



REHR Center Newsletter

Our Mission

The mission of the Center for Race, Ethnicity, and Human Rights is to provide space and resources for students and faculty of Soka University of America to engage in inquiry, research, and constructive dialogue related to race, ethnicity, human rights, and their intersections.

Our Values

Racial and ethnic discrimination are commonly embedded in legal, economic, and social institutions in countries across the world of the 21st century. In many instances, discrimination is a consequence of a history of slavery, colonialism, or ethnocentrism. In others, the origins of present-day discrimination predate the colonial experience, or are the prod-

uct of religious belief systems. Whatever the context, institutionalized racism and personal prejudice remain significant obstacles to the full realization of the inherent dignity of all human beings, as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and subsequent UN Conventions.

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Letter from the Editor

Dear Reader,

It is an absolute pleasure to welcome you to the first edition of the REHR Center Newsletter published in the Spring 2022 semester. This year brings many new challenges and opportunities as our world is in dynamic and unprecedented change for all. The newsletter is born of the sincere effort to engage in inquiry, research, and constructive dialogue related to race, ethnicity, human rights, and

their intersections.

The REHR Center Newsletter is authored by the Student Fellows, Faculty Fellows and Directors of the Soka University of America Race, Ethnicity and Human Rights Center. The three student fellows include: Austin Sunseri, Ha Bui, Vibhu Walia - all in the Class of 2022. Faculty Fellows include: Pablo Camus, Ph.D. Assistant Professor of Spanish Language and Culture, Nidanie Henderson-Stull, Ph.D. Assistant Professor of Biochemistry, Lisa MacLeod,

Ph.D., Associate Professor of International Studies and Distinguished Faculty Fellow, Hortense Spiller, Ph.D. I have the distinct honor of co-directing the REHR Center alongside the very capable Ian Olivo Read, Ph.D., Professor of Latin American Studies, Director of International Studies.

The REHR Center has conducted two key events so far this semester. On February 9, 2022, the program "The Power Broker: Civil Rights Leader

Whitney Young's Fight for the Soul of America" was conducted by award winning executive producer and niece of Whitney Young, Ms. Bonnie Boswell for 155 people including 20 students. At this moment, the REHR Center is conducting a search for a Professor in Afri-

can Studies or Africana Studies at the senior level, open to specialization and discipline. Finally, the Center has conducted two dialogues to determine potential curriculum for Africana Studies.

In this edition, you will find

- REHR Center Academic Programming by Ian Read

- Year 1 article by Lisa MacLeod
- Being Human in STEM by Nidanie Henderson-Stull
- Brief thought on the Power Broker by Austin Sunseri
- A Living Legacy by Vibhu Walia and Shunji Fueki

- REHR 20-21 Summary by Ha Bui

I am elated to be furthering the mission of the REHR Center and to hear your stories.

Cheers,

Kevin Moncrief, Ph.D.

REHR Center Academic Programming: An Active Year

by Ian Read, PhD

Pursuing the Center and the University's mission, the Fellows are busy creating and hosting new academic events and activities that may interest our students. We have aimed for the widest range of perspectives and disciplinary approaches, and our speakers have talked about national, international, historical, and contemporary issues. Our speakers and moderators have included acclaimed scholars, artists and musicians, journalists, NGO founders, and alumni. Many events were recorded and are available through the SUA website, and some have generated considerable interest beyond the SUA campus. For example, Dr. Spillers' talk on "Afro-Pessimism and its Others," with over 6,000 views, has quickly become one of SUA's most widely watched videos of a university-hosted academic event. We have collaborated promotion with Jouelzy, who attracts thousands of participants from around the world to her virtual book club, "A Smart Brown Girl." Student Fel-

lows have served in the crucial role of introducing speakers or providing closing words.

Uniting most of our speakers is a recognition of the deeply embedded problems caused by racism and ethnocentrism and the great potential of our students and community to confront those problems.

- January 22, 2021: "The Living Legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr., A Conversation with Ambassador Andrew Young and Dr. Hortense Spillers."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FCqWUAzVSVw>

- February 16, 2021: "Halfway Home: Race, Punishment and the Afterlife of Mass Incarceration," a talk by Dr. Reuben Jonathan Miller, Associate Professor, School of Social Service Administration, University of Chicago; and Jhody Polk, Founder and Director of the Legal Empowerment and Advocacy Hub.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yqqAdbreUjQ>

- March 3, 2021: "Fearing and Desiring of Black Women: A Book Talk on Imagining the Mulatta: Blackness in U.S. and Brazilian Media," a talk by Dr. Jasmine Mitchell, Associate Pro-

fessor American Studies/Media & Communications).

