

# **Society for the Study of Occupation: USA**

## **Ideas for Antiracism in US Occupational Science Advocacy, Research, and Education**

Content and ideas informed by  
panelists of the 2020 SSO:USA Virtual Event:

Khalilah Robinson Johnson, PhD, OTR/L

Arameh Anvarizadeh, OTD, OTR/L

Dave Thomas, PhD(c), MSc, BSc OT

Jaime Muñoz, PhD, OTR/L

Further detailed strategies were gathered from small group discussions in response to panelists comments and prompts from event organizers.

### **What are we doing with these ideas?**

These ideas will be the fodder for an Ad-hoc Committee on Equity and Inclusion chaired by Dr. Douglene Jackson over the course of 2021-2022. The ad-hoc committee is charged with recommending action-oriented, concrete, long-term, and measurable strategies that SSO:USA can implement across our organizational structures and activities to promote equity and celebrate diversity in our organization as well as in the greater US occupational science community. The full charge of the committee can be found on the SSO:USA website.

We have focused the name of this committee on equity and inclusion rather than the typical “diversity, equity, and inclusion” because we believe this work requires much more than just diversifying those who sit at the dinner table. “Diversity” is too often used for tokenism, empty validation, and continued oppression. Rather, through focusing on equity and inclusion, we hope to reimagine how dinner is prepared, shared, and enjoyed at the table. By addressing issues of

equity and inclusion, SSO:USA and the occupational science community will inevitably diversify *and* be more prepared to celebrate rather than tokenize our heterogeneity.

## **CC: Cross-Cutting Strategies**

### **CC1: Name and frame racism directly and honestly in our work**

- Increase utilization of clear and direct language in regards to racism and racial justice
- Increase recognition and addressing of the profession's and discipline's historical connections with racism
  - Historic oppression and problematic treatment of communities of color from healthcare systems.
  - Name and frame realities of diversity within our discipline and profession
  - English should not be the default
- Increase space for anti-racism work to be focused on.
  - If focusing on racism. Focus on racism.
  - Support understanding of differences between antiracism work, “diversity, equity, and inclusion” work, and anti-oppression work.
- Explicitly examine the relationship between racism and occupation.
  - Honestly and directly address this relationship in research, education, and practice.
  - Increase awareness of the political nature of occupation.
  - Unpack the differences between “culture” and “racism” in relation to occupation.

### **CC2: Support initiatives that facilitate long-term commitment to this work among the occupational science community.**

- Develop integrated DEI committee within SSO governance and board structure
  - Chair is a full board member
  - 1 committee member in each committee responsible for considering and encouraging DEI in committee's work, particularly through the lens of this strategic plan
  - Meet only 1-2 times per year, report to Board annually
- Support policies and practices that compensate for and honor the additional work, speaking, mentorship, and teaching required from faculty, students, and practitioners of color.
  - Develop award for excellence in mentorship of students of color
- Increase visual and active representation in all areas.
  - Increase diversity in panels, speakers, students, faculty, and board members
  - Depict racially diverse occupational scientists and therapists in media and marketing

- Develop honest, trusting, and enduring relationships across scholars and practitioners with varying racial identities.
  - Support antiracist initiatives that build coalition among the occupational science community, honoring intersectional experiences of its many members
  - Hold spaces to consider racism through the lens of many structures of oppression: ableism, classism, sexism, homophobia, religious discrimination...
  - Hold spaces where individuals with these intersectional identities can dialogue and organize.
- Support and hold allies accountable in the work.
  - Develop opportunities for allies to be exposed to education from experts and communities of color
  - Support initiatives, policies, and practices that examine and redistribute power
  - SSO Board evaluate all current documents, bylaws, SOPs, criteria and revise to be antiracist.
  - Encourage allies to be disruptors of racism:
    - Advocate when appropriate and potentially risky
    - Recognize their own privilege
    - Recognize mistakes happen... learn from them and act.

All of this work must produce tangible outcomes not just statements. Having concrete and measurable goals for increasing diversity and achieving them is necessary for accountability.

