

## **To talk or not to talk: Approaches to race and ethnicity topics in mentor/mentee relationships facilitated by shared research cores**

### **Core Administration**

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The “leaky pipeline” leads to underserved groups having a lower persistence rate to graduation, fewer advanced degrees, and underrepresentation in careers in biomedical research such as in research cores. Conversations around race and ethnicity can feel complex to faculty investigators and young student researchers for many reasons. Individuals can be unsure of how to initiate a conversation, or may fail to see a benefit to non-scientific discussions. Faculty mentors play a crucial role in academic and career guidance so that students may build their professional identity. Our objective was to explore if faculty mentors associated with a research core who initiate race/ethnicity conversations are perceived as helpful to young scientists.

We investigated two opposite approaches to determine how race and ethnicity are acknowledged, resulting in different impacts on underserved individuals. The colorblind approach (ignoring differences) and the multicultural approach (engaging differences) are discussed. Qualitative methods, including surveys and interviews of mentors and mentees, were evaluated to understand types of engagement and dialogue that are most beneficial.

Interview responses indicated both mentors and mentees perceived science topics and cultural topics as separate issues. Mentors may be more likely to rely on mentees to bring up cultural conversations. Underserved individuals concluded that the faculty mentor was less biased when faculty members’ acknowledged differences (rather than similarities) in their approach. Ultimately, environmental settings may influence whether the colorblind or multicultural approach is perceived by young researchers as tokenism or inclusion.

The best approach may vary depending on setting (university classroom, research laboratory, or core). Finding effective ways to retain members of underserved groups in biomedical research needs continued exploration. Increasing diversity, equity, and inclusion training is recommended so that investigators/mentors may navigate conversations with young scientists. Shared research core facilities may serve to facilitate training opportunities in alignment with ABRF’s values.