- March 18, 2021: "The Magnificent Marsalis American Jazz Family: A Compassionate Family is the Cradle for Creativity, Wisdom, and Courage," presented by Delfeayo Marsalis.

- March 30, 2021 Research on Statelessness & Related NGO Work (Dr. Lara Chen Tienshi and Mahesh Kushwaha)"

- May 7, 2021, "Afro-Pessimism and Its Others' with Hortense J. Spillers," a talk by Hortense J. Spillers, Moderated by Lewis R. Gordon.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z-s-Ltu06NI>

- June 13, 2021, "Yet We Live, Strive and Succeed," a panel of the World Summit of Educators on how do marginalized or disenfranchised communities identify, represent, and enhance their community by Daniel Meirinho, Trinidad Jackson, and Joana Roque de Pinho, and Pam Newman.

- September 21, 2021, "Stopping Military Use of Kaho'olawe: Reconnecting

Dr. Spillers talk on Afro Pessimism and its Others, with over 6,000 views, has quickly become one of SUA's most widely watched videos of a university hosted academic event.

with the Sacred," a talk by Dr. Davianna Pōmaika'i McGregor.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sA4BgOkPBck>

- January 14, 2022, "The Powerbroker: Whitney Young's Fight for Civil Rights," a film screening and virtual discussion with Ms. Bonnie Boswell.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eB0H2D8-gFo>

- January 27, 2022: "Commemoration of UNESCO International Holocaust Remembrance Day: Museum of Tolerance of Los Angeles," a virtual tour and survivor testimony.



Photo: A live discussion event with Dr. Davianna Pōmaika'i McGregor in September 2021.

Statelessness at the Intersections of Race, Ethnicity and Human Rights

In my first year as a REHR Center Fellow, the thing that I am most proud of was the development of a new course, “Race, Ethnicity, and Human Rights.” I wanted students enrolled in this course, and the larger campus community, to learn about an issue at the intersection of race, ethnicity, and human rights: Statelessness.

Statelessness is the condition of not being a citizen of any country. The United Nations also refers to it as a violation of the right to nationality, a fundamental human right. Stateless persons frequently experience other violations of their human rights, including racial, ethnic, and gender-based discrimination. Stateless persons

often also have difficulty securing employment, education, healthcare, and other socioeconomic rights because many countries link access to these benefits to a national identity card. Although the exact number is unknown, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees estimates there are at least 12 million stateless persons globally. The UN Office of the High Commission on Human Rights and the UN Refugee Agency support the #IBelong Campaign to End Statelessness by 2030 in support of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

On March 30, 2021, the REHR Center hosted “Human Rights and Statelessness” with Dr. Chen Tien-shi and Mr. Mahesh

by Lisa MacLeod, PhD

Kushwaha. Dr. Chen spoke from her personal experience living as a stateless person in Japan for over 30 years. Dr. Chen’s academic research focuses on the disconnect between national and international legal frameworks and the lived experience of stateless persons in Southeast Asia. Her book “Mukokuseki (無国籍 Stateless)” weaves together her experiences and questions of identity beyond nationality. She now teaches at the School of International Liberal Studies at Waseda University and founded the NGO Stateless Network, which advocates for 4.2 million stateless persons worldwide.

Dr. Chen was joined by SUA Alumnus (Class of 2019) Mr.

Mahesh Kushwaha. Mr. Kushwaha shared his own experience as a stateless person in Nepal, a condition that very nearly prevented him from acquiring a passport and visa so that he could attend SUA. At the time of this event, Mr. Kushwaha was a researcher for the Centre for Social Inclusion and Federalism where he studied Nepal’s domestic and foreign relations, especially issues related to the Nepali-Indian border.

I look forward to bringing together members of the SUA Community to learn from each other, and from external experts through future REHR Center programs and events. If you have any ideas, I’d love to hear them.

