



Invited Essay

AEJMC Advertising Division 2020 Teaching Pre-Conference Review: Embracing Diversity Equity and Inclusion Across the Advertising Curriculum-Learning from the Pros

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Abstract

The Advertising Division of the Association for Educators in Journalism and Mass Communication held its 23rd annual Teaching Pre-Conference, virtually, on the topic of diversity, equity, and inclusion in the advertising industry. Six advertising professionals with DEI experience were invited to share their insights. In short, the key findings are that the lack of diversity remains of paramount importance and will take an ongoing, industry-wide commitment to resolve. In support, advertising educators need to thread DEI discussions across the curriculum. Presentations were followed by a moderated question and answer session, with educators invited to ask questions and then debrief in follow-up sessions. Teaching tips were gathered from attending educators and are housed on the Ad Division website.

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The Association of Educators in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC) Advertising Division held its annual Teaching Pre-Conference Workshop on August 5, 2020. The matter of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) is of particular relevance to the advertising community given its historic and ongoing imbalance in representation, and its marginalization of women and Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) people in hiring and promotion, throughout the industry. The topic of DEI was chosen with AEJMC conference location in mind, potentially tapping San Francisco's richly diverse community as a source for insight and inspiration. However, the events leading up to the conference (COVID 19 pandemic, political and racial unrest) not only forced the symposium online but also affirmed the dire need for significant discussion and impactful action around DEI issues.

The planning committee got to work organizing a robust program for Advertising Division members. Industry professionals working in the DEI space or experiencing the effects of the lack of equity and/or diversity in the workforce were invited to share their stories. Six professionals entertained questions from moderators and attendees. Participants were invited to share teaching ideas and debrief with colleagues. What follows is a synopsis of the pre-conference and the points our esteemed speakers made.

Aliah Berman, now Chief Diversity Officer, TBWA/North America, kicked off the conference as our first speaker. *Interesting fact:* Aliah originally trained in law and later worked as an attorney. In her role at TBWA, she works to foster accountability, across all of TBWA's North America's agencies, through planning and assessment that builds on existing DEI systems and established protocols for participation. She identifies programs and initiatives aimed at bolstering equity and diversity, creates learning environments that build a culturally competent community, and develops change and culture management initiatives that align with TBWA's DEI strategy—a strategy that is aligned with business goals to enhance actionable efforts to build internal communities of belonging, thus enhancing creative processes.

Aliah centered her talk around three core pillars: culture, workplace, and work. As for culture, she aims to create space to maximize the hiring and retention of diverse talent through advisory councils, resource groups, listening forums, and volunteerism. In the workplace, her focus is on identifying, attracting, and growing a diverse workforce. As for the work pillar, Aliah discussed the need to enhance a company's reputation around standards of diversity and equity. She emphasized that this can be accomplished by increasing the cultural

acumen of the workforce so that all work outputs reflect a diverse, equitable, and inclusive lens.

In addition, agencies must share a bold vision and clear communication across the entire organization, supported by deliberate conversations along with attention to supplier diversity. Several actions and resources were highlighted including A *White Fragility* book club, the *Race Talk* series, and a resource library for employees. Other takeaways include develop diverse leadership; demonstrate cultural relevance to clients and your audience; have a vision; hold people accountable; check your bias; and create brave spaces for honest conversations.

Aliah shared important career tips for students entering advertising: (1) get involved and build a network, (2) develop relationships with leaders whom you admire, (3) emulate admirable qualities, and (4) know you are not alone. Regarding pushback to DEI initiatives, Aliah responds, “This is not a political issue. This is a human rights issue . . . If we don’t understand the challenges, we can’t solve for them.”

