TRANSFORMATION IN ACTION

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Who (The Campus Center)

Rock Valley College (RVC), located in Rockford, Illinois, is a 2-year community college offering both credit and non-credit services to nearly 13K residents annually. In 2008, a group of faculty and staff created a committee, Promoting an Inclusive Community (PAIC), dedicated to addressing social justice and equity issues at our institution. This committee continues to operate today and predates the creation of the Office of Cultural Excellence and Belonging (CEB) by 13 years.

In Summer 2024, RVC sent its first group of faculty and staff to the TRHT Virtual Conference. Following the summer conference, RVC applied for and was awarded a $20K grant from AAC&U in January 2025, officially marking the beginning of a TRHT Center at RVC.

The RVC TRHT Center resides in the Office of Cultural Excellence & Belonging in the heart of our student center. Active members include administrators, staff, and faculty, many of whom have attended the TRHT Summer Conference since Summer 2024. With the aid of grant funding, we were able to realize our Center's Fall 2025 goal of having 12-15 trained listening circle facilitators. The TRHT Committee currently consists of 14 trained facilitators who have helped lead 6 listening circles in FY 26.

Community Partners

New and existing community partnerships in this work include Eliminate Racism 815 and Northern Illinois Center for Nonprofit Excellence (NICNE) with its Belonging Begins with Us initiative, which is dedicated to building a culture of belonging in Rockford.

Learn more about Belonging Begins with Us

Separation (Division)

In 2024, Dr. Mathew Oakes was awarded a grant from the National Endowment for Humanities to chronicle the history of segregation in the Rockford Public School district. By the Spring of 2025, the funding was revoked due to shifts in the political climate.

In November 2025, TRHT sponsored Dr. Mathew Oakes and Professor Theresa Paulette Gilbert in continuing their mission to tell the story of the 1989 segregation lawsuit People Who Care v. Rockford Board of Education, which addressed the segregtory practices and disparities in funding and resources between students on the east and west sides of Rockford, with differences ranging from $3,000 to $5,000 per student.

The court ordered over $252 million in remedies, which were used to build four new schools on the west side.

Learn more about the People Who Care lawsuit

Law (Policy)

RVC convened several meetings, two Professional Development Day (PDD) presentations, and a PDD panel discussion in FY 2025 to discuss how to combat federal anti-DEI efforts. RVC changed its name from DEI to Cultural Excellence and Belonging and ensured that all student clubs, committees, programs, and events were open to everyone, while maintaining their cultural identity and relevance. The Intercultural Student Services Office and the Association of Latin American Students (ALAS) hosted three "Know Your Rights" forums to educate RVC stakeholders on immigrant rights and what to do if the college experiences an ICE raid. Since 2021, RVC has enhanced efforts to maintain ADA compliance and provide support for people with disabilities. These efforts included appointing a full-time ADA Compliance Coordinator, adopting an ADA board policy, developing administrative procedures for employees and visitors to request ADA accommodations and file grievances, updating the ADA Self-Evaluation and Transition plans, and providing training and guidelines to enhance digital accessibility. Promoting an Inclusive Community (PAIC), the campus diversity team, advocated for RVC in accordance with Illinois state law to provide menstrual hygiene products in public bathrooms.

Economy (Economic Barriers)

RVC has been looking at equity and accessibility for years in order to provide for our community's needs. Special Populations groups--under-represented groups such as single parents, economically disadvantaged, and homeless --were created through the Perkins Grant. By identifying students in these special populations, the out-of-district tuition rate was dropped by 40%. RVC provides additional support through a Homeless Liaison, Student Navigator, Veterans Services, Emergency Relief Funds, Career Closet, and Food Pantry. Through PAIC, we are planning a community garden on campus to help support the Food Pantry. The college has also expanded locations to accommodate community needs and accessibility by building a technology center in a neighboring city to our east and a downtown location on our city's west side, which will also provide childcare.





Narrative Change

RVC works to change narratives with its nearly 2 decades of affinity month celebrations. Becoming a TRHT Center led us to embrace new initiatives and recognize that much of the work we do involves narrative change. In FY 26, our programming included offering a discussion panel of people from the National Alliance on Mental Illness, a Human Library consisting of faculty and community members, a discussion of 21st Century Blackness, and a student-led Spring Symposium focused on "The Many Faces of Immigration", in which students worked with a faculty mentor and presented their work in pecha kucha format.



Healing / Relationship Building

The National Day of Racial Healing was folded into RVC's annual MLK observance. The observance centered on shared dialogue and reinforced the idea that meaningful change often begins with honest conversations and lived experiences. Dr. Keith Barnes, Vice President of Culture & Belonging, and Mr. Eldridge "Skip" Gilbert, former RVC adjunct professor, guided conversations grounded in Dr. King's 1967 speech, "The Three Evils of Society". Attendees were invited to consider how their own voices and choices contribute to racial healing, whether through dialogue, advocacy, or civic engagement. The conversation reinforced that racial healing is not a single moment or event, but a continuous process that requires commitment and participation from all.

Acknowledgements

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