## **AJ: Advocacy and Justice Strategies**

### **AJ1: Inform advocacy with experience and expertise of practitioners and scholars**

- Encourage partnerships with practitioners and scientists to discuss how racism impacts daily practice
  - Example: consider documentation and how it can perpetuate racism and oppression. Encourage strengths based documentation.
  - Develop consultant board to support advocacy efforts
- Seek out partnerships with other disciplines that may have more diverse members and more experience in antiracist work
- Develop SSO-BIPOC advisory board to hold the society accountable

### **AJ2: Leverage projects, initiatives, and student engagement for change**

- Mobilize thesis and capstone projects as opportunities for advocacy and addressing racism
- Connect with younger populations through elementary schools, high schools, and HBCUs to build coalition and inform advocacy (also may support exposure of OS/OT as a professional opportunity).
  - Support summer programs

- Engage communities in research participation/support
  - Collaborate in applicable projects in their communities
- Encourage associations and societies to hold events that challenge racist ideas and norms in their content and procedures

### **AJ3: Encourage policy advocacy within occupational scholarship and practice**

- Regularly examine and actively challenge processes and policies in our discipline, education, and scholarship that perpetuate racism
  - Examine all society policies to ensure all strategic planning includes diversity and antiracism elements (scholarships, awards, lectures, and associated rubrics).
- Regularly host action oriented conversations regarding antiracism
- Amplify, highlight, and encourage comprehensive approaches to scholarship and practice that address and consider racism
- Facilitate knowledge/evidence dissemination and mobilization with broader communities to support change.
  - Speak “the language” of those with power to create change when appropriate (i.e. when not harmful to racialized groups) to convey the importance of work (e.g., explaining to policymakers how greater access to preventive healthcare treatments for Black and underserved communities would reduce long-term costs).
- Develop funding and scholarship mechanisms that particularly focus on addressing disparities in access to higher education
  - Support policies and practices that reduce the cost of higher education in the first place.
- Encourage membership in relevant antiracism/anti-oppression oriented advocacy organizations such as COTAD
  - Consider adding COTAD membership option to SSO membership plans (Similar to WFOT and AOTA)

### **AJ4: Support accountability in the work**

- Support effective allyship from White occupational scholars and practitioners
  - White scholars/practitioners must be active and involved, led by their colleagues, partners, and students of color
  - Recognize “readiness” is not an excuse for inaction.
- Host trainings to prepare SSO members/others to do antiracism advocacy work
- Make statements regarding stances on policies but ensure follow-up with concrete action or demonstration of work already being done.

## **R: Research Strategies**

## **R1: Better understand racism, particularly but not exclusively in relation to occupation**

- Create a database of research available about racism and occupation.
  - Systematic Reviews published
  - Literature
  - Social media
  - Other mediums
- Host clear threads/themes of antiracism in conferences
  - Highlight topics such as the school to prison pipeline, lifespan work, racial equity through an environmental and climate change lens
  - Challenge conference organizers (SSO/AOTA) to integrate local community histories/issues/justice topics
  - Examine how norms/rituals in conference do or do not attend to indigenous experiences and other justice concepts
- Hold discussions and forums to support the examination and unpacking of terms within the profession in relation to “racial equity”:
  - Racism
  - Justice
  - Power
  - Privilege

## **R2: Encourage diversity and reflexivity across research epistemologies and methodologies**

- Support development of an “Anti-racist” research lab
- Utilize criteria for support, funding, or recognition (e.g. RZLOS) to de-centralize White/European ways of knowing. Does a project or researcher:
  - Consider indigenous knowledges?
  - Consider racial contexts more deeply in knowledge development?
  - Recognize the intersectional nature of racialized experiences through perspectives such as neuro-, linguistic, gender, and ethnic diversities?
- Develop and provide an antiracism research award
  - Requirements could include methodologies mentioned below
- Increase opportunities for White researchers to practice and implement reflexivity in antiracism work and research in general.
- Encourage, through workshops, themes, funds, or criteria for awards, the utilization of methodologies that respectfully support liberation, engagement, and action with communities and people of color such as those listed below:
  - *Beginning* each research project incorporating anti-racism and racial equality in the research design.
    - Explicitly consider power and privilege across the project
    - Avoid tokenism
    - Always consider the diversity of your research team.
  - Embed research in the community and lived experience
    - Allow the lived experience of people of color to significantly guide research

- Pay close attention to ways communities/individuals identify themselves
  - Work alongside communities of color to decolonize interventions and studies
- Consider and examine racism in measures/instruments/assessments
- Allow data to be complex and rich to tell the whole story of racism
  - Inform quantitative data with qualitative data and vice versa.
  - Effectively and purposeful aggregate and disaggregate data to examine disparities
- Methodologies that were recommended for consideration:
  - Participatory action research
  - Collaborative approaches
    - Including informants/participants engagement in data analysis process
  - Community advisory boards
  - Mixed-methods
  - Institutional Ethnography
  - Purposive sampling
    - Ensure diversity and voice in sample
    - Amplify and highlight voices of color
  - Narrative methodologies
  - Visual methodologies

