

fostering a culture of belonging

A CASE STUDY IN CREATING THE CONDITIONS FOR ACTION

the client

University of Louisville
Health Sciences Center



the opportunity

The University of Louisville Health Sciences Center aspired to implement new policies around diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) that would make it the leading anti-racist medical school in the country. Having recently completed a DEI training where she saw little engagement from participants, Faye Jones, Associate Vice President of Health Affairs at the University of Louisville, was looking for something different. She wanted a space where people could come in authentically, with a willingness to listen and learn, and be comfortable in the uncomfortable.

“When we were looking at different trainings, the Aspen Institute was distinct because [the process was] opened up to more than just numbers, more than just looking at the data, but looking at how people feel. Giving people that sense of belonging, of connection, made this so much different than other trainings that I’ve been involved with.

Faye Jones
Associate Vice President of Health Affairs
University of Louisville



The school was facing a big question: **How could University of Louisville Health Sciences Center create a more equitable institution, with a focus on racial equity, while also developing more self-aware individuals and stronger teams to lead that change?** They found the answer by fostering a deep sense of belonging among faculty, students, staff, and administrators. With a need to get various departments cooperating around an effective plan, Faye reached out to the Aspen Institute Executive Seminars team to curate a meaningful experience.





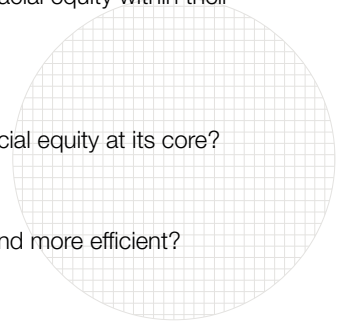
the experience

Working closely with the University of Louisville Health Sciences Center, the Aspen Institute Executive Seminars team developed a 10-week series entitled **A Culture of Belonging: Health Sciences and Racial Equity**. This was a virtual program featuring Aspen-trained moderators that led participants to re-examine how medical instruction is conceived and delivered through an equity lens. These sessions were a combination of curated readings, in-depth discussions, and guided small-group working sessions that culminated in participants drafting actionable plans to advance racial equity within their respective schools: Medicine, Dentistry, Nursing, and Public Health.

The program explored questions including:

- What does it mean to create a place of learning anchored in a culture of belonging with racial equity at its core?
- What are our blind spots? How do we engage others' blind spots?
- How do we create spaces of honesty and vulnerability in which teams become stronger and more efficient?
- How do we reconcile the need for rapid change with institutional inertia?

To accommodate an action plan component, the Executive Seminars team worked with faculty to integrate two workshops into the larger arc of the program. By curating a space that enabled authentic conversations to take place, “[the seminar] created an intimacy that led to a level of openness and trust that usually gets left out of the day to day working environment,” said Theo Edmonds, Professor at University of Louisville School of Public Health.



the results

The leadership team at the University of Louisville Health Sciences Center left the seminar equipped to turn its lofty goal of becoming a leading anti-racist medical school into reality. Participants were given three months to draft actionable plans to advance racial equity within their respective schools. For instance, the School of Medicine recognized that developing a diverse workforce was about more than just recruiting, but also effective retention. With this insight, they restructured their promotion and tenure process to better reflect challenges they were seeing in this space.

Following the experience, nearly all participants relayed that the seminar was a meaningful experience that achieved its goals and said they intended to do things differently as a result. In a survey afterwards, one participant conveyed “a better understanding of racial inequity and ways to improve things as a university and a member of society in general.” The leadership team found the seminar particularly useful in driving a greater understanding of equity work and the importance of its initiatives both to the health science center and the larger university, allowing space for diverse perspectives and experiences, and catalyzing the work ahead.



Ryan Simpson
Program Director, Office of Diversity and Inclusion
University of Louisville Health Sciences Center

“ Most of the participants didn’t want it to end. The fact that we got deans to do it [and] hearing that they didn’t want it to end because of the team building, because of exploring the topics together and how it could impact our work. The journey that we took to get there was needed. ”

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