

2024
SPRING



**Office for Diversity
& Inclusion**

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Dear colleagues, partners, and members of our ODI community,

As our semester draws to a close, I find myself reflecting upon our truth, racial healing, and transformation framework, particularly in these challenging times. As you will note throughout the pages of this newsletter, our cultural centers, programs, and community partners across our campuses and communities have shown, time and time again, the many ways that the arts, scholarship, and activism can allow all of us to reconnect with ourselves, with our histories, and with one another. This semester, in our events, in our spaces, and in our communities, we've told our truths and grieved injustice; we reveled and rested in the beauty of our art, our voices, and our lives together; we've named and claimed our collective agency, power, and joy. Such work is a complex, vulnerable, and even painful process, and I have been moved and humbled by the ways that members of our communities have chosen, time and time again, to help us confront the sources and structures of colonization, segregation, and economic injustice that have impacted our campus, our communities, and our country.

Simultaneously, I'm moved by the way that we also engaged in the work of racial healing, whether by creating and maintaining spaces defined by compassion, honesty, and solidarity, by committing to the self-reflective work of justice and restoration, and by building coalitions and communities throughout our community and our world. The transformative work that we do—all of the ways we move, change, and shape the world around us—is rarely easy. But as you look through these pages and remember our work together, I hope you are reminded that—every time you have committed to the truth, to racial healing, and to transformation—you have made a better world and a hopeful life together all the more beautiful, livable, and real: not only in the day to day, but in the future ahead. For that, you have my heartfelt thanks and greatest admiration.

Yours, in solidarity,
 Frank Tuitt (VP/CDO)

TRUTH, RACIAL HEALING, AND TRANSFORMATION (TRHT)



WHAT IT IS

The University of Connecticut is proud to host a Campus Center for Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation (TRHT)! Participating in the TRHT Initiative allows UConn to honor its commitments to racial justice, especially surrounding the state and University's designation of racism as a public health crisis

FRAMEWORK

The TRHT framework is based on the idea that the first step in reducing barriers to belonging is identifying those barriers. Once we identify those barriers, we can begin identifying both the solutions and the partners who help us promote equity. In particular, the TRHT framework suggests utilizing Narrative Change and Racial Healing across these three areas:

Separation - examining segregation, colonization, and concentrated poverty and then working to ensure equitable lives

Law - examining discriminatory laws and policies and then identifying solutions to produce the just application of law

Economy - examining structural inequality and barriers to economic opportunities, and then identifying solutions

GOALS

- Reduce bias and acts of racism;
- Create compassionate and caring spaces of belonging;
- Integrate the TRHT framework as a tool for strategic planning, using it to:
 - Examine legacies of exclusion at UConn
 - Enhance learning environments across the UConn System
 - Revise policies that create barriers to access and affordability;
- Establish a TRHT Collaborative to enhance institutional transformation through community-engaged racial equity work;
- Establish TRHT Innovation Hubs at Storrs, Hartford, and UConn Health focused on outcome-based research, health, and educational disparities, as well as the social determinants of health.

OUTCOMES

- An increased sense of belonging, especially for historically excluded and racially oppressed populations;
- A reduction in identity-based equity gaps;
- A better integration of DEIJ and anti-racism work;
- The expansion of DEIJ and anti-racism work into the communities that UConn serves;
- Communities that are healthier individually, interpersonally, and structurally.

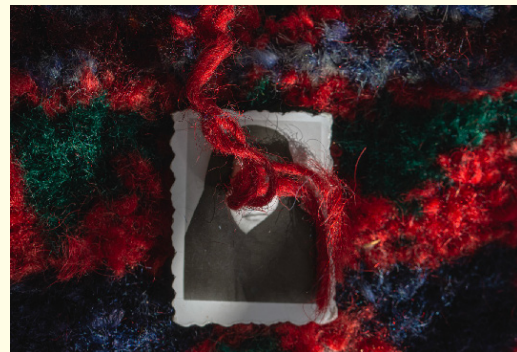
TRUTH

This semester, our cultural centers and programs gave us many opportunities to engage in **narrative change** by helping us tell a more complete story about our communities, our histories, and our world. We learned about and confronted difficult truths about both our past and our present— stories of gender inequity, of exclusion, and of racism as a public health crisis—and shared the stories from our families and communities that have been so often left out of the historical record. Narrative change helps us to see the world—and each other—more clearly, and it is from this basis that healing and transformation is made possible.