Next up were representatives from Leo Burnett Group, who were celebrating the iconic agency’s 85th anniversary the day we spoke: Lois Castillo, Associate Director of Inclusion & Engagement (now Director of Talent & Inclusion at Highdive Advertising) and Christina C. McDonald, Recruiting Director. Lois is a DEI corporate activist who transforms culture, builds corporate infrastructure, and proactively engages talent in the advertising industry. *Interesting fact:* Lois is a strategic U.S. Army veteran with over 20 years of cross-functional management experience. Christina has over 15 years of experience in marketing and advertising largely in the Account Management area. Christina has worked on campaigns for American Airlines, Frito-Lay, Kellogg’s, Samsung, P&G, and Pfizer, to name a few.

Lois and Christina discussed Leo Burnett’s DEI platform. The agency strives to elevate creativity through empowering each individual, developing a true sense of belonging through embracing the whole human experience. They discussed three main initiatives, which bring this to life: culture, community, and commitment. The culture aspect focuses on the agency’s internal experience with an emphasis on how employees are recognized for their individual contributions as they relate to unique individual experiences. The focus is to make sure that each employee, especially diverse employees, feel “greater than” rather than “less than.”

Community initiatives include creating a safe space for brave conversations by educating each other on a variety of perspectives (people of color, LGBTQ+, gender, age, etc.). Together, they develop agency events, partnerships across and outside of the agency, and employee resource groups that support conversations among their peers around injustice. All these bolster retention. Also, regarding community, Leo Burnett prides itself in giving back to the community through pro bono work for organizations such as Boys & Girls Clubs, Feed America,

and Ronald McDonald House. Other charitable programs include high school internship programs, HBCU scholarships, and matching gift programs for their employees.

The commitment pillar revolves around sourcing, recruiting, and engaging talent with an eye toward growing diversity within the agency. Lois and Christina discussed their strategic partnership with various organizations such as the MAIPs program, the Marcus Graham Project, pipelines to HBCUs, and developing relationships with professors who understand Leo Burnett's values and candidate criteria. Candidate criteria include hard and soft skills and requires a flexibility around inclusiveness. In other words, they look for ways to "opt people in" versus opting them out. Notably, the transferable skills that Leo Burnett recruiters look for are leadership, collaboration, adaptability, relationship management, attention to detail, respect, empathy, and follow-through.

As Christina said, "We ask ourselves the hard questions. Leo Burnett is our absolute best when we have a diverse perspective." Lois added, "We are blowing up some systems that no longer work for us."

Up next was the Senior Vice President of Talent Inclusion for Publicis Media US, Brian Vaught. Brian has over 14 years of experience in client management, new business development, recruiting, training, and corporate social responsibility. He oversees talent inclusion for Starcom, Zenith, Spark Foundry, Blue449, Digitas, and Performics. Brian leads the Publicis Media Multicultural Talent Pipeline and the agency's Inclusion Council and also serves as a mentor and coach to the company's business resource groups. *Interesting fact:* Brian is out as an LGBTQIA leader and shares that he is an ESFJ (extrovert, sensing, feeling, judging) personality type.

Brian works as a two-person team supporting the aforementioned brands via consulting, professional development, recruitment, and internal communication. He is actively involved in an Inclusion Council with representatives from each brand he represents. This council discusses the inclusion issues the agency wants to tackle, identifying partnerships and developing metrics to hold the agency accountable. Consultation services include analyzing workforce trends, setting goals, and benchmarking progress. His team responds to requests for proposals and provides information about leadership and overall agency composition. They also have an eye on supplier diversity.

Regarding professional development, Brian's team develops and delivers inclusion programs for entry-level employees all the way up to C-suite. Brian notes that diversity and equity includes learning capabilities, vets, moms, LGBTQ+ communities as well as people of color. His team partners with a variety of organizations to advance equity and inclusion goals, including the AAF, 4A's, the MAIP program, AEF, Ad Fellows, Autism Speaks, Veterans groups, and LGBTQ+ partners. On the recruiting side, Brian's team focuses on entry level and campus connections with attention to the multicultural pipeline. However, they recognize the diversity gap in mid-level and senior positions,

which of course often includes the lack of women at the top, and work to find remedies for the issue.

