Explaining the Open Society Initiative at the University of Mississippi and the Role and Essential Attributes of the Executive Director

September 11, 2019

I.   **About the Open Society Initiative at the University of Mississippi**

Housed within the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement (DCE), the Open Society Initiative at the University of Mississippi (OSI@UM) is an antiracism initiative that uses integrated theoretical and practice frameworks to advance truth-telling, racial healing, and transformation (TRHT) at the personal, interpersonal, institutional, and community-cultural levels.   The OSI@UM builds upon the title of former UM Professor of History James Silver's 1964 book *Mississippi: The Closed Society*. (See UM news release from 2011 attached on page 9). This name is intellectually stimulating and emotionally resonates with scholars and prospective funders, particularly those with a connection to Mississippi and the University of Mississippi. The TRHT[1] framework was developed by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation[2] under the leadership of Dr. Gail Christopher[3]. OSI@UM is not funded by WKKF, but may adapt WKKF's TRHT framework to inform its work and mission and conceptualize future funding opportunities. In January 2018, the American Academy of Colleges and Universities, in partnership with WKKF, convened the inaugural TRHT Campus Centers Institute[4] that consisted of 10 campuses selected from a national RFP. UM considered submitting a proposal to host a TRHT Campus Center, but chose not to submit. Millsaps College was selected and currently hosts a TRHT Campus Center.

OSI@UM will succeed the William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation[5] on UM's campus. Taken directly from WWIRR's website:

> *The William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation engages citizens in classrooms and communities across the state of Mississippi and abroad to enable them to communicate candidly and constructively about race.*
>
> *By emphasizing the fundamental value of storytelling, the Winter Institute works to create a safe space for interracial, multicultural dialogue that is truth-centered and, above all, solution-oriented. While we promote equity and inclusion in all communities, our focus lies primarily on forging meaningful and collaborative relationships among people in the most disparate communities.*
>
> *We envision a more inclusive and just society that actively eliminates division based on difference, so we diligently pursue this reality, one community and one classroom at time.*

Established in 1999 on UM's campus, WWIRR separated from UM in 2018 establishing itself as an autonomous nonprofit organization in Jackson, MS. WWIRR works to advance community building,

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[1] https://healourcommunities.org/
[2] https://www.wkkf.org/
[3] https://drgailcchristopher.com/
[4] https://www.aacu.org/trht-campus-centers
[5] https://winterinstitute.org/

youth engagement, and policy and civic engagement across Mississippi and beyond[6]. WWIRR staff and their UM and community-based collaborators were consulted in deciding how to conceptualize OSI@UM.

While the mission of OSI@UM will transcend geographic, social, political, and economic classifications, OSI@UM will initially focus on advancing TRHT at UM and Oxford and Lafayette County. Because OSI@UM must continuously meet an ever-evolving role in service to UM and its antiracism needs, a significant portion of OSI@UM's budget will be internally funded. These funds ensure stability; allow OSI@UM to meet its core mission in service to UM, the region, and the discipline of antiracism; and seed other externally funded entrepreneurial activities that bring additional value to DCE, UM, its stakeholders, community partners, and the academy.

With maturation, OSI@UM will grow to include meaningful work and impacts across North Mississippi, our state, and beyond. As such, OSI@UM will seek external support through fundraising and grant proposals to advance the mission of OSI@UM, DCE, and UM. External funding will be welcomed from the range of reputable private, corporate, and philanthropic sources, regardless of their sociopolitical and economic connotations.

II. **OSI@UM Methods: Partnership; Connection; Critique; Action**

- **Partnership**: OSI@UM is a community-engaged initiative, and as such, will form long-term, sustained, and well-held partnerships with individuals, organizations, and institutions within and beyond the academy. The partnerships will be collaborative, mutually respectful, mutually beneficial, and reciprocal and will advance the mission of OSI@UM, DCE, UM, and the lives of the individuals and missions of the organizations partnering with OSI@UM.

