

## **'Race, Racism & Anti-Racism' conversations at UFV**

A report based on the findings of the 'Postcards from the Margins' campaign  
organized by the Race and Anti-Racism Network (RAN)

<http://www.ufv.ca/ran/>



**Authors of Report:**

Satwinder Kaur Bains  
Director, Centre for Indo-Canadian Studies  
Satwinder.bains@ufv.ca

Sharanjit Kaur Sandhra  
Coordinator, Centre for Indo-Canadian Studies  
Sharanjit.sandhra@ufv.ca

**Other Contributors:**

Alisha Soni (Student Research Assistant)

Zaki-Al Dhamari (Student Research Assistant)

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*We acknowledge that UFV is located on the ancestral, traditional and Aboriginal unceded territories of the Sto:lo Nations on whose territory we work and live on.*

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# POSTCARDS FROM THE MARGINS REPORT

*“Let us find a way to belong to this time and place together. Our future, and the well-being of all our children rests with the kind of relationships we build today.”*

-Chief Dr. Robert Joseph, as quoted in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report, 2015 p. 218

*Our schools, colleges and universities continue to be powerful discursive sites through which race knowledge is produced, organized and regulated. Marginalized bodies are continually silenced and rendered invisible not simply through the failure to take issues of race and social oppression seriously but through the constant negotiation of multiple lived experiences and alternative knowledges.*

-M. Aguiar, G. Dei & A. Calliste: Power, Knowledge and Anti-racism Education, 2000, p.11

## **Introduction**

This report reflects on some of the work of the Race and Anti-Racism Network (RAN) at the University of the Fraser Valley (UFV) <http://www.ufv.ca/ran/> in Abbotsford. We take this opportunity to build on the valuable work of RAN by contextualizing some of the findings from the “Postcards from the Margins” responses with current readings of critical race theory and issues of race on campuses across North America.

The Race and Anti-Racism Network (previously called the Discussions on Racism Group) at UFV was founded in 2007. The aim of the group was to allow for informal dialogue amongst colleagues and students at UFV and members of the community about issues of race or other ‘isms’ across broad spectrums. A few years after the founding of the Network however, it became clear that there needed to be more strategic institutional purpose(s) to the group’s outcomes and outputs. As a result, RAN members agreed to the following objectives:

- a) Raise awareness about racism and race-related (gender, sexuality, religious, class, dis/ability) issues at UFV, the Fraser Valley, and society at large,
- b) Organize events for members of UFV related to race and anti-racism.
- c) Bring together individuals and communities at UFV and beyond working on anti-racism, decolonization, and anti-colonial projects.
- d) Provide a space for Indigenous peoples and peoples of colour and their allies to work on issues related to race and anti-colonial politics.
- e) Resources pending, respond to local, regional, national, and international events and issues relevant to RAN.
- f) Facilitate dialogues and discussions within UFV among staff, faculty, administrators and students.
- g) Advocate for changes within UFV that are consistent with the above objectives. (<http://www.ufv.ca/ran/ran-objectives/>).

Since these objectives were articulated, RAN members have continued to meet monthly to discuss current issues and work to generate current and relevant dialogue on campus and by commemorating the annual *International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination* by holding events in March.

In 2011, members of RAN created a report (RAN report, 2011) with an eighty five page guide in order to address the range of issues connected to race, marginality, gender and basis inequalities specifically at our campus. This report was based on a UFV-wide Professional Development Day entitled: “Building Anti-Racist & Inclusive Communities at UFV.” The overarching questions the PD Day addressed included:

1. *Define racism: What is it? How do we recognize it? How is it evidenced? How does racism intersect with other “isms”?*
2. *Acknowledge that discrimination and exclusion take place in many forms.*
3. *Identify the practical realities of dealing with racism in the classroom and on campus.*
4. *Identify actions: how do we respond? What strategies are there to address racism? (RAN Report, 2011, p.5)*

Based on the results of the Professional Development Day, the RAN report made a number of recommendations in these key seven areas of:

1. *Indigenization*
2. *International Students*
3. *Supporting anti-racism initiatives for students*
4. *Collecting data on race related matters*
5. *Hiring, rank, tenure and promotion practices*
6. *Raising awareness*
7. *Institutionalizing anti-racism*

Based on these seven areas, RAN recommendations were prioritized with indigenizing the academy and introducing histories of colonization as being in the forefront (RAN Report pp. 35-36). Several recommendations were also made on equivalency testing and processes for international students as well as access to resources and support for international and domestic students.