Unveiled Silence

This semester, MECP's own Mahsa Attaran—a MFA candidate here at UConn—was a featured artist at the Windsor Arts Center for a moving and thought-provoking exhibit titled "Unveiled Silences: An Exploration of Gender in Iran." Attaran's work blends photography, textiles, and other media to tell moving, complex stories about gender, culture, and identity. Her work encouraged us to think about the stories we hear and those that remain veiled or untold, helping us to reflect upon the importance of truth-telling through art, storytelling, and community. Her work was displayed alongside the work of fellow Iranian artist Leila Ghasemi. The gallery opened with a reception and a talk-back with both artists. Congratulations to Mahsa on this enormous accomplishment!



AACC Opening Ceremony

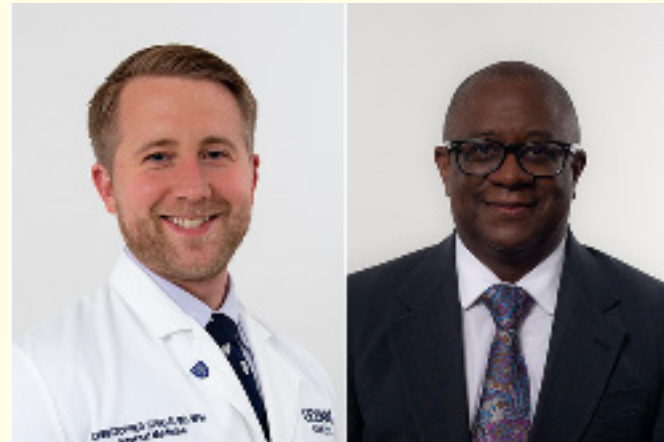
We celebrated a busy and exciting Black History Month this semester, beginning with a packed opening ceremony featuring celebrated actor Nia Long. Alongside a moving series of performances from UConn students, including poetry and musical performances, Dr. Tuitt offered a short reflection on the importance of the arts and the role of the artist in the midst of national backlash to DEI and the teaching of Black history. The night was a thoughtful, joyful, and engaging conversation with Ms. Long, who reflected upon her own experiences of pursuing a career in the arts as a Black woman. A massive congratulations to all of the organizers involved in making this event happen and thank you to everyone who attended this fantastic commemoration of Black History Month!



Lunch for Thought

Throughout this semester, beginning in January, UConn Health hosted a series of talks called “Lunch For Thought: A Journey into Inclusivity, Equity, and Respect.” This important series provided the UConn Health community with a needed opportunity to come together and participate in several important conversations about a wide range of topics about the intersections of health and diversity, equity, and inclusion. For the first of these sessions, Drs. Christopher Steele and Jeffrey Hines led an important discussion about the social determinants of health, including the ways that medical racism contributes to health inequities. The group also discussed a podcast episode by “The Sum of Us” author Heather McGee, which also examines the ways that racism harms public health. Such urgent conversations are strongly in keeping with UConn Health’s continued focus on racism as a public health crisis and helps us to confront the role that segregation

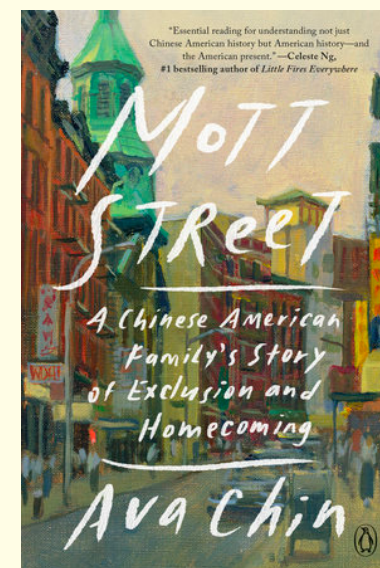
and separation negatively impacts our shared life together. Our thanks to all involved in facilitating and organizing these important conversations!



A Night with Ava Chin

This April, author, professor, and journalist Ava Chin visited UConn as the keynote speaker for Asian Pacific American Heritage Month. A fifth-generation Chinese American, Chin shared their experiences researching the long-lasting impact and legacy of Chinese exclusion on her own family, from the building of the transcontinental railroad to community organizing in opposition to Chinese exclusion in the United States. They shared about the complicated experiences of combing through historical archives and conducting personal interviews for their most recent book, *Mott Street*

Street: A Chinese American Family’s Story of Exclusion and Homegoing, and dialogued with students about the ways that their family’s long history in Chinatown can help us understand the political, social, and emotional stakes of structural racism. More importantly, they urged students to never underestimate the power of telling their own stories. Thank you to all who organized this event, and congratulations to the Asian American Cultural Center and the Asian American Studies Program for this event!



