



# Deconstruct your syllabus – a practical guide for change in the classroom

*A University of Delaware Anti-Racism Initiative Project*

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Co-produced by the Deconstructing Syllabi sub-committee of the [UD Anti-Racism Initiative \(website\)](#)

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## Table of Contents

<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	1
<i>A. Citation Politics</i> .....	2 - 7
Summary.....	2
Best Practices.....	2 - 4
Resources.....	4 - 7
<i>B. Exclusion Statements</i> .....	8 - 12
Summary.....	8
Guidelines.....	8 - 9
Sample.....	9
Resources.....	10 - 12
<i>C. Creating Care-full classrooms</i> .....	13 - 16
Summary.....	13
Guidelines.....	13 - 14
Resources.....	14 - 16
<i>D. How to Talk about Structural Oppression in the Classroom</i> .....	17 - 18
Summary.....	17
Guidelines.....	17
Resources.....	18

## Executive Summary

The creation of this guide arose out of a need to see, name, and address the systemic oppression that undergirds the past and present of the academy and find ways to address it from the ground up through the classroom. It came from a grassroots effort involving over 300 faculty, staff, and students at the University of Delaware who were determined to see concrete change around diversity, inclusion, equity and anti-racism efforts across campus and was co-authored by a subset of graduate students, staff and faculty across multiple units.

This training is intended to foster faculty to actively seek to provide content as part of their scholarship and especially teaching activities that are attentive to more and wide-ranging voices, perspectives, and experiences with careful attention to scholars who have been historically underrepresented and excluded—such as Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC), LGBTQIA+, those with disabilities, and those from the global periphery. The goal of this programming is to have more holistic, diverse, caring, and equitable spaces across campus that start at the site of the classroom.

The co-authors of this guide believe that deconstructing syllabi will allow for opportunities to learn, understand, and begin the process of dismantling the structures of power that privilege particular groups in the academy to the exclusion and marginalization of others. What we mean when we say “deconstructing” is the wholesale rethinking of how we construct our classes, classroom spaces, and class-based activities. As producers of knowledge, it is paramount that we challenge the status quo, refuse to adapt, be complicit with, or reproduce oppressive structures and to instead do the necessary work to deconstruct these dominant knowledge frameworks and work towards more equitable forms of knowledge production. We can begin this work by breaking down universals and acknowledging the academy as a white supremacist institution.

Starting at the site of the syllabus is critical, as classes and their associated content show or hide the character of our scholarship and disciplines more broadly. To deconstruct our syllabi we must hold ourselves accountable. To attend to citation politics we cannot simply add new voices and stir, we must critically engage the material. To recognize the role of our disciplines in structures of oppression we cannot relegate actions to the past, but acknowledge and claim them foremost. To produce knowledge with our students that is attentive to the power dynamics in the classroom we must do more than hold office hours and give extra credit. Finally, no matter what our training, we must understand our position and learn about how to have these conversations in non-superficial ways.

Attempting to deconstruct your syllabus and by extension your classroom is an ongoing and complex process. In practice, it means much learning and unlearning on the part of the faculty, shifting course objectives, readings/materials, assignments, and expectations to reflect attention to the oppressive and exclusionary character of the academy. This guide is intended to provide background, suggestions, and resources for how you might undertake this important task. This guide was developed as a resource to support all faculty and staff who work with students and within classrooms, inclusive of all disciplinary backgrounds and programs.

## A. Citation Politics

*...diversifying resources and readings in your discipline/courses*

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### **Summary**

Citations do more than just demonstrate a scholar's engagement with literature relevant to an area of study. Citations are a distinct form of knowledge production in and of themselves, signaling which ways of thinking are accepted as canon and, conversely, which are peripheral. With scholars from privileged backgrounds (in terms of race, gender, heteronormativity, able-bodiedness, geographical location, primary language, and others) being those whose work has dominated the academy for centuries. By continuing to cite these works at the expense of other, more marginal perspectives, we are reinforcing these hierarchies of knowledge production. However, when we are critically reflective of and intentional towards the sources we use in our research and use in our teaching, we can diversify not only the works we and our students become personally familiar with, but ultimately contribute to new forms of knowledge production that give voice to scholars and scholarship that has been traditionally marginalized. To contribute to a more diverse field of knowledge production, we must seek out, meaningfully engage with, and include diverse resources in our research, teaching, and other campus engagements. It is not possible to encourage critical thinking and free inquiry without familiarizing students (and ourselves) with diverse perspectives; likewise, to be relevant to the students of today and support them to emerge from their UD education as competent global citizens, what we teach and research should reflect the growing diversity of the world we share.