Their Talent Spotlight initiative recognizes diverse company talent. Brian's team develops monthly digital toolkits for employees to share in the digital space, providing an innovative way to educate and celebrate diversity within the company. These toolkits feature events, heritage months, involvement opportunities, and key personalities. Business Resource Groups (BRG) provide access to speakers, events, networking, and fundraising among other benefits. Brian states that BRGs have helped shape policies and changed the way the agency operates. Additionally, BRGs have given back to communities they represent, presenting a win-win situation.

Publicis has a Multicultural Talent Pipeline (MCTP) initiative and invites approximately 150 college students to their campus for education, networking, and interviews with professionals, resulting in multiple job offers and new hires. The MCTP group works with universities and professors to identify gaps and align curriculum with industry needs. Brian stated that Publicis is expecting to expand the MCTP program from once a year to ongoing and include high schools to create awareness about careers in the advertising industry. The goal for future MCTP is to include more than 1000 student participants and connect with more universities. Brian envisions the MCTP program as a vehicle that could be replicated in many countries allowing international collaborations. As Brian puts it, the MCTP program "will gain momentum and further people's interest in why this (advertising) is a really cool job to have."

Jimmy Smith, Chief Creative Officer at Amusement Park, works his magic in a variety of roles: entrepreneur, environmentalist, creative director, author, video game creator, and producer (TV, film, and music). *Interesting facts:* Jimmy was the brain behind the Gatorade "G" campaign. He spurred a Guinness world record for the highest skydive, sans parachute, in the Stride Gum stunt titled "Heaven Sent." The show Bewitched was his inspiration for entering into advertising.

With experience working in multicultural agencies and general-market agencies, Jimmy has first-hand experience in mixing ideas together with folks from different backgrounds while inspiring innovative outcomes. He believes creative leaders need a variety of diverse perspectives on the team in order to create magic. Regarding diversifying the workforce, Jimmy suggested that the industry has a long way to go. He noted there is so much untapped talent of all colors. Once hired, a person should be allowed to be their authentic self even though they may not walk or talk the same as others on the team. He doesn't want to be known as a Black creative, or White creative, but a creative.

When asked about his current assessment of the industry hiring practices regarding people of color, Jimmy says it's worse now than when he joined the industry a couple of decades ago. At that time, there were more Black agencies that were thriving. However, due to the tragedies of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor,

and others, brands are now asking for people of color, which he notes would have been unheard of before those events. He hopes that momentum can be sustained.

It was interesting to hear Jimmy say that even as White folks are going to make some diversity hires on the agency and brand sides, he notes that Black people in positions to hire are not bringing along enough people of color. He noted that while agencies may not be all that brave, brands can put pressure on agencies to diversify. When asked if education through anti-bias training could help, he thought it could. He also pointed out that culture provides ways to learn about other communities through movies like the Black Panther, and artists like Chance the Rapper and others that help move the ball forward.

He suggested that this is a unique time period and a time to be bold, not timid. It's okay to ask about a company's diversity stance in an interview. People of color can say they don't want to be a token, but reiterate they have the skills to increase business. He concluded by saying, "If you get a whack answer, it's probably not a place you want to work at anyway."

Kat Gordon, Founder of the 3% Movement, was our final speaker. The 3% Movement emerged from the recognition that, nearly a decade ago, only 3% of creative directors were women. She set out to change that number. As 3% evolved, so did Kat's commitment to diversity and inclusion. She now touts the idea that diversity equals profitability. Though there has been movement, change has been slow. She notes there needs to be more women and people of color in the C-suite and that is because DEI must be part of corporate responsibility. *Interesting Fact:* Cindy Gallop has been the keynote speaker for every 3% conference since its inception.

Kat had a lot of relevant advice for attendees. She is a big advocate for building a culture of belonging and sees that as a path toward equity and inclusion. Creating safe communities where people are willing to take risks can reap great rewards. She encourages "opting in" rather than "opting out" of diversity. Kat believes that companies should release their diversity numbers and tie them to measurable goals.