RACIAL HEALING

This semester, we were also fortunate to host a number of events that helped us develop a framework for racial healing. What does it look like, we asked, to help one another find healing in the midst of injustice? What does it look like to build real, substantive, and mutually compassionate relationships across racial and ethnic lines? Whether through building new frameworks for racial healing circles, or exploring the meaning of restorative justice, we've had many important opportunities to stand with and alongside one another in pursuit of healing and rest.

TRHT Professional Development Series

Throughout this semester, a dedicated collective of faculty and staff met to learn about and develop a framework for racial healing circles, including important deep dives into racial healing with Dr. Nikkia Young, as well as joining for vital and important conversations with Dr. Anneliese Singh on the National Day of Racial Healing. This fantastic group have worked patiently and thoughtfully to understand the role that racial healing circles can play in the work of

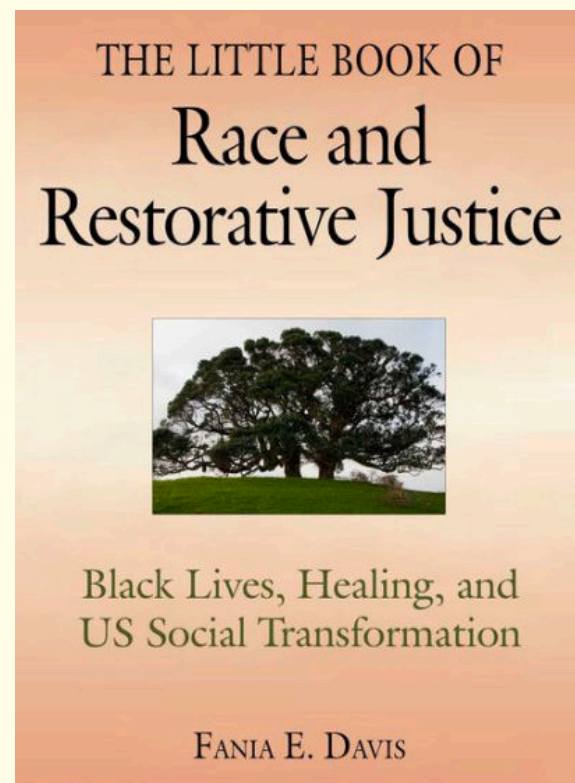
narrative change and transformation on campus, dedicating time, energy, and support to reading together, learning together, and engaging in the vital work of shared reflection, goal-setting, and truth-telling. We're grateful to our guest speakers, our organizers, and our participants for their time and dedication in this work, which required patience, vulnerability, and time. Thank you and congratulations to all of those involved for their work!



MLK Living Legacy:

Restorative Justice and Fania E. Davis

This semester, we welcomed activist, scholar, and writer Dr. Fania E. Davis to campus for our Martin Luther King, Jr. Living Legacy Convocation for thoughtful, moving, and timely discussion of restorative justice called "The Power of Restorative Justice." Throughout the night, Dr. Davis helped us explore the meaning and urgency of both justice and healing. Following a reception in the ODI Commons, we also celebrated the four recipients of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Living Legacy Award, including Nadine Nicola Green, Lucinda Canty, Tae'Niajha Pullen, Shana Lusk, Trisha Hawthorne Noble, and Milagros Castillo-Montoya. Congratulations to all of our award recipients, and thank you to Dr. Fania E. Davis and all of those who made this wonderful night possible.



The Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation Showcase

On April 17, UConn Health and the Office for Diversity and Inclusion presented their annual TRHT Research Symposium. The Symposium featured twenty-four important posters focused on the importance of health equity and intersectional justice and included a vital panel focused about health equity and community engagement. What a gift to learn from and hear about the important work of addressing inequities in public health! Thank you to all of our organizers and participants for sharing all of their important work.