**R3 : Encourage just dissemination of knowledge, particularly in any journals sponsored by SSO:USA.**

- Include clear guidelines for addressing race and racism in manuscripts/publications/journals/conferences. These could/should include:
  - Requiring author positionalities
  - Offering guidelines for language use and terminology
  - Requiring clarity and specificity about the study population in title and presentation
  - Curtailing overly negative/needs based representations of racialized groups in review of by ensuring these are balanced appropriately with strengths and assets.
  - Requiring training for editors/reviewers in antiracism strategies
- Encourage appropriately framing and highlighting the barriers, structures, and context that are problematic for communities of color such as:
  - Client-practitioner-researcher interactions
  - Access to care
  - Access to general resources and contextual factors that influence occupation
  - Public safety
  - Prejudice
  - Privilege
  - Health and Well-being
- Consider reading levels in abstracts

- Support and encourage publication in languages other than English
- Ensure reach to diverse populations
- Consider varied ways/mediums of communicating knowledge

**R4: Encourage the discipline to grow and think broadly about its research in this work**

- Embrace all and highlight historically excluded types of OS research particularly that bridge OS/OT and address these topics in atypical practice settings
- Actively seek and integrate knowledge and evidence from other disciplines that have been working in antiracism for longer

**R5: Hold space for and amplify the work of researchers of color and those focused in antiracism**

- Hold spaces at conferences, in journals, and events to specifically de-centralize White scholars.
- Encourage allies to be vigilant for opportunities for faculty (and students) of color to step into research, writing, and other projects **where their expertise would be valuable.**
- Support a research mentorship program for researchers of color in OS/OT
- Develop SSO Consortium of OS Antiracist Researchers

## Students and Education Strategies

**SE1: Provide consultation and expert support to facilitate preparation of program atmospheres in supporting students and faculty of color.**

- Collect, develop, and implement strategies within SSO to do this.
  - Develop strategic plan
  - Implement strategic plan
- Encourage student and faculty self-reflection
  - Implicit and explicit biases
  - Getting comfortable with being uncomfortable
  - Journaling
- Support programs in examining policies and procedures for problematic issues or barriers
- Maintain regular, honest, and open spaces for students and faculty to unpack these topics together and develop ongoing clear and concrete actions
- Decrease financial barriers to accessing field and education through scholarship and advocacy
- Encourage a culture of collaboration and action among students and faculty around these topics
  - Consider non-research oriented mentorship program between students and faculty, or other SSO members, particularly oriented toward students of color, but not solely relying on faculty of color

- Do not overly place this work on students and faculty of color
- Acknowledge and hold space for differences in experience with graduate school.
  - First generation students may not have had the opportunity get support and tips for graduate school as it is currently conducted
  - Diverse backgrounds and the personal experiences of students influence their knowledge.
  - Some students may have been raised in communities that were very homogeneous and may not have been exposed to certain viewpoints or ideas

**SE2: Provide support and consultation to encourage effective recruitment of students and faculty of color.**

*Students*

- Connect through appropriate and relevant mediums (e.g. consider moving away from FB to Instagram or Twitter)
- Encourage representation and visibility of faculty and students of color in marketing.
- Offer conference scholarships to potential OT students from minoritized racial identities
- Support and encourage OT and OS programs in
  - Marketing of antiracism aspects of curriculum and program.
  - Addressing systemic barriers for students to enter into programs
    - Remove GRE requirement
    - Support scholarships
  - Utilize holistic admissions processes to all programs (MS, PhD, OTD)
    - Consider factors, experience, situations that increase a student's contributions to the field beyond their academic performance

*Faculty*

- Hold spaces and opportunities for OT and OS programs to recruit faculty of color and discuss
  - Including explicit interest in experiences of racial diversity in faculty position requests
  - Differences in cost of living when offers are made
  - Institutional environments and addressing concerns early
- Develop early career diverse OS/OT faculty award that OS/OT programs can apply for when hiring new faculty

**SE3: Offer toolkits and resources to faculty and students for integrating antiracism throughout occupation-based curriculums by:**

- Offer regular series of lectures/workshops to OT programs that incorporates OS and antiracism approaches