- **Connection**: Story-telling using the empathetic arc builds and maintains human connection, trust, understanding, and graciousness that must proceed critical self- and community-inquiry focusing on race, racism, and other forms of oppression. Individuals from communities who have experienced historical and contemporary oppression frequently carry wounds that make inter-racial group dialogue and antiracism work difficult in the cognitive, emotional, psychological, and physical domains. Likewise, individuals from communities that have perpetrated racial oppression and violence, and subsequently continue to benefit from the

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[6] https://winterinstitute.org/about/

contemporary existence of racial hierarchy and oppression, frequently carry wounds that make inter-racial group dialogue and antiracism work difficult. White people's wounds are frequently experienced, or observed, as shame, guilt, anger, denial, and justification. These emotions, and their subsequent actions, frequently occur when white people are presented with the contemporary existence of racist structures and evidence of their own complacency in perpetuating them. Providing scaffolding structures that build active and empathetic listening skills in paired conversations and larger group settings allow for the discovery of shared common connections, empathy, understanding, and trust that are essential in working through the inherent messiness of the colliding experiences, emotions, worldviews, truths, and personalities that bring unavoidable conflict and disagreement to this work. Doing the initial and on-going personal and interpersonal work to establish and maintain the human connections can transcend the conflicts, misunderstandings, and messiness in antiracism work.

- **Critique of Race, Power, and Privilege**: Racial healing is defined as reaching a point of mutual commitment to affirming the humanity of each individual and engaging in a sustained commitment to dismantling the structures of racism and oppression. Simply put, racial healing means addressing the fundamental beliefs that give permission for racist structures to exist and capturing the genuine motivation to do the work that sustains change. Racist structures exist when the conscious or unconscious acceptance and legitimization of attitudes, beliefs, practices, policies, and institutions advantage whites while producing cumulative and chronic adverse outcomes for people of color. Illuminating, identifying, and understanding racists systems and structures is accomplished by exploring historical and contemporary interactions of race, power, and privilege. Critique is ongoing at the personal, interpersonal, institutional, and community levels.

- **Action – Individual, Interpersonal, Institutional, and Community**: Progress is only possible with sustained, thoughtful action. OSI@UM will partner with individuals, organizations, institutions, and communities to improve learning, knowledge, skills, and behaviors that will ultimately drive the educational, economic, and social progress of communities across our state, region, and nation.

III. Essential and Desirable Attributes of an Effective Executive Director

Reporting to the Assistant Vice Chancellor of Community Engagement within DCE, the Executive Director (ED) of the OSI@UM will fill an important and complex role within DCE, UM, Oxford/Lafayette County, and Mississippi. The ED must be exemplary in demonstrating respect for the dignity of each person, fairness and civility, personal and professional integrity, academic honesty, academic freedom, and good stewardship of resources, and through their words and deeds, the ED must encourage others to live by these values.

A. **Essential Attributes**. The ED must be dedicated to antiracism, truth-telling, racial healing, and the transformation of individuals, institutions, and communities. To be successful in this role, the ED must possess several essential attributes.

1. **Skillful Administrator**[7]. First and foremost, the ED must embrace the role and identity of a skillful administrator who is also a community member, educator, and leader. The ED must care deeply about individuals, communities, and higher education, appreciating the abundance of the strengths and imperfections that they each hold. The ED must have a desire to serve the institution, communities, faculty, staff, students, and the scholarly-practice of antiracism.

2. **Self-Transforming Mind**[8]. The ED must hold the cognitive and developmental complexity to know and articulate their own truth (self-authorship) and be willing to work within the authority of others' truths that are contradictory. The ED must be able to hold and explore the multiple contradicting thoughts and ideologies and explore the dialectic between these conflicting realities without blaming, shame, or villainizing individuals, organizations, and institutions who hold or represent them.
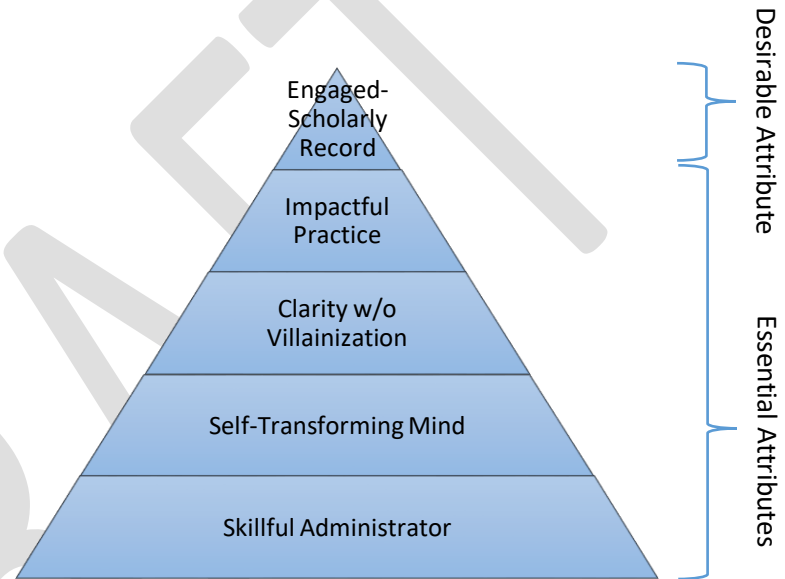
3. **Clarity without Villainization**[9] [10] [11]. The ED must have moral and cognitive clarity that understands, illuminates, and effectively communicates how historical and contemporary racist attitudes, systems, and structures have resulted in the explicit and implicit acceptance of human hierarchy and produced disparate outcomes between whites and people of color. The ED must also demonstrate welcoming attitudes and actions that invite all people, regardless of their starting point, into the TRHT process without condemnation, condescension, or marginalization.

