



Truth Telling: Justice and the Problem of Small Numbers
Virtual panel discussion

Date: 23 April, 2021
Time: 1:00-2:30 pm
Register: https://unm.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_LCcybHpcQF-7vxPQLKd_cw

The Black Faculty Truth Commission Working Group and UNM Division for Equity and Inclusion are hosting “Truth Telling: Justice and the Problem of Small Numbers”.

The UNM Division for Equity and Inclusion (DEI) recognizes the University of New Mexico is a leader among universities confronting past legacies of harm in the United States. UNM is among few universities addressing multiple legacies of harm that involve race, ethnicity, gender, citizenship, state and tribal sovereignty among others simultaneously. UNM is also dealing with harms toward Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) faculty that may include violations of academic freedom.

Multiple instruments such as taskforces, truth-telling apparatuses, cultural forms of redress, and institutional reform have been used to address past and present harms within universities whose identity and pasts are complex and contentious. UNM’s legacy is complex because it is multi-racial, multi-ethnic, has contested wounded parties, and requires consideration of citizenship and language. An intersectional approach sheds light on the complexity of harms that have historical, layered, overlapping, and multiplicative effects that vulnerable populations on campus experience. Examples include threats of lynching, cyber-attacks, simulated sexual violence, physical threats, and targeting based on race, ethnicity, religion, language, citizenship, sexual orientation, and gender identity and expression.

In this first, of three panel discussions focused on truth-telling concerning the harms experienced by Black faculty, we will begin to address the problem of small numbers for truth telling efforts, and explore a restorative justice framework to create an institutional space that is safe and supportive for UNM’s efforts to repair harm.

“Small numbers” (meaning the very few Black faculty teaching at UNM currently and historically) creates a problem for truth telling because once such faculty members share their experiences, even if in a confidential survey, they are vulnerable. They are easily identifiable because they are the first or only person of African descent in their department or college, and thus protecting their confidentiality produces unique challenges. Finally, Black faculty members who are brave enough to identify perpetrators may be further harmed by retaliation.

On the basis of research in restorative and transitional justice, the panelists will provide recommendations for how to balance the need to protect the privacy of Black faculty who wish to share their stories, and collecting systematic data that could inform the design of institution-level redress of harms.

Panelists include Dean Emeritus Alfred Mathewson, Dr. Kathy Powers, and Dr. Assata Zerai.