### **Best-Practices from the Literature**

1. **Cite and acknowledge the contributions of diverse scholars.**
  - a. Intentionally set out to read and engage with works produced from non-traditional sources, ensure that you center these in these in your teaching, writing, and research.
  - b. Establish the works of diverse scholars alongside the "canon" of your discipline, to diversify knowledge production in your classroom and scholarship.
  - c. If you cannot "find" scholarship from diverse scholars, ask others who are familiar with your field to support you to do so. Exclusion of diverse citations will almost always be a reflection of a non-exhaustive search.
2. **Citations alone do not constitute engagement and they do not relieve our duties to participate in anti-racism movements.**
  - a. Well-cited authors have authority precisely because they are well-cited; only teaching these authors reinforces such citational practices.

- b. Superficial citations and classroom engagements reinforce discriminatory practices of knowledge production.
  - c. Be a conscious engager: attend to, disseminate/teach, reinforce, or critique the work. [1]
  - d. Whether in regard to teaching, research, or other campus activities, seek out work in your area of inquiry that was developed by non-traditional authors, particularly Black, Indigenous and scholars of color
  - e. Engage with these works meaningfully and intentionally (as in, do not just skim, or worse, cite or assign without familiarizing yourself with the work)
- 3. De-emphasize the importance of measurable outputs.**
- a. It is unfair to assume that another’s work is not relevant just because it is unknown.
  - b. Include a wider range of practices of what is valued in terms of academic dissemination such as teaching, conferences, public talks, interviews, blog posts, etc. so we can legitimize the multiple ways that knowledge is produced. [1]
- 4. Best practices in the classroom lead to best practices outside the classroom: For journals, responsibility lies with the authors, editors, and reviewers.**
- a. Authors: read through and count the citations to self-consciously draw attention to whose work is being produced, and question self-citations unless necessary. [1]
  - b. Authors: Do not make assumptions about a person’s background. As you engage with a citation, research the author and use their available information to understand how the scholar identifies, whether that is in relation to gender, sexuality, race, or other background [3].
  - c. Reviewers/Editors: Prioritize suggesting other authors for inclusion and discourage excessive self-citations; provide guidelines for authors on best practices for citations. Scrutinize archaic policies in the review process to dismantle certain biases which may occur [1,2,3].
- 5. The ability to do something about citational inequality falls on both established researchers and new ones.**
- a. Established researchers: question your self-citations and required readings of your own work, don’t just cite or assign tenured, other established researchers, include early career scholars; make attempts to co-author with early-career academics. [1]
  - b. New researchers: Remember that citations do not imply relevance or importance and that the readings you assign have meaning; co-author with other established researchers and other new ones; and do not participate in “citing without sighting” [1,6]
- 6. Educational resources need to be vetted for their inclusionary characteristics.**
- a. Open educational resources (OERs) are extremely vital nowadays, particularly with students and universities struggling with finances; consider assigning readings that students don’t have to pay for. [2]

- b. However, a critical and equity-seeking adoption and examination of OERs is necessary.
  - i. *Who creates OER?, Are individuals' representations in these textbooks appropriate and empowering?, and Who is cited in these works?*. [2]
- c. Often, the textbooks we assign in a class are considered "standard texts," and have been in circulation for years. These textbooks may be authored by scholars whose work reproduces dominant forms of knowledge production, and sidelines diverse scholars. In these cases, think about offering a critique of the text as part of teaching and learning, or consider alternative texts or even ways of accessing more diverse formats of information: consider for example an open access text, bringing in authors from a variety of backgrounds. This would not only give more flexibility about what work to assign to students, but also make the sources accessible to students from all backgrounds. [2,6]

**7. Mindfully integrate diverse scholarship into your syllabus.**

- a. Assign readings from a diverse group of scholars and related work that addresses DEI issues.
- b. These works should be clearly identified as core perspectives in the class, not a marginal or "diverse" perspective.
- c. Integration here means more than just including a citation to work produced by a diverse scholar. You should aim to promote meaningful engagement with the works you include, and treat them as opportunities for intellectual growth rather than simply tokenistic representations of "difference" [6,7]
- d. Add a citation diversity statement to your syllabus [7]

**Resources**

**Annotated Bibliography:**

1. Carrie Mott & Daniel Cockayne (2017) Citation matters: mobilizing the politics of citation toward a practice of 'conscientious engagement', *Gender, Place & Culture*, 24:7, 954-973, DOI: [10.1080/0966369X.2017.1339022](https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2017.1339022)
  - Through the lens of geographical studies, the authors consider citations as a problematic technology that contributes to the reproduction of the white heteromascularity in thought and scholarship, despite advances toward more inclusivity in the discipline in recent decades. They argue that citations alone do not constitute engagement, and to fully realize the power of citations, one must attend to, disseminate, reinforce, or critique the detail of the work, i.e. conscientious engagement. They present several suggestions for conscientious engagement such as questioning self-citations, read through and count the citations in their list of references, and de-emphasize the importance of 'measurable' outputs as citations cannot be adequately used as a proxy for quality, authority, or impact.