4. **Impactful Practice**. The ED must be able to develop and lead successful programs, activities, and services that advance truth-telling, racial healing, and transformation at the individual, interpersonal, institutional, community, and cultural levels. Successful practice is demonstrated by the ability to attract, engage, and positively impact individuals, organizations, institutions, and communities from a wide range of experiential, developmental, cognitive, and philosophical starting points.

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[7] http://www.bolman.com/RALIntro.htm
[8] https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2807119/
[9] https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/08/opinion/student-mobs.html
[10] https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/25/opinion/national-security-polarization.html
[11] https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/17/opinion/sunday/cancel-culture-call-out.html

B. **Desirable Attribute**. After the essential attributes in the ED for OSI@UM are assured, the engaged-scholarly record of the ED should be considered. The ED may bring greater value to OSI@UM, DCE, and UM if they have an engaged-scholarly record that merits a tenure-track or non-tenure track appointment in an academic department. Although this attribute is not essential, a faculty appointment will make scholarly, multidisciplinary partnerships with faculty, academic departments, college/schools, and other universities easier to form and sustain. Even so, the academic role of this position will appear largely "service" in nature.

1. **Engaged-Scholarly Record**. The ED must be able to form mutually beneficial and respectful, collaborative, and reciprocal relationships that may improve the conditions of institutions and communities, the behaviors of individuals and groups, and the learning process and content. The ED should be able to accomplish this through the dissemination of existing antiracism knowledge and pedagogies. Additionally, the ED may be greater value to this field through the development of knowledge and pedagogies from multidisciplinary sources and emerging pedagogies. Finally, additional value is created if the ED supports, facilitates, or leads the discovery of new antiracism knowledge and methods.

   a. Engage scholarship may be produced by faculty and/or scholarly-practitioners. Engaged scholarship is any creative intellectual work resulting from mutually beneficial and reciporcal partnerships between university affiliates and communities that is reviewed by scholarly peers and communicated to the larger world. These may include refereed manuscripts, funded grants, curricula, conference presentations, workshops, art, and performances.
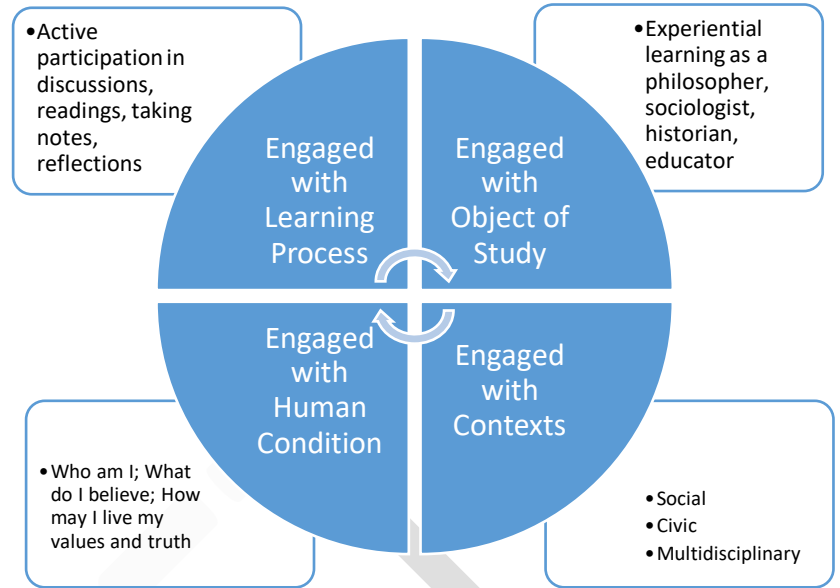
IV. General Type of Work

The ED will co-create, facilitate, direct, and deliver curricula, programs, services, and activities that engage participants (students, faculty, staff, student, and community members) in antiracism learning, skill development, and action.

