



Faculty Lunches with the Dean (No. 18) (John Rubin)

Author : Mike Smith

Categories : [Faculty Lunches](#)

Date : May 4, 2017



Last week was another round of our Faculty Lunches with the Dean. The group included John Rubin, Jonathan Morgan, Rick Morse, and Jeff Hughes. It continues to be a valuable use of our time—everyone seems to enjoy spending time with one another, as well as learning about interesting and important work outside of their field. We are making progress on our shared goal of breaking down barriers among faculty members. This post covers the information that John Rubin shared by about his work, and I will include the work of the other folks in future posts.



John Rubin



John Rubin. John talked about the work he and his colleagues in the Indigent Defense Education Group have done on racial bias in the criminal justice system. You may recall [an earlier blog post](#) indicating that the US Supreme Court had cited one of our publications. The Court referred to a manual primarily for defense attorneys on raising issues of race in North Carolina criminal cases. It was co-authored by Alyson Grine and Emily Coward and supported with a grant from the Z Smith Reynolds Foundation.

The Indigent Defense Education Group received a second grant from ZSR to create the North Carolina Racial Equity Network (NC REN). The grant supported training on racial issues for members of the criminal defense community who joined the Network. John's team now has received a third grant from ZSR to support NC REN attorneys who wish to initiate collaborative projects aimed at advancing equity in their jurisdictions.

Recent work in Buncombe County illustrates the Network's impact and long-term potential. In late 2016 two NC REN attorneys in the Buncombe County public defender's office approached the incomparable Emily Coward about designing a racial equity program for all of the court actors in the local criminal justice system. They wanted to share what they had been learning at NC REN programs. Emily helped them form a Racial Equity Training Work Group as a subcommittee of an existing Buncombe County Justice Advisory Group. Many local officials endorsed the idea and Emily provided guidance and encouragement after the Work Group was formed.



Emily Coward



The Work Group with Emily's support envisioned the training as a way to develop shared language and a shared understanding about the influence of implicit bias in discretionary decision-making. It also was seen as a first step in developing trust among the court actors as they looked toward a long-term project of addressing racial disparities in the Buncombe County criminal justice system. We provided funding to support the training through the ZSR grant, developed a roster of possible presenters, and helped design an agenda for the training. The training took place on April 21. It featured leading national and state experts, including our own Jim Drennan.

The implicit bias training was attended by over 120 people—including prosecutors, defense attorneys, judges, probation officers, pretrial services officers, US attorneys, federal public defenders, legal services attorneys, private attorneys, law enforcement officers, the Mayor of Asheville (who is an MPA alum), city council members, and county commissioners. The evaluations were very positive and the participants expressed an interest in future events aimed at addressing equity and fairness issues in the criminal justice system.

John and Emily are doing excellent work in terms of addressing racial equity issues. The newest ZSR grant is focused on building local capacity to address these issues, which seems like an important strategy for bringing about systemic change on the system.

In light of my recent call for fundraising proposals, I want to highlight two features of this work. First, it would not be happening except for private fundraising—in this case a series of investments by the Z Smith Reynolds Foundation. Second, the private funding has allowed John to add capacity beyond what he can do alone. Emily Coward is a talented research attorney whose work is a credit to the School, and it makes no difference that she is not a faculty member.

Z. Smith Reynolds

F O U N D A T I O N

I am convinced that this is a model that could apply in any number of other fields. It requires John to assume a role that includes leadership and supervision—I am grateful that he has taken that initiative over the years and done it to well. The result is a substantially greater impact in his overall field of indigent defense education.