

Debra Leigh: Anti-Racism Leadership

Debra Leigh is a co-founder (2004) and lead organizer of the *Community Anti-Racism Education (CARE) Initiative* at St. Cloud State University (SCSU) in Minnesota. With a mission to build a lasting anti-racist institution, she coordinates the CARE Anti-Racism Leadership Team and collaborates with campus partners to establish university and community dialogues and programs.



Her work has framed conversations that lead to institutional transformation through policy changes in:

- recruitment, hiring and tenure practices
- curriculum development, teaching and research
- the relationship between the university, the community of color and the greater community

Debra designs and facilitates seminars to help organizations understand and overcome racism. She also trains and coaches faculty and community members to facilitate difficult conversations and workshops about anti-racism.

Since 2005 Debra has served as a training consultant with the Minnesota Collaborative Anti-Racism Initiative where she facilitates anti-racism workshops for non-profit, for-profit, government and other service organizations. She also is a training consultant for leadership teams organizing systemic change within higher education institutions.

In collaboration with the Multicultural Resource Center at SCSU and the Minnesota Collaborative Anti-Racism Initiative, she launched the *Anti-Racist Pedagogy Across the Curriculum Seminar* for faculty. This program received the Minnesota State Colleges & Universities (MNSCU) Award for Outstanding Diversity Program. Debra also organized the *International Black Women's Leadership Project* at SCSU.

Through Create CommUNITY, a St. Cloud community organization, Debra designed and organized *Omeka*, a monthly gathering where African-American women serve as hosts for African women refugees and their families moving into St. Cloud, MN. Within a year, a sister project was also launched with women in the Latina community called *LatinaMeka*.

Debra holds degrees in dance from the University of Missouri Kansas City (BA), and the University of Illinois Champaign/Urbana (MFA).



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MORE ABOUT DEBRA LEIGH ►

Debra began her work at SCSU in 1989, as Director of the Dance Program. She founded the *SCSU Repertory Dance Theater*, *Summer Dance Institute*, the *Multicultural Children's Art Connection* and the *Full House Children's Dance Company*. In 1993, she became a Fulbright Scholar studying the arts in Indonesia. The following summer she returned to Indonesia as an artist-in-residence and presented a concert at the prestigious Akademi Seni Tari Indonesia—(ASTI) Academy of Performing Arts. In 2002 Debra taught at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in South Africa and established *Namaste*, the University's first modern dance company.

Debra's formal training is in dance. Her professional interests include:

- anti-racism organizing and training
- international education
- leadership development for under-represented groups
- performing and visual arts

During the 2013-2014 academic year, Debra was on sabbatical in Washington, DC taking part in a project sponsored by the Lumina Foundation for Education to document effective practices for underrepresented student access and success in higher education. Debra attended the National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Institute, Finding Mississippi in the National Civil Rights Narrative.

Debra's presentations are perfect for:

- ★ Colleges & Universities
- ★ K-12
- ★ Government
- ★ Faith Groups
- ★ Non-Profit
- ★ Businesses

Here's what others are saying about Debra:

"As someone who 'walks the talk' of transformative work, she offers real-life knowledge and skills, but also uses techniques from her dance background to engage workshop participants with their own potentials. Her goal is to encourage and excite others to be agents of change and she succeeds at this."

– *Minot State University, ND*

"With both her solid understanding of key concepts and issues, and creativity and artistic skills, she effectively engages participants in processes of exploring the realities and causes of racism, and avenues for working for greater racial justice." – *Service Learning Organization, MN*

"She has mastered the skill of designing events that are relevant, engaging, informative, and transformational." – *R. James Addington, Training & Organization Development Consultant*

**For more information about Debra Leigh,
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