In 2015, RAN launched a postcard and online campaign entitled “Postcards from the Margins.” The project was designed to gather current understanding about racism, race related harassment, bullying and discrimination on UFV’s campuses by way of an anecdote collecting campaign. RAN designed a number of postcards for dissemination to UFV wide community eliciting responses on racism through a simple question: *Is there racism on campus? Share your story or opinion anonymously.* These postcards could be dropped off at anonymous drop off locations or sent via anonymous internet collection on campus. The cards requested

anonymous personal experiences and perspectives on race and racism by UFV's community(s) of students, faculty, staff and management across the campuses. This project's aim was to create a "snapshot in time."

## **Project: Postcards from the Margins**

Forward six years later from the 2011 RAN report, and seven years later from the 2010 Professional Development Day at UFV. Current members and the RAN Chair decided that a 'revival' and reminder of the current climate of racism on campus would be important to be assessed. While some RAN recommendations have been acted upon, we are aware that issues of racial discrimination and inequalities continue to exist within structures of higher learning. These issues are further problematic because race is not an 'it.' We know that race is not a thing, a reified object that can be measured as if it were a simple biological entity. Race is a construction, a set of fully interactive social relationships. Assumptions that overt acts of racism no longer occur, trump the more covert forms of racism on University campuses especially, but these assumptions also hinder honest and forthcoming dialogues about the very real construction of racial identities.

Furthermore, structural racism is embedded in the institution of higher learning and white privilege continues to place stress on marginalized students, faculty and staff within campuses across North America<sup>1</sup>. Being mindful of these barriers, one of our goals in collecting anonymous anecdotes and stories at a University campus in Canada was to provide a safe space to share, disclose and discuss those narratives that are often silenced by everyday racism within institutionalized systems.<sup>2</sup> In addition to providing a safe space for dialogue, current members of RAN also wanted to re-initiate a robust and meaningful dialogue on campus on race and racism at an administrative level, depending on the responses received from those who voluntarily participated in the project.

## **Project Methodology**

Five postcards with various anti-racism messages were designed by a student Research Assistant who subsequently placed and distributed the postcards across various high-traffic areas on three UFV campuses (Abbotsford, Mission and Chilliwack). Each of the campuses had a designated/protected locked drop off box at the library where filled-in postcards could be placed. In total, five hundred postcards were printed based on five designs (see sample at appendix 1).

In addition to the 500 physical post cards, RAN also initiated an online anonymous campaign (with support from the Marketing Dept. at UFV) where a testimony or response could be submitted online. The phrasing of the question posed in the campaign was the same

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<sup>1</sup> For further reading see: Dua and Lawrence, 2000; Samuel 2004; Dalhousie Task Force Report, 2015 and Henry, 2015

<sup>2</sup> See Essed, 2002.

whether on the physical postcard or online: *Is there racism on campus? Share your story or opinion anonymously.* The question was framed in its most simple form in order to initiate as wide a range in response as possible without influencing the responses in anyway. In addition, the campaign did not want to base the answers on the assumption that all participants agreed that racism on campus even exists, hence the posing of *Is* leaves the space open for the responder to question that. While overwhelmingly, respondents gave proof that racism does indeed exist on campus, and many had experienced/observed it personally, as will be seen in the analysis of the responses later in this report, it was also the case that a number of respondents “casually and unequivocally” (without giving any proof) asserted the nonexistence of racism on campus in any shape or form.

The RAN ‘Postcards from the Margin’ project received ethics approval at UFV. Minimal risks were foreseen for the respondents as their responses were anonymous and the submission of testimonies was voluntary. RAN members firmly believed in the benefits of the research as issues of race and racism, discrimination and harassment are often silenced within academia. This research provides valuable insights into these issues on a mid-sized campus in BC, Canada. Furthermore, because UFV has a harassment policy, enough of a critical response provides RAN information on the current debate/discourse on racism on Canadian campuses.

## **Findings and Analysis**

Of the 500 physical postcards (see Appendix 1) disseminated across campus, each postcard garnered (on an average) six separate and distinct observations and personal testimonies of worth resulting in a total of 626 comments (see Appendix 2). A total of 74 were dropped off at the drop off locations. In addition, there were 25 online responses submitted for a final total of 99 (person) responses which were coded into nine themes and analyzed.

