"We are not going to solve racial issues today." – Robin DiAngelo



Robin DiAngelo discusses racial issues with staff in Gregory Forum on Feb. 10.

photos by Collin Berend



Staff answers questions from DiAngelo at a staff inservice in Gregory Forum.