

**INTRODUCTION:**

The provost and dean convened a Heller community forum following the *Deadspin* articles reporting on the firing of the Brandeis basketball coach and the campus town hall earlier in the week. The goal of the forum was to hear everyone’s perspectives, to bridge knowledge gaps. Firing the coach addressed charges of discrimination, racism, favoritism and other inappropriate behaviors of one person. There was an outcry from the community since the behaviors had persisted unaddressed for multiple years and media reports pointed to system failures to follow up on complaints by black basketball players of inappropriate behaviors and evidence of public incidents when the inappropriate behaviors were plainly visible. We were left to reflect on how prevalent this behavior is on campus, inside and outside of sports.

The case demonstrated how immediate and prolonged institutional inaction on reported bias can allow the behavior to continue and potentially infuse the community with a pathology of hatred and fear. Indeed, the subsequent *Deadspin* article highlighted that the coach was an equal opportunity bigot, targeting other players for what he viewed as their deficiencies (e.g., weight, religion, etc.). Without the black basketball players’ bravery in coming forward, the team would have continued to be persecuted. Through the work of the black basketball players we were able to see the persistent institutional and structural bias on campus. We recognize that bigotry has to be stopped in the moment and prevented. It was with this in mind that the Heller community forum was convened.

In his opening remarks Heller Dean David Weil paraphrased Dr. King, “We are tied together in the single garment of destiny, caught in an inescapable network of mutuality. And whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. For some strange reason I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. And you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be.”

With that in mind, Dean Weil invited Associate Dean Maria Madison to share words from the community in reaction to reading the *Deadspin* article. She collected these expressed feelings in the following figure.

*What would your word or sentence be? This is how and where change starts.*

**Heller voices in response to the Deadspin Articles**



Brandeis Provost Lisa Lynch clarified that Associate Dean Madison listed the reactions from the community in response to reckless remarks made by a senior Brandeis faculty member, during the campus Town Hall.

Dr. Madison demonstrated how 'in-the-moment' (ITM) intervention of bigoted statements can be made inoffensively to redirect to the true nature of a problem, in this case racism on campus and the pain it causes. ITM recasting of a racial threat, is a model of coping and behavioral assertiveness during conflicts. This approach is promoted through the work of Dr. Howard Stevenson, former Chair of the Applied Psychology and Human Development Division in the Graduate School of Education at University of Pennsylvania. ITM will be the topic of trainings in 2018/2019.

In particular, Provost Lynch stated:

- Dr. Madison's quotes from the Heller community were shared in a very powerful way at the town hall on Monday as members of the Brandeis community rose up to speak forcefully against the assertions of a senior faculty member at a campus Town Hall. The faculty member recklessly claimed (paraphrasing) that staff at Brandeis were incompetent and inexperienced, that there was no racism on campus, and if there was it was so little that reducing it further was not a priority.
- The pain and trauma experienced by those at the town hall, especially for our Black students, staff and faculty was clear. But members of our community, especially our students, rose up and spoke truth to power. It is time to take the weight of this work off the shoulders of our students and put it squarely on the shoulders of faculty and administration. Our students are understandably weary of being the leaders of the charge. We (faculty, staff and senior administrators) have to do the work to address racism on our campus now.

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## **QUESTIONS / COMMENTS IN THE COMMUNITY FORUM:**

### Summary:

The community expressed a mixture of emotions, reflections and demands. These included the need for leaders such as the administration and faculty to be accountable for dismantling bigotry inside and outside of the classroom and office. Others were humbled and/or surprised at the varied reactions of members of the Heller community. There was empathy for black students, but empathy for the coach was mentioned by two. This latter feeling was called out by others as painful, and should be a teachable moment on the deep history of racism and its legacy impacting every aspect of the lifelong, cross generational black experience in America. Others emphasized the systemic nature of racism on campus.

Provost Lynch provided a list of efforts made since Ford Hall and described how efforts fall too short of addressing bigotry. There are efforts underway through the Associate Dean's office for diversity, equity and inclusion that are presented on the website but include targeting institutional, systemic, psychological and behavioral issues.

It was noted that to achieve sustainable change, the process has to be covert and overt, deliberate and specific, immediate and long term. Quick fixes are necessary but not sufficient, working for some individuals but not all – as witnessed by those who participated in bias training workshops in the past. Others spoke of redemption and exhaustion almost in the same breath. One individual noted the desire "... to see the beauty here."