The submitted experiences or observations to the questions of racism on campus were themed based on similar type responses. The responses and themes that arose consistently (in terms of highest numbers in response) included the following:

1. Racism exists on campus (243 responses)
2. Experienced/observed acts of racism (152 responses)
3. Racism is institutionalized and systemic (57 responses)
4. Campus support and strategies are needed (51 responses)
5. Racism based on stereotypes/ignorance/fear (33 responses)
6. Racism based on jokes or white privilege (28 responses)
7. Racism not experiences (23 responses)
8. Racism based on exclusion/segregation (20 responses)
9. No racism exists on campus (19 responses)

For those who responded with overt personal experiences of racism on campus, the types and violent nature of their experiences/observations are significant. Some of the specific

and powerful examples of racist experiences on campus need to be analyzed individually and then assessed alongside current literature that addresses issues of race in the academy and race and the University.

One respondent, outlining her/his disturbing experience in a classroom demonstrates the level of overt racism and angst occurring in post-secondary situations. One student's two-experience written response deserves being looked at in its full length because of the range of issues that the statement gives rise to. The student wrote:

*In one situation, a peer was explaining her frustration about how she believes she was wronged in an interview because she didn't get the position she hoped, which had listed "Punjabi is an asset" on it. While she was reflecting, she focused her attention on me, as did the rest of the class. Being the only South Asian in my class made me feel like I had to defend myself and apologize for her disadvantage...However, her tone of aggression relayed as hostility towards me, my language, and my people and it made me extremely uncomfortable.*

*In another instance, we were talking about applying to the Bachelor....Program and it came to our attention that we were applicable to receive 5 extra points if we could identify as being part of a marginalized group. In the eyes of my white peers, those 5 bonus points would only be going to people of colour since they identify as a minority. They failed to understand that those 5 points could extend to many different things, not just racial aspects. Everyone focused their attention on me and my peer, a First Nation's female, and one girl angrily said, "Well, looks like none of us are getting those points." This struck me because I had never felt advantaged for identifying as a South Asian, and the one time I did for an application, it made my white peers uncomfortable.*

The experience of this student not once, but twice in a classroom setting is striking for a number of reasons. Firstly, we at UFV believe that students are supposed to study and work in safe and comfortable settings and secondly peers play a big role in creating safe spaces and may not recognize that racially charged attitudes towards each other can create real and tangible concerns for their classmates.

While institutions (such as ours) work with good intentions to create conducive learning environments, there is still some push-back to dismantling inequities as was demonstrated by two very distinct post-card examples in particular. One student wrote:

*My ....teacher began the course by stating the obvious fact that he was originally from England. This, he believed, was the thing that made him an ideal teacher of this course. In my mind, I brushed this comment aside thinking that perhaps he hadn't yet had the privilege of reading the vast and soulful works spilling out from the language's diaspora. His wit and confidence seemed to give hope that he would have something of value to impart... maybe later in the course?*

*By the second day into the class, we had spent a significant amount of time discussing biblical references. I thought I had been careful in reading the university calendar and selecting my courses for this semester; I hadn't remembered reading anything about a substantial amount of Christian theology in the description for this course. So, after class I asked the teacher if we needed to have prior knowledge in that regard in order to do well in this course. He answered with a question about my background. I stuttered a tiny bit out of minor surprise and also because I didn't think there was enough time to talk about how I*



*don't believe in god but how I obviously have a religious ancestry and that it is clearly not Christian. He probably picked up on some of my nervousness because he simply continued and answered my question about the class; no prior knowledge of the bible is necessary for this course.*

*"BUT!" he replied further that I would need it if I planned to stay here. ("Here" as in "Canada"). Here's some relevant context... I'm a person of colour from Canada. I believe he mistook my Canadian accent to be something more exotic.*

*I made it through the course with some difficulty even though it did indeed resemble a bible study; by being accused of plagiarizing (how could I possibly write this well or understand metaphors without stealing it from others, right?); by compromising my integrity (by appeasing him through less participation in class discussions and by writing essays he wanted to read); by enduring a craftily constructed environment of disdain for non-believers.*

*The A that I ended up receiving doesn't make up for my experience. This is the daily-life stuff that disempowers students from studying ....further, alienates non-Christians, demeans atheists, and disrespects diversity.*

Another student's response sheds light on an aspect of 'white-privilege pedagogy.' Here, the student discusses the drop-out ratio in a class once students discovered the theme was a topic related to First Nations. According to the student:

*When the first day of the class came, we found that the topic was Canadian Aboriginals and the plays, television, and media created by this group of people were disappointed it was a First Nation centered topic. With one girl whispering to me. "I thought I was going to be .... and European - there is no way I'm sitting through this semester" by the second week a noticeable number of students dropped the class, all because we were studying first nation plays and they had no interest to learn about first nation plays.*

We recognize that while young students are struggling to understand their own identities, those born with access to power, resources and privilege may be unable to see the impact on those that do not possess it. A concern raised by the student's testimony above addresses a nation-wide problem with syllabus design and the lack of instructors who deeply engage students on the issues of white privilege and identity. Deconstructing issues in the classroom require skill and commitment from professors and students alike. White privilege is an institutionalized and individual set of benefits that benefits those that hold dominant and powerful positions in our institutions - the sort of domination that needs serious attention.<sup>3</sup>

Many who responded acknowledged that although they themselves had not experienced racism, they were keenly attuned to the racism faced by 'other' students. For example, according to one student:

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<sup>3</sup> See Zeus Leanordo's, *The Colour of Supremacy: Beyond the discourse of 'white privilege.'* 2004.

*Racism on campus is alive and well...I have seen students being harassed by other students in the class...it is very subtle, sometimes a student of colour will get no takers when class assignments for group work are being assigned.*

A number of detailed responses (three different postcards) written by students highlighted targeted incidences of racism based on racial profiling. Three of those responses are abridged below:

*Within my first year on campus at UFV, I have seen one incidence where a student was being teased for wearing a hijab. Hence, I went there and told the students that what they were doing was very rude.*

*I was sitting in a lounge on campus one day and overheard someone in another room say "f\*\*\* Jihadists" and "f\*\*\* Jihad." I don't know if the comment was intended to be funny but I heard another voice say "That was funny." And I'm pretty sure this person was a UFV staff!*

*I have seen Sikh students being stared at, comments made about them (snide remarks) in class - that the boys are thugs and the girls are idiots. Once when I heard about this, I told my professor but she did nothing about it.*

Racism, racial profiling, micro-aggressions, covert racism etc. are currently experienced by students based on this testimony. Old and outdated ideas of oppression and bigotry and singling out of racial and "ethnic" persons for differentiated behaviours, responses and actions is alive and well on campuses.<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand, when racism is denied (or not addressed) there is pressure to assimilate by minority groups, tokenism might occur in our interactions when there is no desire for deep and sometimes difficult engagement, there might be disregard for others' rights and need for cultural identification, etc. Through all this the status quo is maintained and those who are marginalized take on the burden to bolster existing power structures by not being able to access avenues to demand change and accountability from the very structures that inhibit in the first place.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, we acknowledge that power dynamics at a macro level (institutional) need to be addressed, because acts of racism cannot be seen as isolated individual acts, but rather as an invisible system that confers dominance and privilege to certain groups but not others. Individuals also need to take responsibility for their own actions and to attempt to understand the everyday subtle and not so subtle racism occurring around them.

One notable theme that produced a significant number of response (51 responses) was the role of UFV in providing institutional support. This was expressed by both students and faculty/staff according to the post cards. Many students claimed that UFV doesn't not offer the necessary safe spaces to address issues of racism on campus; for example, with one post card stating: "students don't know where to go to report it (racism). What actions will be taken? Is it

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<sup>4</sup> See Smith, Yosso and Solarzano, 2011.

safe to report racism at campus?” Another respondent wrote: “It is unacceptable that a University of our size and reputation would get rid of the saferoom.” Many respondents shared their feelings of discomfort or anxiety at there being no ‘safe space’ on campus to share stories of racism on campus or otherwise.

While the study of race and racism and the work of anti-racism continues at UFV both in the classroom and in the public sphere it behooves us to realize that acts of racism are well and alive on our own campuses. We agree that racism diminishes our humanity and it can leave us with a sense of frustration, anger, isolation and depression that can be very harmful to our life at UFV. Denial of its existence and the pervasive nature of institutional bias must be combatted with open dialogue, confrontation of fear of reprisal (in person and online), demands for equal freedoms and responsibilities and for a continued sense of purpose for RAN as a collective.