A. **Engaged with the Learning Process**. The ED will support participants' engagement in the **learning process** through reading, project-based learning, dialogue, and reflection.

B. **Engaged with the Object of Study**. The ED will develop partnerships with faculty and practitioners from a range of antiracism disciplines and practices to engage participants with the **object of study** (i.e. the respective course topic, discipline, or practice) through experiential learning endeavors, including: practicum, internships, field experiences, and community-based research. Engagement with the object of study is reflected in doing the work of a historian, sociologist, educator, or community activist (i.e. providing experiential learning that allows one to practice the discipline of focus).

C. **Engaged with Contexts**. The ED will likely spend the majority of her/his/their resources engaging participants in the **social, civic, and multidisciplinary contexts** of antiracism. This includes understanding and practicing how racism and antiracism exists within a community (i.e. geographic area, situational similarity, shared practice, culture, or belief system); how racism and antiracism exists within society; and how racism and antiracism is understood and practiced as informed and/or influence through integrated multidisciplinary lenses including, but not limited to: religion, history, sociology, anthropology, psychology, economics, political science, social work, legal studies, etc.)

- Active participation in discussions, readings, taking notes, reflections

- Experiential learning as a philosopher, sociologist, historian, educator

Engaged with Learning Process

Engaged with Object of Study

Engaged with Human Condition

Engaged with Contexts

- Who am I; What do I believe; How may I live my values and truth

- Social
- Civic
- Multidisciplinary

D. **Engaged with the Human Condition**. Finally, the ED will engage participants with how racism and antiracism affects the **human condition** from first-, second-, and third-person perspectives. They may explore how race, racism, and antiracism affects or informs who they are, what they believe, and how they subconsciously or consciously choose to live and narrate their lives.

V. **General Focus and Location of Work**

The cornerstone of OSI@UM's antiracism work is the University of Mississippi with the entirety of its complicated racist history, contemporary issues, scholarship, actions, and the lives of faculty, staff, students, and alumni who have contributed to and been influenced by the institution. OSI@UM's work will include co-creating and/or delivering curricular and co-curricular experiences to improve the knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, and conditions at UM; co-creating and delivering antiracism scholarly- and practice-based institutes, dialogues, and experiences using racial truth-telling, healing, and transformation; engaging willing participants who have disrespected social norms and aspirational values in dialogue, learning, and development; and co-creating and/or supporting appropriate restorative

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UM Historical and Contemporary Issues, Scholarship, and Opportunities

United States

North Mississippi

Mississippi

justice processes that are led by UM offices or administered within the governance of student organizations. The antiracism work specifically at and with UM is essential OSI@UM's mission. In the long-term, a successful OSI@UM will lessen the frequency, harm, and subsequent responses to the occurrences of polarizing and inflammatory racist attitudes, speech, actions, and conduct violations. The curricula, programs, services, experiences, and engaged scholarship that evolve from OSI@UM's work at UM will inform subsequent work at the local, regional, state, and national levels. While institutional, local community, and discipline-specific practice will remain central in OSI@UM's mission, as the initiative matures and develops, the proportion of work focused at the state and national levels will increase.

VI. **Examples of Initiatives that may Complement OSI@UM**

   A. In Higher Education

      1. Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation Campus Centers. https://www.aacu.org/trht/campus-centers/vision

         h. The Citadel – The Military College of South Carolina http://www.citadel.edu/root/trht

         c. Duke University https://trht.duke.edu/

         a. Austin Community College https://www.austincc.edu/news/2019/07/acc-seeks-director-truth-racial-healing-transformation-campus-center

         b. Brown University https://www.brown.edu/news/2017-08-16/trht and the Institute for Transformative Practice https://www.brown.edu/about/administration/vp-campus-life/initiatives/institute-transformative-practice

         d. Hamline University https://www.hamline.edu/hunewsdetail.aspx?id=4295042731

         e. Millsaps College http://www.millsaps.edu/major-happenings/major-news/posts/2017-millsaps-college-site-truth-racial-healing-transformation-campus-center.html

         f. Rutgers University – Newark https://www.newark.rutgers.edu/news/truth-racial-healing-and-transformation-center-opens-its-doors-throughout-newark%20%20

         g. Spelman College https://www.spelman.edu/about-us/news-and-events/news-releases/2017/08/18/aac-u-selects-spelman-college-as-an-inaugural-truth-racial-healing-transformation-campus-center

         i. The University of Hawai'i at Mānoa https://www.hawaii.edu/news/2018/11/27/truth-racial-healing-and-transformation/

         j. University of Maryland, Baltimore County https://llc.umbc.edu/home/news-events/?id=73179