2. Veletsianos, G. Open educational resources: expanding equity or reflecting and furthering inequities? *Education Tech Research Dev* **69**, 407–410 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11423-020-09840-y>
  - Veletsianos conducts a literature review on open source educational resources (OERs). He finds that OERs are an appropriate and worthwhile resource to consider as colleges and universities shift to digital modes of teaching and learning, particularly in the aftermath of the pandemic when universities and students are strapped for money. However, without scrutiny, such efforts may reflect or reinforce structural inequities. Example questions to ask are *Who creates OER?*, *Are individuals' representations in OER appropriate and empowering?*, and *Who is cited in OER?*.
  
3. Wagner, D., Bakker, A., Meaney, T. *et al.* What can we do against racism in mathematics education research? *Educ Stud Math* **104**, 299–311 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10649-020-09969-w>
  - In the aftermath of the “Black Lives Matter” protest in the summer of 2020, each member of the Editorial Board of the journal *Educational Studies in Mathematics* comments on what they, the journal, and academia/society broadly can do to combat racism in education research. The six authors touch on many points, several revolving around allowing more inclusivity in their journal by bringing in more individuals from developing countries, that educational research needs to go beyond the dichotomy between the objectivity and subjectivity, and to look at policies which may be outdated or racist in their nature.
  
4. Smith, C.A., Williams, E.L., Wadud, I.A., Pirtle, W.N.L., and The Cite Black Women Collective. 2021. Cite Black Women: A Critical Praxis (A Statement). *Feminist Anthropology*. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/fea2.12040>
  - Leaders of the “Cite Black Women Collective” collaborate on a statement that provides the intellectual genealogy, history, principles, and charge of the citational politics movement they are spearheading. The statement includes five essential steps that the collective identifies as crucial to transforming citational practices, including: 1) Read Black Women’s Work; 2) Integrate Black women into the core of your syllabus (in life and in the classroom); 3) Acknowledge Black women’s intellectual production; 4) Make space for Black women to speak; 5) Give Black women the space and time to breathe. The overarching charge is to “reimagine hegemonic citational politics by critically and actively reflecting on how gender, race, nationality, and class shape the possibilities of knowledge production” (5).
  
5. Delgado, R. 1984. The Imperial Scholar: Reflections on a Review of Civil Rights Literature. *University of Pennsylvania Law Review* 132(3): 561-578.

- Specifically focused on literature in the field of civil rights legal scholarship, this paper is nonetheless a landmark critique of the hegemony of dominant voices in academic scholarship at the exclusion of others, specifically in relation to Black, Latinx, Native American, and Asian scholars. Delgado calls for scholars to redirect their efforts away from advancing their own careers to instead promote and encourage their colleagues from marginalized backgrounds, including through citations and acknowledgement of the work they are producing in a given field.
6. Brown, L.I. 2004. Diversity: The Challenge for Higher Education. *Race, Ethnicity, and Education* 7(1): 21-34.
- This article argues that the diversification of faculty and students can no longer be thought of as a peripheral activity. Brown emphasizes that policies and verbal commitments to diversity are not enough to create meaningful change, which must instead come from actionable practices. Brown's article emphasizes that diversification brings with it crucial advantages in higher education spaces. While not specifically addressing citations, one can extrapolate from the call for actionable practices instead of symbolic gestures, a parallel to citational justice, which is one potential area of transformational practice.
7. Zurn, P, Bassett, D.S., and Rust, N.C. 2020. The Citation Diversity Statement: A Practice of Transparency, A Way of Life. *Scientific Life* 24(9): 669-672.
- An overview of the significance of reducing citation bias, along with an instructional guide on including a "Citation Diversity Statement" along with publications. The article focuses on science disciplines (broadly defined), but is applicable more broadly. The Citation Diversity Statement is a short paragraph inserted before the citation list which sets out the biases of the authors, and quantifies the equitability of the reference list. The statement should: 1) the importance of citation diversity; 2) the percentage breakdown (or other diversity indicators) of citations in the paper; 3) the method by which percentages were assessed and its limitations; 3) a commitment to improving equitable practices in science. The aim is that, even when diverse citations are less available and equity cannot be achieved, the author includes a recognition of this, which can educate readers about the importance of citational justice for future work.

#### Other Resources:

- **Cite Black Women Collective:** The official website of the "Cite Black Women" movement, a campaign originated in 2017 by feminist anthropologist Christen A. Smith. Includes information about ongoing efforts to motivate everyone, particularly scholars, to critically reflect on practices of citation and consciously question how they can incorporate Black women into the core of their work. Including information about the movements: Five Guiding Principles.



