



MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

Department of Family Science and Human Development

Social Justice Statement

June 2023

Social justice is a practice that aims to create a fair, equitable, and inclusive society by addressing the systemic inequalities and injustices individuals and communities face. As the Department of Family Science and Human Development, our commitment to social justice is fundamental to our aims of fostering knowledge and a culture of belonging, critical thinking, and positive social change such that all people and families have access to the necessary support and have opportunities to experience the greatest possible health and well-being as they live, work, and play over their entire lives.

Indigenous Land Acknowledgement

We recognize that the Montclair State University campus occupies the traditional Indigenous lands of the Lenape people. We offer a land acknowledgment to the sovereign Lenape nations and recognize our part in their displacement and expropriation of their homelands and communities. We acknowledge the collective suffering caused to the Lenape nation, and the wrongful treatment of other Indigenous individuals and communities now residing in New Jersey, that resulted in land dispossession and the erasure of their historical legacies. While we recognize our harmful colonial history and the current practices that continue to suppress these truths, we commit to working towards long-term restorative measures to honor the ongoing connection with the Lenape people, past and present. As a department community, we advocate for the Lenape nations as well as respect for all Indigenous treaties and land claims. We seek to continue to grow and evolve through collaborative efforts with local tribal communities and Indigenous leaders.

Defining Social Justice

Social justice is a multifaceted concept encompassing multiple dimensions of equality, equity, fairness, and human rights. Importantly, social justice also seeks to create a sense and practice of inclusion and belonging for all. It recognizes that power imbalances, discrimination, and marginalization are pervasively embedded within social, economic, and political structures. Social justice seeks to dismantle these systems of oppression to ensure that all individuals and families have equal access to opportunities, resources, and social benefits. Importantly, social justice also seeks to create a sense of inclusion and belonging for all.

At its core, social justice acknowledges that different social groups and their intersections, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, socioeconomic status, ability, and religion, experience different forms of disadvantage and discrimination. Accordingly, it seeks to challenge and eliminate these disparities, fostering a society where every person is treated with dignity and respect, and where everyone has an equal chance to thrive and contribute to the collective good.

Importance of Social Justice in Academia

Academic institutions and, in particular, individual academic departments, play a pivotal role in shaping society by generating knowledge, disseminating information, and nurturing the next generation. As a result, we believe universities are responsible for prioritizing social justice in their teaching, research, and community engagement. Accordingly, social justice is intricately woven into the fabric of our department and all that we do.

Here are several reasons why social justice is of utmost importance to us:

1. **Knowledge production:** Social justice recognizes and challenges the existing narratives and biases in academic knowledge production. We can contribute to a more comprehensive and inclusive understanding of the world by critically examining established ideas and exploring alternative perspectives.
2. **Education and pedagogy:** Incorporating social justice principles into teaching practices equips students with the necessary tools to critically analyze societal issues and contribute to positive change. It promotes empathy, respect for diversity, and a sense of social responsibility.
3. **Inclusivity and diversity:** An academically diverse and inclusive environment fosters creativity, innovation, and holistic problem-solving. By embracing different perspectives and experiences, we can enrich the learning environment and create a welcoming space for all to experience being valued, respected, and a sense of belonging.
4. **Research and scholarship:** Engaging in scholarship that addresses social injustices can lead to transformative solutions, policies, and interventions. By conducting rigorous scholarship and actively involving historically minoritized communities as partners, we can contribute to evidence-based practices that advance social justice actions that promote health and well-being for all.

Approach to Promoting Social Justice

Within the Department of Family Science and Human Development, we are committed to promoting social justice through a multifaceted approach encompassing teaching, research, community engagement, and institutional practices (see our current [Social Justice Strategic Plan](#)). Here are some of the broad strategies and initiatives we undertake:

1. **Curriculum development:** We continuously review and revise our curriculum to integrate social justice perspectives and representation across disciplinary boundaries. Our courses aim to foster critical thinking, challenge social inequalities, and inspire students to become agents of change. We emphasize diverse voices, historical contexts, and intersectional analyses to provide a comprehensive understanding of social justice issues.
2. **Faculty and staff training:** We provide professional development opportunities for faculty and staff to enhance their understanding of social justice principles and inclusive interactional practices. This training equips them with the knowledge and skills necessary to create inclusive environments and engage in research that addresses social injustices.
3. **Research and scholarship:** We support and encourage faculty to pursue scholarly work that addresses pressing social issues and contributes to the broader social justice discourse. We

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promote collaborations with historically minoritized communities, ensuring their active involvement throughout the research process. This approach promotes community empowerment, knowledge co-creation, and the development of sustainable solutions to address social inequities.

4. Community engagement: We actively engage with local communities, nonprofit organizations, and social justice advocacy groups to understand their needs and collaborate on initiatives that promote social justice. We strive to create meaningful connections between our academic community and the wider society through partnerships and outreach programs, fostering reciprocal learning and positive social impact.

5. Student support and mentoring: We provide, or connect students to, comprehensive support services to ensure the well-being and success of all students, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds.

6. Department policies and practices: We critically examine our own policies, practices, and structures to identify and address any potential biases or inequities. We strive to create an inclusive and equitable environment for all members of our academic community, including students, faculty, and staff. This approach includes promoting diversity in recruitment and hiring processes, implementing inclusive policies and practices, and fostering a culture of respect and belonging.

Final Reflection

As the Department of Family Science and Human Development, our commitment to social justice is vital to our identity and mission. We recognize the importance of promoting equity, inclusivity, and social justice in our teaching, research, community engagement, and departmental practices. By integrating social justice principles into our curriculum, supporting transformative scholarship, engaging with historically minoritized communities, and fostering an inclusive environment, we strive to contribute to a more equitable and just society. We understand that social justice is an ongoing process, and we are committed to continuously improving and evolving our efforts to positively impact our academic community and beyond. In solidarity, through our collective actions and commitments, we can work towards a society where everyone has equal opportunities, rights, and dignity that work to strengthen their health and well-being over the life course.