      2. Coming Together for Racial Understanding: a national Cooperative Extension Service and non-Land Grant University Initiative http://srdc.msstate.edu/civildialogue/index.html with curricula http://srdc.msstate.edu/civildialogue/curriculum.html

3. Community Anti-Racism Education Initiative (C.A.R.E.) at St. Cloud State
https://www.stcloudstate.edu/care/default.aspx

4. The Antiracist Research & Policy Center at American University
https://www.american.edu/centers/antiracism/

4. USC Race and Equity Center https://race.usc.edu/

B. Foundations and Nonprofits

1. Everyday Democracy https://www.everyday-democracy.org/

2. The William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation https://winterinstitute.org/

3. Center for Social Inclusion https://www.centerforsocialinclusion.org/

4. The Racial Equity Institute https://www.racialequityinstitute.com/

5. The Center for Urban and Racial Equity https://urbanandracialequity.org/

6. Race Forward https://www.raceforward.org/

7. Racial Equity Tools https://www.racialequitytools.org/home

8. Center for Racial Justice in Education http://centerracialjustice.org/

9. Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation. WKKF. https://healourcommunities.org/

UM Tribute Set for Professor James W. Silver

September 26, 2011 by [Staff Report](#)

Silver Pond. UM photo by Kevin Bain

OXFORD, Miss. – Nearly 50 years after he left the University of Mississippi in a storm of controversy, the late James W. Silver, a history professor and author of a well-known book on repression during the segregation era, will be honored by the university in a pair of programs Sept. 30.

A new body of water near the intersection of Sorority Row and West Jackson Avenue will be dedicated as "Silver Pond" in a 4 p.m. ceremony. A commemorative marker has been placed at the site, which is near Silver's former home on the Ole Miss campus.

The dedication will be followed by a symposium on Silver's impact on Ole Miss and Mississippi. The event is set for 5 p.m. in the auditorium of the Overby Center for Sothern Journalism and Politics.

Both programs are free and open to the public. A reception follows the symposium.

Silver, who studied at the University of North Carolina, Peabody College and Vanderbilt University, specialized in Southern history. He joined the Ole Miss faculty in 1936 and served as chair of the history department from 1946 to 1957.

He was a close friend of William Faulkner's and an influential figure among his students. Following the admission of James Meredith as the university's first black student in 1962, Silver offered personal support and friendship to the embattled student.

During the segregationist era, Silver was frequently at odds with state political leaders, but never daunted by them. He was a constant critic of racial taboos and spoke out against them, often in letters to the editors of various newspapers in the region. His 1964 treatise, "Mississippi: The Closed Society," became one of the most talked-about books to come out of the state during the period.

Silver took a leave of absence after its publication to teach at the University of Notre Dame and eventually joined the faculty at the University of South Florida. He died in 1988.

"His sterling legacy was that he challenged students and the public to think beyond their prior experience to a broad range of ideas, even controversial ones," said John Robin Bradley, a UM professor of law for more than four decades and chairman of the Silver Commemorative Committee.

The symposium at the Overby Center is called "Opening the Closed Society," and Ole Miss officials are using that title for a series of other programs to commemorate the school's integration.

Speaking at the pond dedication will be James L. Robertson, a Jackson attorney and a student of Silver's 50 years ago when Robertson was editor of the campus newspaper, The Mississippian, before it became a daily publication.

