

A Conversation: Student Organizers Reflect on the 2018 Youth Summit



This is a conversation between graduating seniors Kaity Calhoun and Collin Noble about the 4th RPI Youth Summit which occurred during the 2018 Race & Pedagogy National Conference. Comprised of about 500 middle and high school students and college student volunteers, the Youth Summit worked to engage in conversation revolving around histories of power, expressions of resistance and new actions for justice. With over 100 University of Puget Sound Student volunteers, these two organizers were pivotal in making sure the event day was successful. Their work would not have been possible without the leadership of the Youth Summit committee particularly the co-chairs: Sonja Morgan (RPI Community Partner), Jade Cooper (High School Student), and Kaity Calhoun (UPS Student) who is represented in this interview.



Kaity Calhoun '19 is one of the co-founders and former president of the Student Association for the Race and Pedagogy Institute (SARPI). From Walla Walla, WA., Kaity will be graduating in May with a double major in African American Studies and Psychology with a minor in music.



Collin Noble '19 served as the President of the Associated Students of the University of Puget Sound (ASUPS) for the 2018-19 academic year, during the 2018 Race and Pedagogy National Conference. A biracial, queer student leader, Collin was born and raised in Boise, Idaho before moving to Puget Sound in 2015 to complete an undergraduate degree in Business Leadership and Economics.

Collin: Hi Kaity! It is so nice to have a chance to chat about the conference, especially the Youth Summit. You did such a great job and I'm so proud of you and the students. Love y'all! Tell me a little about the youth summit and how we both got involved.



Kaity: Thank you Collin! We really pulled this off as a team, though. The Youth Summit has been a central piece to the Race and Pedagogy Institute pretty much since its creation with the goal of empowering youth, especially youth of color, to take charge of their own educations. This year was special because it was the first time that UPS students ran and coordinated the summit. RPI helped SARPI get in contact with ASUPS, and you and I started working together on the Youth Summit shortly after ASUPS pledged their involvement and support with RPI. We worked really hard to shift responsibility and collaboration into students' hands to find a way for UPS students to get more involved with RPI, the Youth Summit, and the RPNC conference overall! Collin, we worked hard together but stuff happens, of course. What do you think the Youth Summit was successful in, and what improvements do you think the future planners should work on?



Collin: I hope I can capture a *few* of the successes of the Youth Summit, but I know I will miss many. Seeing my peers, in collaboration with community members and high school students, plan and carry out the summit was inspiring, humbling, and electric. One goal of this practice is to show young people that they have the agency and resources to make real change - that their voice is necessary to the work of justice. The summit succeeded in bringing youth together (coalition building), providing the opportunity to organize (leadership development), and creating hope for a future that we re-imagine together.



Kaity, though we were partners in some aspects of the Youth Summit, you were one of the co-chairs who directed the whole project of the summit. What did you learn from that and what did you learn about justice work?



Kaity: First, let me say much gratitude to Sonja Morgan and Jade Cooper who co-chaired the summit alongside me. This reflection focuses on UPS student involvement specifically, but none of this would have been possible without Sonja's past Youth Summit experience and Jade's connection to the youth we served. In regards to what I learned: I learned a lot about justice work through the Youth Summit, but I think the two most important lessons I learned was positionality, and how much work really goes into these projects. A lot of the work that I was doing throughout the planning process was making sure that I understood my positionality as a white woman and how to navigate spaces of social justice work. I learned how to put on programming for primarily youth of color that would be accessible and most importantly help them grow and learn how to take charge of their own educations. Learning about who you are as an advocate and planner for justice work is so important to understanding your own personal blind spots and how your positionality can influence the way you see the world, and what you think would be best for groups you're trying to help isn't necessarily what they actually need. And this is where collaboration comes into play and is so important. Social justice work needs a community because it is trying to uplift a community, and communities are built on similarities and differences. Especially in social justice work such as the Youth Summit, where we are trying to engage students from a community that we aren't fully involved with, we worked to bring together voices from the community including high school students and community partners so that we could help to fill those blind spots that we had as a planning group. I also learned that social justice work is incredibly taxing, but in the end so rewarding and lots of fun because you get to hang out and work with some truly amazing people, like you Collin! This type of work truly brings people together in a way that we can all learn from each other.



Collin: What I might leave the discussion with is simply a message to our successors. I find it incredibly important that they know that they have all the tools and resources to do this work of putting on a Youth Summit - of engaging youth in conversations about race and equity in education (and thus the world). It may seem daunting and that you could never pull it together. We overcame this through learning from our elders, asking for help before we needed it, and not being tied to an idea of perfection. My belief is that, in the end, you need to bring people together and honor their whole existence. With that, natural inertia rises to deconstruct systems that have taken hostage of the liberation of all people. I see leading the Youth Summit as a responsibility to *convene with deep intention, not to create the group's agenda for change.*