Being Human in STEM Learning Cluster aligns with SUA values of wisdom, compassion, and courage

Wisdom. In the winter of 2021, five students, hailing from Korea, Hong Kong, India, Japan, and the United States, and I began our quest to learn what it means to be human in STEM. We surveyed the academic literature, reading over 50 articles, so that we could learn about everything from representation in STEM to how K-12 math education in the United States is rooted in racism. We questioned objectivity in science by learning about other epistemologies,

including Standpoint Feminism and Indigenous Ways of Knowing.

Compassion. The Being Human in STEM curriculum challenged us to be compassionate as we viewed dozens of videos and listened to hours of podcasts of how other humans experience STEM globally. We, too, documented our own HSTEM stories and challenged ourselves to think about inclusivity in STEM as a human rights issue, rather than an economical issue, or

one of representation, as it is usually presented.

Courage. The course built toward a group oral history project. Through SUA student narratives, we learned that students were generally positive about their STEM experiences at SUA, but there were some common barriers that many students faced. To help to make SUA a more inclusive learning environment, HSTEM students boldly designed interventions. One student’s proposal has been

implemented in this year’s Science Bridge course. We, along with a dozen other institutions, presented our SUA HSTEM course and student-created interventions at the National Science Foundation (NSF)-funded, 1st National Being Human in STEM Conference, hosted by Amherst College, Amherst, MA in June of 2021.

The most recent offering of the HSTEM Learning Cluster, while structured like the inaugural one, was tailored to en-

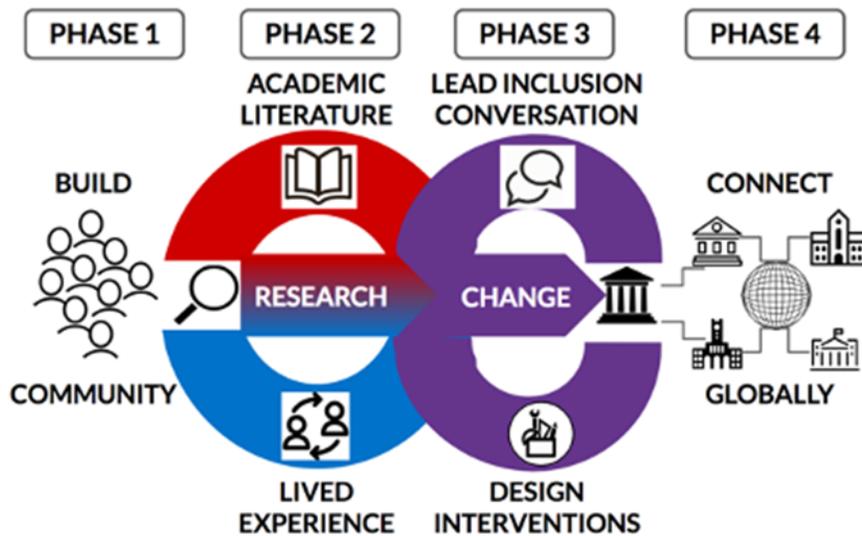


Fig.1 Being Human in STEM Course Progression. Image Courtesy Sheila Jaswal, Amherst College. PhI: Building the Class Community; PhII: Sharing our lived experience and grounding it in the academic literature; PhIII: Engaging with the SUA community, identifying barriers and best practices, designing interventions, and leading conversations of inclusion; PhIV: Connecting with the HSTEM community beyond SUA.

gauge the interests of this year’s cohort mix of three domestic and four international students and updated to include the state-of-the art. Comparative assignments on race in both pre- and post-industrial medicine were added, for example, to reflect the prevalence of pre-med students in this course. A comparative analysis of the ways Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) students at SUA and Amherst College confront institutional inertia in higher education, generally, and in STEM, in particular, was motivated by a recent publication by SUA alumni Victoria M. Huỳnh, Kristen Michala Storms, Jordyn

Solidum-Saito, Professor Aneil Rallin, and another anonymous professor.

Finally, this year’s HSTEM cohort’s oral history project and interventions sought to address STEM students’ experiences of bias and belonging on campus and in their

STEM classes.

I am grateful to the HSTEM learning cluster students, who brought their energy, authentic selves, and insight to the respective courses and Sheila Jaswal, Sarah Bunnell, and Megan Lyster for their encouragement and support

in launching this course. My students and I joined a supportive community of Being Human in STEM practitioners nationally while we expanded its reach to the West Coast. (Pomona College is offering its first course this semester.) Developing and

teaching the Being Human in STEM course has been the highlight of my REHR Center Fellowship, deepening my understanding both of my own discipline and lived experiences of our own students.