Chancellor Dan Jones will open the Overby Center program with his own remarks before introducing several prominent alumni to offer personal recollections of studying under Silver. The speakers will be former Gov. William Winter of Jackson; Elizabeth Nichols Shiver of Oxford, who served as editor of The Mississippian in 1953-54; Daniel P. Jordan of Charlottesville, Va., a 1960 graduate who served for years as president of the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation at Monticello; and Edwin N. Williams of Charlotte, N.C., who edited The Daily Mississippian in 1964-65 and went on to become editorial page editor of The Charlotte Observer.
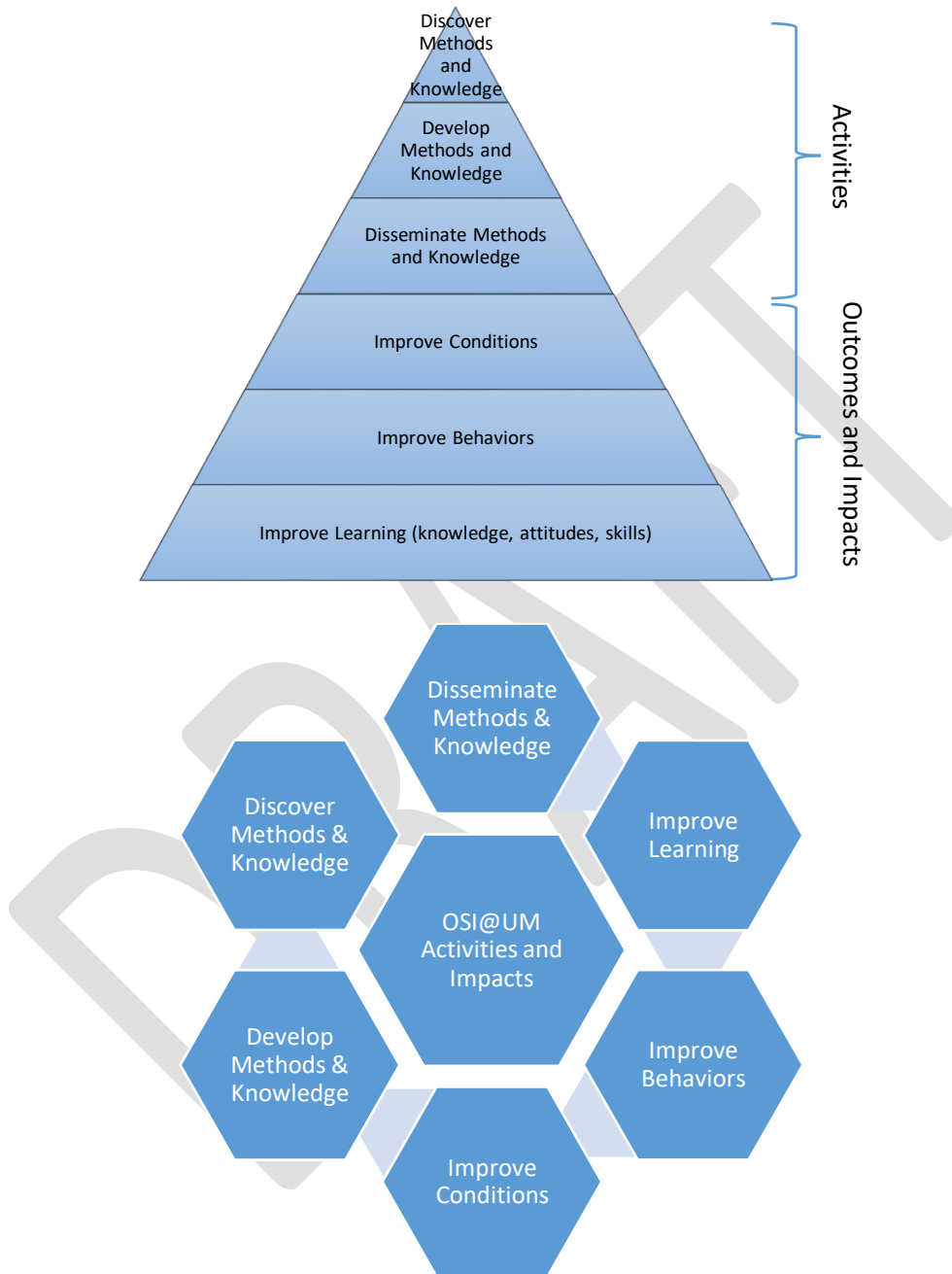
Gerald W. Walton, UM provost emeritus and a member of the faculty during Silver's years here, will be the moderator. Silver's three children are also expected to attend.

For more information on this and other programs, visit the [Overby Center for Sothern Journalism and Politics](#).

Evolving Thoughts and Items to Potentially Consider or Develop