- Supporting national and state associations and programs in communicating to get on the same page in regard to antiracist curriculum.
- Recognizing, acknowledging, and being informed by the realities of racism in OS/OT and our history
- Increasing presence of these issues in reading lists for students
- Opening up opportunities for students to deconstruct occupation through a racial equity lens
- Incorporating resources with perspectives from scholars and practitioners of color as well as from other cultures.
  - Incorporate texts not in English
  - Incorporate other media such as videos or poetry
  - Recognize and integrate the many other disciplines who have studied this.
- Engage students in:
  - Pedagogical development and implementation
  - Curriculum Development
  - Feedback about these after they have graduated
- Offer specific courses that address these issues, but make sure antiracism is still throughout curriculum
  - OJ courses
  - Racial trauma as doctoral topic
  - Health disparities and structural justice
- Consistently connect antiracism discussed in curriculum to practice and research directly
  - E.g. Deconstruct and examine racism in evaluations and assessments with students to model anti-racism work

**SE4: Encourage increased student exposure and engagement with diverse perspectives/experiences.**

- Consider a special interest group for incorporating antiracism in occupational science education
- Foster connections for students and programs with communities, cultures, and occupations that broaden students' understanding of occupation
- Gather and make available education and content for new practitioners about different bodies and experiences, particularly for people of color, to prepare all practitioners to appropriately support and have more understanding of those experiences
- Facilitate students and program connection to more community spaces around more diverse people
  - Increase awareness of a variety of diverse occupations and how different people experience and do those occupations.
  - Support the development of diverse case studies
- Provide support (e.g. educational grant) for development of community-based coursework that facilitates exposure, familiarity, and action in these topics

- Shift from service/charity model to engagement and learning through more substantial long-term projects
- Encourages faculty to be more active and engaged in community
- Supporting “international” or inter-community experiences and connections for students if desired.
- Pursue and pay guest speakers who can bring lived experience and expertise into events, conferences, and the classroom
  - Build relationships with practitioners of color
  - Identify SSO members who are willing to speak as invited guests in occupational science and therapy courses

**SE5: Offer consultations, workshops, or resources to encourage implementation of antiracist practices in student evaluations such as:**

- Vigilance against tone policing
- Consideration of antiracism in choosing assessments; requires exposure and examination of equitable assessments.
- Celebration of varying writing styles and language uses
- Regular review and critique of “Professional behaviors” through an antiracist lens
- Consideration of similarities and differences between “academic” skills and practice skills
  - Consider how academic achievement influences access to scholarships

**SE6: Engage students as change agents within their programs.**

- Consider a doctoral and masters student representative to the Board of SSO:USA
- Host workshops or discussions that unpack how to include students in:
  - Admissions processes
  - Scholarship processes (applications and fundraising)
  - Case study development
- Include students in these decision making processes
- Leverage “the wisdom of youth and the curiosity of the old”.

**SE7: Offer spaces for discussion, strategizing, and mentorship regarding the below topic areas to support the retention of faculty and students of color**

- *Financial*
  - Discussing salaries and scholarships
  - Ensuring fair hiring, tenure, and promotion processes
- *Emotional*
  - Develop supportive relationships between Professors-Students, Mentors-Mentees, and also potentially local community liaisons
    - Encourage and support mentorship among diverse faculty and students, but do not force this.
    - Alumni mentoring group to support more diverse student body

- Particularly attend to first generation students
  - Start and maintain a COTAD Chapter
- *Policy -particularly at the institutional level*
  - Examine strategies working at other institutions
  - Critically and vigilantly examine any “professional behavior” standards for potential racism
    - Requesting non-White folks to review and critique is recommended
    - Paying these folks is further recommended
  - Develop student advisory board to offer feedback to program and institution
- Hold spaces where students can discuss these issues without faculty present and vice versa. Also hold spaces where discussion can be had together.
- Develop strong and honest relationships among faculty

**SE8: Advocate at the Educational Policy Level**

- Support communication and collaboration among OS/OT programs to build coalition and movement
- Advocate for inclusion of antiracist concepts in ACOTE standards
  - Including restoration of ideas such as occupational justice, culture, and occupational science to standards
- Offer strategies and support to faculty who are advocating in institutions for policy changes that reduce racism and barriers for faculty of color.
  - E.g. Recognizing the value and additional energy required for mentorship of students of color by faculty of color, particularly in the tenure/promotion process