It is obvious from the results of the postcards that the racial climate at UFV is both overt and covert in its manifestation, experiences and opinion. While a straight denial of racism might come from a privileged position of those who have never experienced racism because they see themselves as racially unmarked or racially neutral, it might also come from those who see themselves as “colour blind.” While people from a dominant culture may see acts of racism as isolated individual acts, people of colour view racism as a pervasive condition that needs to be negotiated daily. Failure to notice racism cannot be confused with its absence.

This project has taken some of the guesswork out of the commentary on racism on our campus. Anecdotal and anonymous comments have brought to the fore front many examples of how racism occurs on our campus and we rest assured that our work on anti-racism strategies, responses and stand against racism must continue. In the spirit of this project we make some recommendations for discussion and action.

## **Recommendations for RAN**

1. RAN continue to support Indigenizing the Academy’s important work by building active partnerships and alliances across the academy with organizations and individuals who work in social justice arenas
2. RAN create intensive faculty learning circles to read and discuss race scholarship for inclusion into curriculum including inter-disciplinary courses – race in the classroom can be supported both as a discussion and teaching opportunity
3. RAN assist in combatting institutional resistance to systemic racism through ongoing campus wide open dialogues and participation in University wide annual professional development
4. RAN suggest to Administration to make public (annually) the Human Rights Office’s report on UFV’s compliance with our Equity and Inclusion compliance mandate.
5. RAN to partner with Teaching and Learning to create a working group of interested faculty, RAN members and a member of the TLC. The focus of this working group is to create workshops for faculty related to classroom management techniques on how to make an impact on dealing with issues of race and racism in the classroom.

6. RAN to partner with Teaching and Learning to create a working group of interested faculty, RAN members and a member of TLC for the purpose of considering various approaches to support curricular inclusions of issues of racism in the classroom
7. RAN support a full Equity Systems Review of UFV Policies and Practices at UFV (the last Employment Systems Review was undertaken in 2010)
8. RAN continue to proactively respond to current events on race and racism and partner with UFV groups and departments who are engaged in solidarity and awareness programs
9. RAN itself and RAN as a collective work with UFV partners to create safe spaces on campus for those affected by racism to discuss racism and to advocate for resolution mechanisms to eliminate it.

**Appendix 1: Post Card Samples**



**There's no limit to prejudice...  
It's a learned behaviour**

Postcards from the margin

Building Strategies to Eliminate Racism



*Acceptance privilege strength race experiences anti-racism Love  
Diversity discrimination Power community equality justice belief  
Identity victimization prejudice change pride respect united  
Acceptance privilege strength race experiences anti-racism Love  
Diversity discrimination Power community equality justice belief  
Identity victimization prejudice change pride respect united  
Acceptance privilege strength race experiences anti-racism Love  
Diversity discrimination Power community equality justice belief*

**RACE**

Postcards from the margin

Building Strategies to Eliminate Racism



**"I'm joking"** **Power** **Black**  
**Yellow** **Colourism**  
**Red** **Secret**  
**Prejudice** **White**  
**Glass ceiling** **"You're different"**  
**Brown**

**SPEAK UP  
AGAINST  
RACISM!**

Share your story.