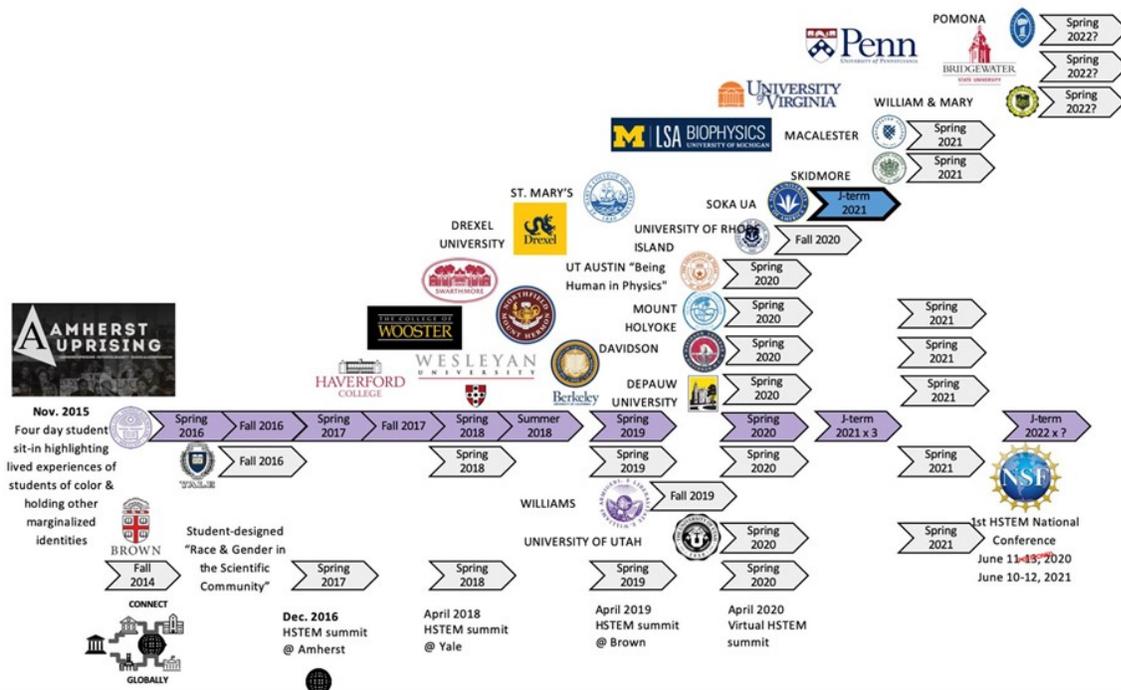


Fig 2. Timeline of the Development of Practitioners of Being Human in STEM. Courtesy of Sheila Jaswal, Amherst College.

The Power Broker

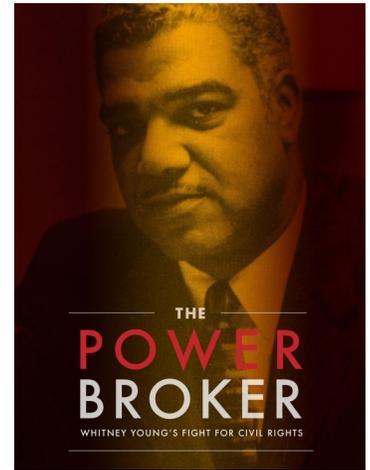
by Austin Sunseri

The recounting of Whitney Young's life by Bonnie Boswell was both insightful and encouraging. Whitney Young was prepared to be criticized by both ends of the engagement in U.S. race relations. As a social worker, he was concerned not with being the biggest name remembered, but as an agent of change who solidified key legislation for future Americans. One of his biggest strategies was to use dialogue with the upper echel-

ons of the US government and take an interdisciplinary approach to solving problems.

During her interview, the speaker, Ms. Bonnie Boswell, reminded us how her uncle, Whitney Young used an interdisciplinary approach. I found her emphasis on keeping everyone "in the room" as very relatable. This is liberal arts (more specifically, Soka) education in action. The fact that every "part of the watch"

served its purpose and one would not be as effective without the other confirms previous thoughts on what makes successful and sustainable change. Boswell respected his strategy and celebrated his behind-the-scenes skills in communication. Considering his impact on the Civil Rights Movement, I am surprised to not have heard much about Whitney Young before this event.