Specific comments from the community are collected in the Appendix, and will be input to further actions.

**Next Steps:**

The Office of the Dean will provide a list of action items and report on progress to the community by the first week of May.

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**APPENDIX:**

**Summarized thoughts from Community Forum participants and input to guide future action:**

One student opened up the forum by asking everyone in the room to recognize the various power dynamics, fears, and intimidation present at the Heller community forum. She and other students mentioned that Heller is in a unique position on this campus and we often find ourselves in a bubble.

Several students pointed out the lack of diversity present in the room. One student in particular suggested that this may be a result of growing frustrations amongst underrepresented students, with administrations and institutions apologizing without following up with action.

A student questioned if faculty members would have attended the town hall had it not been in replacement of the normal faculty meeting at that time. The student went on to urge that we need participation from all levels of Heller, especially the professors. Another student asked for more open dialogues such as the forum to take place in class as well with the facilitation of professors.

One professor went on to commit to making sure that he takes actions in his own professional and personal life. He promised to challenge his associates in professional settings to be more cognizant of the importance of discussing and addressing these issues.

International students discussed that even within Heller they have faced discrimination in jobs, grading, and a variety of other ways that need to be addressed immediately. While they suggested some of their complaints are beginning to be heard, they were clear that enough is still not being done and they have not been happy with the way they have been treated. Some students suggested that because of the mistreatment they aren't as proud to be Heller students as they and their families imagined they would be when they were first admitted.

Several students went on to remind the administration and faculty that just because they aren't hearing about issues does not mean they aren't real.

One student said that change would require each of us to be accountable of not only each other, but also ourselves. She went on to say that from her studies in strategic management, she understands transformational change to be hard, but valuable work. She pointed out that it will take all of us working collaboratively to truly change the status quo.

One professor suggested that before we change cultures, we need to take a moment to identify what our culture is. He stressed that really taking time to recognize culture and calling it out would be instrumental to beginning transformational change.

A student commented on the need to do the work – students are ready to collaborate – and suggested there should be a pipeline with the undergrads and between the masters' degree students and the doctoral students – working together we can move forward.

At the conclusion of the community conversation, a student noted that it is good to see so many people here, and built on the statement that we need to do a culture change. The student asked if we stopped to see what our culture really is – the values, practices and behaviors that are a problem – the courses we offer – the sacred cow of academic freedom – if we want to change the culture we need to change the values – otherwise it will not happen

Several students stated that we need to keep people accountable for their mistakes and that is a part of redemption too. Some asked the administration if many changes had been made since the 2015 Ford Hall. One student in particular went on to say to the provost that because he recognizes that we are all connected his love for her and others in the room calls him to make sure that we are all accountable for the promises we make moving forward.

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### **Comments from the Associate Dean for DEI and the Dean on moving forward:**

Maria Madison noted that we have posted equity, diversity and inclusion progress slides on our website, which is a reflection of the learning so far:

- Today's session adds to the learning
- The work focuses on institutional, structural, psychological and behavioral change
- DEI work involves covert and overt ops –with people who need to change without there having to be any shaming

- Some changes will take 12 or 18 months, but that work has begun
- We are creating a baseline – with the HEED (Higher Education Excellence in Diversity) criteria
- The communications group has created a dashboard on this and you, the community, are the council to review the progress toward the targets – such as the 10% increase in diversity in faculty, staff, and students demanded by Ford Hall 2015
- The search committees are going through implicit bias training
- We have distributed surveys to baseline and benchmark against other similar programs, with workshops designed in response to what we learn
- We are adding course evaluation questions on diversity, equity and inclusion
- The 2016 EEOC Task Force documented how 30 years of training and workshops has not had the impact needed
- There are also workshops on call – seven so far in response to need and using evidence-based research
- It is about moving beyond our entrenched perspectives

David Weil commented on efforts this academic year to create new ways to raise issues around racism, sexism, and intolerance, but also cited the need for further work to hold administration, faculty and staff accountable for conduct that occurs in our community, acknowledging that there is an opaqueness on how complaints are currently handled. He also acknowledged that it is on school leadership and him personally as dean to exercise leadership in this area. Accordingly, steps to move forward will be announced within the next few weeks.