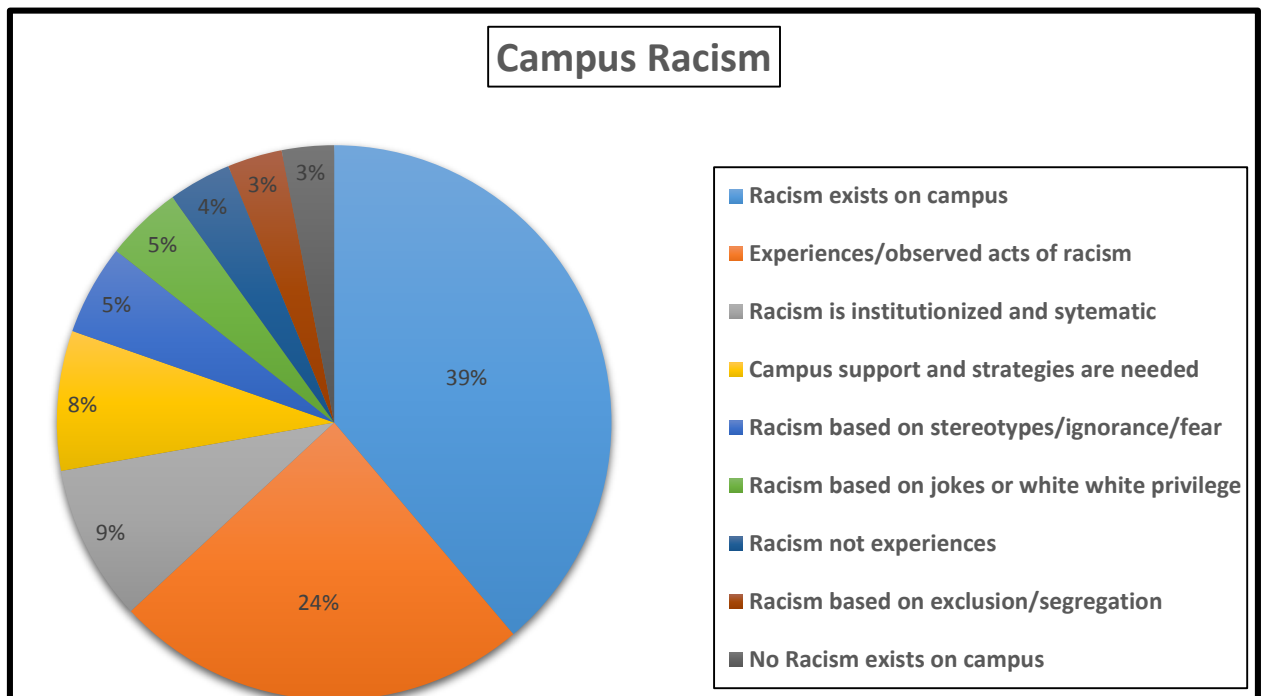
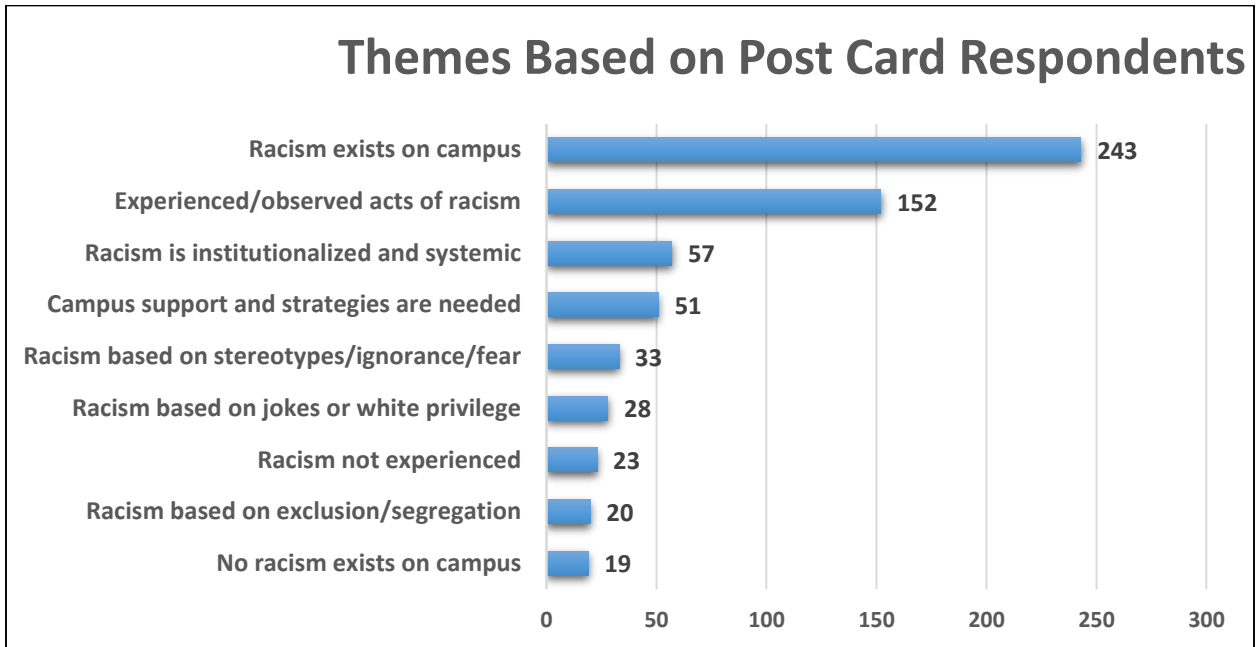
Postcards from the margin

Building Strategies to Eliminate Racism





**Appendix 2: Graphs**



### **Appendix 3: Resources and Additional Readings**

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