TRANSFORMATION

TRHT™ is meant to be a comprehensive framework for truly transformational change: to work toward a just, equitable, and compassionate world for all communities by addressing economic injustice, structural inequities in our laws and policies, and the ongoing legacies and structures of segregation in our society. While we know this transformation will not happen overnight, we are also moved and buoyed by the events this semester that gave us the opportunity to celebrate with and alongside one another. Whether in celebrating International Women's Day, participating in Spring Pow Wow, or attending the Rainbow Center's Drag Show, these events reminded us of why working for narrative change and racial healing is so vitally important: now and always, our stories, our communities, and our joy matter, and it is through our work together that we hope to build a world that reflects that.

The Rainbow Center Drag Show

In March, The Rainbow Center celebrated the annual drag show, held this year in the Jorgensen Center for the Arts to accommodate even more students, faculty, staff, and community members. This year's "Cabinet of Curiosities" was hosted by Throb Zombie, a finalist of The Boulet Brother's Presents: Dragula Season 5, and featured performances from students, KConn, and performers from across the state. The night was a wonderful celebration of queer joy, history, and culture, offering us all the chance to laugh, cheer, and encourage one another, particularly in the midst of increased efforts to threaten, silence, or marginalize the beauty of queer life and community. In challenging times such as these, it is all the more vital that we continue to affirm the joy to be found in embracing our true selves and helping one another to

delight in the opportunity be with and among our communities. Our congratulations and gratitude go out to all who made this amazing night possible and thank you to all who attended!



Spring Pow Wow 2024

This semester, NACP celebrated the annual Spring Pow Wow, featuring a wide range of activities and performances hosted in the Student Union Ballroom. The afternoon included a potato dance contest, musical chairs, and a street dance contest, as well as performances from dancers Atsah Zah and Kendra Eaglestar, and drums led by Iron River. Spring Pow Wow is a celebratory event that allowed us to remember the importance of community, joy, and the arts for resisting and rebuking historical and ongoing efforts to silence or erase Indigenous history, as well as a reminder of the beauty and power of Indigenous community and culture today. Congratulations to NACP and NAISA on this wonderful event, and thank you to all the artists, organizers, and community members who shared their gifts and talents with us throughout the afternoon!



Women's Herstory Month

In March, the Women's Center commemorated Women's Herstory Month with a series of timely and important events, beginning with a moving keynote address from lawyer, activist, writer, and filmmaker Valarie Kaur. Leader of the Revolutionary Love Project, Kaur joined us for a talk and a book signing with students for a conversation about love as a force for justice. Later in the month, the Women's Center hosted a celebration of International Women's Day in the Student Union Ballroom, where speakers and performers urged us to celebrate women's history and take concrete steps toward gender parity. Finally, in partnership with the UConn Foundation's #ThisIsAmerica series, the Women's Center hosted a watch party to learn about the reproductive justice framework, which centers the needs and rights of the

most marginalized to bodily autonomy as a way to pursue the health and wellbeing of all people. These vital and varied events helped all of us to understand how we ourselves can participate in movements for justice and transformation. Congratulations to all of the organizers on these important events!



A Night of Dance: PRLACC's Bomba Dance Cabaret

In March, PRLACC collaborated with the Jorgenson Center and the Movimiento Cultural to present the Bomba Dance Cabaret, filled with food, dancing, and fun! Bomba Night takes its name from one of the Puerto Rico's oldest traditional dance forms, which has a storied history as a form of both community and resistance. Participants enjoyed a delicious candlelit dinner featuring Puerto Rican favorites like pernil and pollo guisado, before being treated to a series of wonderful student performances. This beautiful night reminds us of the importance of community, joy, and movement for sustaining the ongoing work of resistance and transformation. Congratulations to all the organizers and community partners involved in putting this beautiful event together.



Leading in Challenging Times Series

This semester, ODI Central Office led a series of workshops helping university and community leaders to think through strategies, responsibilities, and implications of leading in turbulent and uncertain times. In the midst of budget cuts, changing leadership structures, and increasing threats to DEI efforts across the country, each entry of these series were designed to help UConn leaders to address the needs of staff, faculty, and students across campus. Some sessions addressed particular issues, including how best to address the needs of faculty of color, and others focused on the needs of particular communities. This series gave us the opportunity to pool our collective power and agency to proactively plan for the needs of our community. Congratulations to all involved in putting this series together, and thank you to all

of the leaders in our community who have made proactive steps to help make UConn a more equitable, just place, especially in the face of the challenges our communities face in these times.

acknowledgements

Thank you so much to each of the cultural centers at UConn for hosting and providing these photos to be included in the Spring 2024 Newsletter.