Supporting the Development of Genomics Literacy Through Genetics Education Could Reduce Racial Prejudice

Dr. Brian Donovan
Research Scientist
BSCS Science Learning

Friday, January 31, 2020, 11:00 AM – 12:00 PM
Fred Kavli Auditorium Tata Hall 3201

Light refreshments will be served at 10:45 AM
A roundtable discussion with Dr. Donovan will take place in Tata Hall 3103 immediately following the talk

Abstract: Throughout history, the science of genetics has been used to support ideological claims about the naturalness of racial inequality. What role, if any, does biology education play in the development of ideas about the genetic causes of social inequality? In his talk, Dr. Brian M. Donovan will present data from randomized control trials (RCTs) carried out in schools to highlight how students unintentionally learn genetic explanations for racial inequality in school biology. Then, Dr. Donovan will use evidence from RCTs and think-aloud protocols to explain how these harmful beliefs could be reduced through curriculum and instruction that enhances students’ disciplinary literacy in genomics. Dr. Donovan will argue that the teaching of human genetics is not a socially neutral endeavor — it could produce humane or inhumane social attitudes depending on what we teach students about human genetic variation and how we teach it. By teaching about the social and quantitative complexities of human genetic variation, we can help students develop a better understanding of human difference, which in turn, could reduce the risk that students develop naïve and harmful beliefs about the genetic basis of racial inequality. The implications of this work for genetics education will be discussed.