Intro:

The Missouri State Journal, a weekly program keeping you in touch with Missouri State University.

Nicki Donnelson:

This year, in honor of Black History Month, we're going to discuss the pervasiveness of systemic racism. It's even present in the way we gather data. I'm Nicki Donnelson. And today on the Missouri State Journal, I have Dr. Kyler Sherman-Wilkins. He is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at Missouri State University. He is working to empower more people of color on the university's campus and one step is incorporating anti-racism into the curriculum. He shares the definition of anti-racism brought forth by author Ibram Kendi.

Kyler Sherman-Wilkins:

The current dichotomy of being racist, not racist is not good enough. What he's basically arguing is that not being racist is simply just kind of saying, "Oh, I'm not one of them. I don't ascribe to prejudice or discrimination." But in doing so, you're complicit with the racism that's actually going on. And it really starts with this understanding that racism is systemic. It's not necessarily something that individuals do to one another. I mean, there is an individual level to racism, but it's much more embedded in our systems.

Kyler Sherman-Wilkins:

The new dichotomy is racist, anti-racist, where anti-racism involves actively identifying and then dismantling those systems, those racist systems. Again, that's the definition that I ascribe to. I think for the most part, Kendi represents well the scholarship that's been done on anti-racism. That's a definition that's shared by a lot of critical race theorists, a lot of black feminist thinkers. It's basically Kendi representing the collective in terms of anti-racism, the definition.

Nicki Donnelson:

He was recently awarded a grant to add anti-racism into the undergrad methods and statistics course in social sciences. He describes how he created this proposal.

Kyler Sherman-Wilkins:

The idea behind it I think really started with the reckoning that I think a lot of institutions are faced with, which is, how do we as an organization or how do we as scholars or how do we as instructors push anti-racism? How do we ensure that we can become a more anti-racist society or space? And in sociology, a lot of the substantive courses really deal with identifying oppression and trying to dismantle it.

Kyler Sherman-Wilkins:

For example, in social gender or social race, in ethnicity, the real core of those courses is basically understanding what systemic racism is, understanding what the patriarchy is, and what can we do as a society to kind of end those systems of oppression. I teach statistics and methods. They're not the most exciting topics. However, a lot of what we know from our studies of race and ethnicity and the impacts of racism and how structurally racism is perpetuated comes from carefully crafted studies, so that involves having really good methods.

Kyler Sherman-Wilkins:

How do we use statistics to highlight racism and how do we use statistical methods to actually further the goal of dismantling racist systems?

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The grant funding will be used to assist with resource building and professional development. The course will officially be offered in fall 2021, but he and fellow colleague, Dr. Caty Hoegeman, will begin piloting some modules during the current semester. They hope that students can see how useful statistics fit into the larger picture, even if they don't expect statistics to be part of their career path.

Kyler Sherman-Wilkins:

It's really a way to make it so that methods and statistics become these really useful tools that can be used to dismantle these systems. I mean, again, the first issue is identifying that these issues exist, identifying racism, identifying systemic oppression. And that's no easy feat. I mean, especially when we're looking at change in policy, you have to prove that it exists. And you prove it by carefully crafted and designed studies and presenting statistics. I think that's the goal.

Kyler Sherman-Wilkins:

And ultimately, I would like to see a world in which all the classes that deal with methods and statistics incorporate at least a part of this in their curriculum. Just really huge hat tip and shout out to Dr. Nancy Gordon and the rest of the staff of the Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning. These are really great opportunities for people to really inundate in their curriculum. And I think one of the things that draws me to being an academic, being a professor is the idea of innovating and always pushing boundaries.

Kyler Sherman-Wilkins:

And I do it a lot with research, but I haven't done it as much with teaching. This is a really cool opportunity for for... It provides an incentive for faculty to incorporate their research training into their teaching. I just really am grateful for the opportunity. I think that it's saying something about the university, that they are really funding this push to incorporate anti-racism into their curriculum.

Nicki Donnelson:

That was Dr. Kyler Sherman-Wilkins. I'm Nicki Donnelson for the Missouri State Journal.

Outro:

For more information, contact the Office of University Communications at 417-836-6397.