

We're listening. We're learning.
Wildcats Engage in Community Conversations on Race
Posted June 18, 2020

As protests in the movement against racial injustice began across the country, President Keith Evans announced a series of Community Conversations to engage in discussion and action with our alumni, parents, students, past parents, faculty and staff members, and trustees. To hear perspectives from as many community members as possible, Westminster held a series of virtual town hall meetings on June 11, June 12, and June 16. More than 800 people participated in these sessions.

Marjorie Mitchell '82, our director of enrollment management and longtime admissions director, moderated the sessions. Attendees used videoconferencing as well as an active chat window to voice their stories and ideas about how Westminster can become more inclusive.

Conversation at each event centered on three questions:

- **As you think about your professional, community, and academic affiliations, what are some best practices that promote equity and inclusion and fight racism that you think would be effective at Westminster?**
- **What unique opportunity(s) are in front of Westminster that we should not miss?**
- **What should we keep doing? Start doing? Stop doing?**

Chuck Easley '82, a business leader/executive and professor who has been an active Westminster alumnus for many years, including as a recipient of the Alumni Service Award, was one of the leading voices in calling Westminster to thoroughly assess how Westminster's community members experience race relations now in order to make a plan for setting goals and moving forward.

"Look at yourself clearly and objectively," he urged. "It's instructive, it's non-blaming, and it's very effective. Sometimes you have to call the baby ugly, even though you still love it. It's hard work, it's the right work to do, and we can do it here. Our community will be better for it."

Young Black alumni have been particularly active in urging changes at Westminster. "First and foremost, I think the thing Westminster has to stop doing is stop justifying. Stop justifying infractions and incidences that are racially charged," said Chandler Searcy '20, one of the young alumni calling for changes, in one of the sessions.

With 20 minutes dedicated to each of the three questions in each session, about 30 community members spoke during each town hall, with hundreds more comments coming through typed chats.

"I could not imagine how a Zoom call with over 240 participants could possibly run smoothly until I witnessed Marjorie Mitchell's grace in action as the facilitator," said Kim Mazier Hockstein '88 P '19 '21.

Participants praised the ongoing initiatives currently happening at Westminster, including affinity dialogue spaces for families, faculty, and students to explore issues of race, ethnicity, religion, and LGBTQIA status. Students, parents, and alumni also expressed a need to better communicate these programs to the wider community.

"Students at Westminster and around the nation aren't simply looking for more Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives as check-offs. We've had plenty of those for years. What we heard loud and clear from young people, Black students specifically, is a desire for significant curricular and cultural shifts that more accurately reflect the diversity and complexity of the American experience," says Upper School Equity & Inclusion Programs Coordinator Judy Osborne.

We'd like to invite our entire community to answer the three questions discussed in the town halls, whether you were able to attend a session or not. Please use the form on this page to share your ideas; you may choose to answer anonymously.