



Dr. Kennaria Brown's relationship with Police Chief David Gregory began in 2013, when he was speaking with members of their community about diversity training; Brown, an Associate Professor of Communications from Berea College, was recommended. In 2016 they started their first conversations about a survey that would provide guidance for improvement in community and police communications. When Brown brought two undergraduate students into the diversity training, all three experienced a powerful, memorable, grueling summer as they worked on diversity training with the Berea PD against the backdrop of repeated tragedies in the national spotlight.

PROFESSOR SPOTLIGHT

by Rachel Clevenger

Berea College: Diversity Training in Police Departments

The Beast Within Us

During their first meetings in 2013, Gregory and Brown began searching for a program specific to the Berea PD, with Gregory looking for tools to make them “better servants” to their community. As the diversity training began, Gregory watched officers quickly engage with Brown and open up to her, and he heard genuine affection in her voice when she spoke of getting to know “her” police, the men and women serving her community.

2014 brought Ferguson—followed that same year by the death of Eric Garner and the death of Freddie Gray a few months later, along with a litany of other harrowing murders of both citizens and police officers publicized on the national stage. An already emotional topic became even more potentially volatile. Chief Gregory acknowledges there was some initial resistance from his staff simply because they didn’t know if they “would be heard and understood from their perspective.” Brown was able to put the officers at ease when the training began, as she discussed the human element of biases. Gregory saw friendships develop as the students “began to see the human side of policing.” He believes the partnership between the police department and its community has made everyone involved more “sensitive to cultural differences” as well as “more understanding of social issues.”

In the training, Brown is quick to shut down the “kneejerk reaction” that the cure to all diversity ills is simply more diverse representation in the same institutions, whether the lack of representation is in race or gender. She also eliminates the quick assignments of reductive and damaging labels, explaining, “We don’t have to be fill-in-the-blank *-ists* to complete *-ist* behavior with *-ist* outcomes.” Besides, suggesting that one-dimensional, easily assigned villains are the issue is being blind to the larger problem—the “stereotypes and norms of how we treat people are in the air.” She explains that diversity training is not about “sniffing out racists and racism” because the truth is that “the beast is within us.”

Some have wholeheartedly given over to the beast, she acknowledges, but “most of us are good people.” Even the best among us can treat people according to our expectations, and then we have “self-fulfilling stereotypes,” a tendency borne out by the research. The key is simply paying attention, she explains, to develop practical goals to combat these looming, overwhelming societal cracks. Effective diversity training offers a “look in the mirror” and a “reality check,” while she also acknowledges the “dangerous, thankless job” that policing can be. She gives them spaces where they can speak to each other; she is not prescribing solutions. She knows an academic can’t go “barging in with daydreams”

for any dreams of improvement must be firmly anchored in reality; in short, she is not there to instruct. Instead, she explains, “I ask them to come up with those answers—because I don’t do the job.”

Though there had been protests in Berea in support of Ferguson protests, Brown is adamant that the Berea police officers were “not reflective” of what was happening in Ferguson. She also marks the similarities between the public reaction to both police officers and minorities, particularly the idea that “what one does well reflects on one,” yet if one does wrong, that lack of judgment or lapse in character reflects on the entire community. In these horrifying events that draw the nation’s attention, she adds, there is not a simplistic answer involving white police officers and black community members. “The race of the officer doesn’t matter,” she explains, and the focus should be on “policing culture.”

A Heavy Emotional Load

Last summer, Brown brought two of her students into the diversity training via the Undergraduate Research and Creative Projects Program (URCPP) at Berea, a summer mentor-apprentice program designed to enhance student learning via opportunities for engaging in collaborative, directed, challenging programs with a faculty member. Not only does the program foster creative work that encourages interaction between students



and a professor, but it helps students understand the interplay between independent action and collaboration in any complex project.

Brown brought in Rashad Hayden, an African-American student from Birmingham, Alabama, and Bethany Turner, a Caucasian student and Kentucky native. The project, a response to national unrest permeating the summer of 2016, was designed for Brown, Hayden, and Turner to partner with the Berea PD to develop powerful diversity training and prepare a Community Survey Report for the Berea Police Department designed to assist Chief David Gregory.

The project was divided into four, two-week segments. The first, Relationship Development & Research, allowed Brown and her students to participate in three ride-alongs and accompany an officer to court. They read about policing theory and policing in general; they read the Report on Ferguson by the Department of Justice. In the second segment, they developed the diversity program based on their observations of the Berea PD as well as their academic

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work and collaborated with Chief Gregory to develop a survey. Next, in Program Delivery & Survey Refinement, they delivered three-hour programs to eight sections of Berea officers, with three to five officers per program. Finally, in Debriefing & Survey Administration, they gathered survey results and entered data; Brown analyzed the data and prepared a report for Chief Gregory to offer insights about moving forward.

