



John Mejia inspires many in the ways he lives and acts on *Our Common Ground* values. As one colleague so succinctly put it, “John lives his values out loud.” John’s values show in how he interacts with and supports students, colleagues, and community members. He is especially committed to making systemic change at UVM that will lead to social justice and equity for our underrepresented students and staff.

Starting in 2003, when John was with the university’s ALANA Center (now the Mosaic Center), he and director Bev Colston discussed the limitations of traditional diversity trainings for students of color at predominantly white institutions. What they found missing was a

person-of-color perspective on race and racism, and training on how to keep a positive racial self-image and how to deal with internalized oppression and the dynamics of horizontal oppression. The outcome of these conversations resulted in Racial Aikido, a program to better support students of color. John was instrumental in its creation, implementation, and institutionalization at UVM.

Based on the positive impact of Racial Aikido, John developed a similar model for LGBTQA students in his role as the LGBTQA Center’s Education and Outreach Coordinator. John has continued his support of students in his current role as the Assistant Director for Off-Campus Services. John’s expertise, empathy, and wisdom are expanding a culture of support for all of our students, whether they are on or off campus, and most importantly for our underrepresented students.

The director of the Center for Cultural Pluralism sums it up well: “John has continually demonstrated his ability to ‘walk his talk’ both on and off campus and across the spectrum of social justice issues, including ability, class, ethnicity, cross cultural, and race.”

Based on his reputation with students, colleagues, and community members, John was invited to participate in a Residential Life “Train the Trainers” Program for Restorative Practices. John’s restorative nature creates an environment of trust and connectedness, ingredients essential to building safety nets and communities of care.

John has made UVM a better place for students and staff by embodying the spirit of *Our Common Ground* values. They inform his daily actions. It is both humbling and an honor to know and work with a colleague who has the kind of impact John has on others and on this institution.