The 3% Movement provides numerous resources including an educator guide titled "[100 Things Faculty Can Do Right Now to Drive the 3% Number Upward.](#)" All are available on the 3% website, with many ideas that faculty can incorporate into their classrooms immediately. Another idea for educators and practitioners alike is asking the question: "How can this work move diversity forward?" [Grey Advertising](#) partnered with the 3% Movement to add this question to every brief, which is an action every agency should consider taking.

Kat advises everyone to broaden their idea of creativity. She recommends studying Tom Kelley's book, *Ten Faces of Innovation*, with insights from IDEO. The book reviews ten roles a team can take that can inspire new ideas. She also believes educators should incorporate unconscious bias training in the curriculum to help students prepare for the workforce. Helping students learn to sell

and pitch their ideas will go a long way to assisting students as they work to land a job in the field, noted Kat.

To further enhance diversity and inclusion in the future, Kat stated that children with a creative sensibility should be encouraged to consider advertising as a career. However, first, parents need to know about it. This entails outreach and education.

Once we heard from each speaker individually, we held an interactive panel discussion. Three key themes emerged from that conversation:

First, what are ways in which agencies can create safe communities for employees from underrepresented groups? How can educators create safe and brave spaces for students?

Lois spoke to the need for the industry to take more risks. Agencies have to look at the experience of their talent and listen to everyone's voices. You cannot solve problems with one initiative. Having open conversations and creating an environment to listen to feedback are very important. One of the best ways to create safe spaces is for people in positions of power to become more willing to move out the way to let junior or diverse talent shine. Always remember that one person's experience may not be your experience, but all experiences matter.

Christina added that sometimes people are not comfortable raising their voice when they are the only one in the room, which can be a challenge. So, companies need to tap into diverse communities.

Brian agreed with Lois that more leaders need to give up their place at the table in order to bring in other voices. They need to coach junior talent, listen to them, and give them opportunities to flourish.

Jimmy advised not to think you are alone just because of the color of your skin. White folks experience that uncomfortableness too. Find out who can provide a safe space, find your support system and speak up. He then added, "if they fire you, you don't want to be there anyway."

Second, how can we raise awareness of advertising as a viable profession, among BIPOC and other marginalized communities? And how do we go about drawing young people in?

Jimmy: Find out who made the ads you really love. If there are people of color actually working on those ads, make them your role models. He commented that young people are already doing advertising on social media and that talent can come from anywhere.

Kat brought up a video made by ANA, "The Best Jobs You've Never Heard Of," and suggested that it is important to make people aware of all the

possibilities the advertising industry offers. She also pointed out that young people are increasingly choosing purposes and values in their careers. They care about being aligned with brands they feel proud to work on.

Lois: For most Black and Brown families, educating parents about the advertising industry is one of the important first steps. Help families and communities understand that advertising is a viable and sustainable career.

Third, what can people with privilege do to help expand diversity, equity, and inclusion?

Kat said her mission through the 3% conference is to spotlight amazing Black women, not in diversity conversations, but celebrating them as creative thought leaders. She also echoed earlier points about moving out of the way to spotlight women of color.

Brian emphasized the need to make the space and give up your seat at the table. Leaders should work with the team to identify the right talent—always looking to find out who is missing and bringing them in during the decision-making process.

Given the imperative need for DEI in the advertising industry, and across our curriculum, this was a highly relevant pre-conference. We'd like to thank the gracious advertising professionals who shared their wisdom and insights. We also wish to acknowledge our attendees who shared many innovative teaching ideas related to DEI, which are now housed on our Advertising Division website. The pre-conference planning committee is proud to uphold the Ad Division legacy of the longest running, full-day teaching pre-conference at AEJMC conference. The planning committee included: Robin Spring, Grand Valley State University; Jean Grow, Marquette University and Shanshan Lou, Appalachian State University.

We have no conflict of interest to disclose.