A Family Bond

Brown refers to Hayden and Turner as “her kids,” and they call her “Momma Brown,” but in this process—Brown notes—they most assuredly were not just “Momma’s Little Helpers.” They were fully engaged in the research and the survey design; even more importantly, they were leading some of the training, and they were facilitating some incredibly difficult, evocative conversations.



Brown notes that the work was a “heavy emotional load,” and both Hayden and Turner agree that the psychological burden—while ultimately worth it—was devastating at points. Brown worked to keep her students “empathetic but with healthy boundaries,” but even so she recognizes they paid a price for their academic and personal growth. For instance, Turner acknowledges that she was hesitant at first because Brown and Hayden are African-American, and she is not—something that created a struggle for her when conversations grew particularly “raw” in the presentations and classes.

Turner still finds herself thinking back to the ride-alongs, noting, “Within that first hour, my world was rocked.” Even though parts were slow, and even boring, she realized in one day how morally complicated the job can be, even with decisions that seem trivial, like assigning tickets. In her ride-along, every decision was hers; she was calling all the shots. When they pulled someone over, she had to decide if they let the offender go with a warning or assigned a ticket. She recognized, for the first time, the intricate dance between “wanting law and order while being human.”



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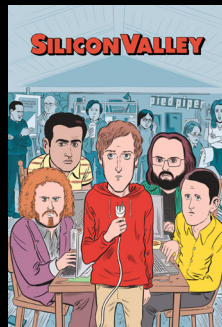
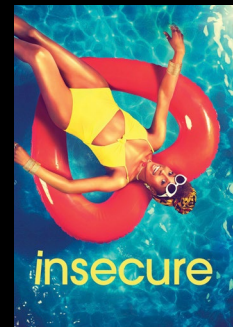
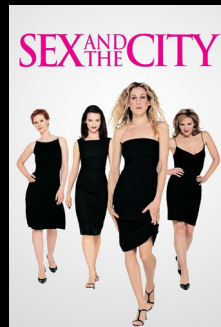
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Rashad Hayden, a Birmingham native, was reeling from the deaths of several of his friends lost that summer in Alabama through police action. While he acknowledged he wasn't questioning the officers' judgment in the encounters, the loss was still profound—which informed all conversations that summer, imbuing them with both extra poignancy and more urgency. "It was really emotional," he adds, "to have to process those losses and then go to diversity training."

In the classes, Hayden felt the most important piece of knowledge was exposure—where officers could see the views of race relations held by a community and "how that narrative evolves in media presentations." He wanted the officers to recognize how a "revenue-based system" in some communities was naturally playing into racial profiling."

Comfortable in Her Humanity

Chief Gregory believes communication between community members and a police department is the key to success and would encourage any police department to work with an expert

in communication and diversity to setup training meant to accomplish mutual goals, but he also recognizes that Brown is special, one of the best educators he has met in more than twenty years of policing. Noting her remarkable leadership in discussing diversity and social justice, Gregory shares, "Dr. Brown is great at communicating and worked a lot of hours in making her police department one that believes in respect and understanding its community."

The admiration and respect she sends out to her community comes back to her—especially from her academic children. "I love that woman," Turner notes, "and she will forever have a piece of me." Because of the powerful bond created by Brown with both mentees, Turner also views Hayden as a sibling, someone she shared a journey with that was both grueling and rewarding.

In addition to also finding the treasure among the toil, like his academic sibling, Hayden notes that Brown helped him find his place in the communication discipline. Among the many traits his mentor exhibits

that Hayden admires, he is most in awe of her ability to be consistently empathetic, always willing to go to any lengths to help someone looking for a breakthrough. While he hopes others in varied departments from across the country will try to recreate what Brown has done in Berea, in building this powerfully symbiotic relationship with their local police departments, he also recognizes that person would have to be similarly empathetic, strong, and fearless. "She never strays away from being herself," he concludes. "She's so comfortable in her humanity."



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Dr. Rachel James

Clevenger earned her B.A. and M.Ed. degrees from Mississippi College. After finishing her PhD in Composition and

Rhetoric, she taught and served as the University Writing Center Director for Birmingham Southern College and University of Alabama at Birmingham. Currently, she teaches Business Communications at Samford University.



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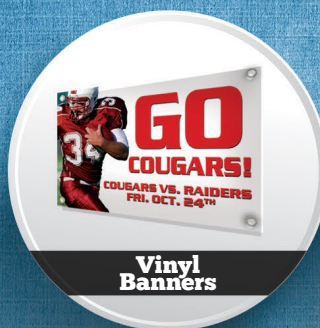
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