A Living Legacy

by Vibhu Walia and Shunji Fueki

The REHR Center, founded in 2020, builds on a tradition at SUA to engage in inquiry, research, and constructive dialogue related to race, ethnicity, human rights, and their intersections. Notable guests like Rosa Parks, Coretta Scott King, and José Ramos-Horta exemplify a living legacy.

Rosa Parks

Dec. 5, 1992: Civil Rights for American Ethnic Minorities: An Historic and Future Perspective



Rosa Parks, the mother of American civil rights movement, visited the Calabasas campus of Soka University for a panel discussion with Irene Tovar, Ron Wakabayashi, Glenda Ahhaitty, James M. Lawson, moderated by Tobie Marsh. She shared her Montgomery bus boycott experiences in the panel discussion titled "Civil Rights for American Ethnic Minorities: An Historic and Future Perspective." She recalled distasteful segregation practices in her youth and stressed her belief that "freedom and

equality...should be for everybody, that all regardless of race or regardless of where we were located should have the same opportunity for education, for employment and every aspect of our lives should be equal."

She asserted that her refusal to give up her seat at the front of a bus in 1955 was her individual proclamation that people should no longer be treated in a discriminatory manner. Following the panel discussion, Mrs. Parks revisited the Calabasas campus in January 1993. During her visit, Daisaku Ikeda, the founder of SUA, welcomed her and they engaged in a dialogue. Given their fruitful dialogue and strong mutual respect, Mr. Ikeda invited Mrs. Parks to Japan. She gladly accepted his invitation and in May 1994,

Mrs. Parks visited Soka University in Tokyo.

Please see the REHR Center's new webpage, "A Living Legacy," for more legendary moments that build a foundation upon which the REHR Center strives to build.

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The Center for Race, Ethnicity, and Human Rights

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We are on the web!

<https://www.soka.edu/academics/research/center-race-ethnicity-and-human-rights>



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Assistant Professor of Biochemistry

Lisa MacLeod, PhD

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Austin Sunseri, *Class of 2022*

Ha Bui, *Class of 2022*

Vibhu Walia, *Class of 2022*

REHR 20-21 Summary

by Ha Bui

On September 21, 2021, REHR Center was honored to invite Dr. Davianna McGregor, Professor of Ethnic Studies at University of Hawaii at Mānoa, to talk about the resilience of a land and a community of Native Hawaiians in restoring the Kaho'olawe, one of the main volcanic islands in the Hawaiian Islands. The island underwent a historically challenging evolution: from a penal colony, a ranching site, to a training ground and bombing range of the U.S. Navy. Although regarded as “a living spiritual entity” (wahi pana) for native cultural-spiritual practices, science, and indigenous wisdom about natural resources,

Kaho'olawe is still a barren island contaminated by red dirt and ordnance and eroded by historically exploited farming—remnants of wars and colonialism. The Kaho'olawe Island Reserve currently oversees the island, its surrounding waters, and the entire ecosystems, with an aim for restoration and sustainable management. Collaborative efforts from the state and locals are much needed to heal and reconnect a land once being the rich center for celestial observation and marine navigation training.

Another major event that the REHR Center hosted in 2021

was the Student Forum moderated by Dr. Rita Roberts, Nathaniel Wright Stephenson Professor of History and Biography at Scripps College and Professor of Africana Studies at the Claremont Colleges. Attended students were engaged in constructive conversations about curriculum changes at Soka, the ongoing student-faculty-administration collaboration on campus, and pioneering initiatives students could start to promote student voice, trust, and transparency in future dialogues.

For the 2022-2023 academic year, the Center will introduce more activities and events on

our new website to encourage more inquiries, dialogues, research, and awareness of intersectional issues relating to race, ethnicity, and human rights. We also hope to continue the conversations on curriculum planning and faculty search with valuable inputs from Soka students, with the earliest forum taking place in February 2022. For any student who is interested in becoming a Student Fellow at REHR Center, the application for the next cohort will be opened in April 2022. Please stay tuned for our upcoming plans, and we hope to receive your support!