<https://www.citeblackwomenscollective.org/>

- **Citational Politics Guide:** Practical overview from Salem State University about the significance of citational politics, and practical ways to be more conscious about citations.  
<https://libguides.salemstate.edu/c.php?g=955102&p=7298518#:~:text=Citation%20politics%20is%20about%20reproducing%20sameness.&text=People%20of%20color%20and%20other,beause%20they%20are%20well%20cited.>
- **Citation Practice Challenge:** a template for scholars/teachers to use in regards to their own writing and work  
[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdpbmsJDZ3-zwca-dgGjfePrT\\_6koBTZRWlvh80fmoYYQRrlw/viewform](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdpbmsJDZ3-zwca-dgGjfePrT_6koBTZRWlvh80fmoYYQRrlw/viewform)

## B. Exclusion Statements

*...authoring a statement about disciplinary exclusion and/or its abatement for a syllabus*

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### **Summary**

The academy was built by and for a very exclusive group, with few exceptions, economically privileged, white, cis-men. There is a long history of exclusion of women, and Black, Indigenous, and people of color from higher education. Centuries of policymaking leave a legacy where it remains a challenge for people in these groups to be able to attend university. Moreover, the physical spaces of campus force members of under-represented and historically excluded groups to maneuver in spaces that are largely on stolen land and are a constant reminder of oppression, such as buildings named for racists, misogynists, and conquerors, as well as an institution's historical ties to enslavement and the use of enslaved labor. Moreover, campuses may also have monuments and statues celebrating oppressors or events intended to uphold white supremacy.

Simultaneously, many disciplines taught at the university have concurrent violent and exclusionary histories. As scholars, it is important that we recognize the role that our disciplines may have played (and continue to play) in excluding people and what part they may have played in upholding, promoting, or ignoring the oppression of women, Black, Indigenous and people of color. Not only must we become familiar with these past and present practices, but create awareness about them and take action to prevent future continuance. These steps should be transparent. In the case of deconstructing the syllabus, an acknowledgement of the history of exclusion and any steps being taken to address it should be part of the front matter.

Finally, some disciplines are part of the work to abate systemic oppression and other disciplines have already faced their exclusionary history and are taking steps to name and address such practices. If your discipline was developed outside of or because of exclusions experienced in the academy, a statement to that effect is important for student and faculty understandings of the spaces created to fight systematic oppression.

### **Guidelines**

- Learn about the history of your discipline, beyond the mythology of its origins
  - o Example: Ask students to identify one moment in the western history of the discipline where structural oppression was created or perpetuated by individuals or institutions.
- Interrogate our own identities and their relationship to broader forms of structural oppression (e.g. what of ourselves, and our own biases are we bringing to the classroom?)
  - o Example: Present contrasting cases of researchers with different positionalities and how they came up with different results in their work--in the social and natural sciences and the humanities.
- Dialogue with colleagues about the interconnectedness of course content.
  - o Examples:

- Participate in regular meetings with members of the UD Anti-Racism Initiative to discuss progress of syllabus creation and implementation.
  - Look for opportunities to participate in and/or form Faculty Learning Communities (FLCs) for increased pedagogical discussion.
- Learn about the demographic make-up of your discipline and its change over time
- Seek out information about change to the diversity of your discipline and what recruitment and retention efforts are already underway
- Know who the founders of the University were and what the name on the buildings you teach in and where your department is located represent; if you are at a land grant university, learn about the Morrill Act and how it disposed Native Americans of their traditional homelands
- Draft a short statement about the exclusionary and/or oppressive character that shaped your discipline; add it to your syllabi and discuss it with your students as a precursor to syllabus finalization
  - Example: Your syllabus can serve as a contract of sorts with your students, so finalizing it together during the first week of class builds community and allows for meaningful buy-in.
- Consider concrete ways to address issues you see in your discipline in a classroom setting; experiment with the curricular framework and an emphasis on the intersections of discipline and broader social justice perspectives
  - Example: Consider incorporating textbooks and other reading materials from alternative voices into the curriculum (see A. Citation Politics for best practices).
- Help students to understand the relationship between course material and broader deconstruction of societal oppression (theoretically and in practice) - connecting to activities external to the university
  - Example: Ask students to attend an anti-racist/social justice-oriented event outside UD and to reflect upon the experience. Encourage them to organize their own events and organizations inside and outside the university.
- Identify ways that your course(s) may be contouring students into an institution that was not built for them and adapt strategies for teaching and learning that are anti-assimilationist (see: UD Anti-Racism Initiative Anti-Assimilationist Mentoring Guide)

### **Sample**

As scholars, we acknowledge the significant role that western academic traditions have played in perpetuating systems of oppression through the selective transmission of knowledge. Furthermore, we recognize that the discipline or field of \_\_\_\_\_ has contributed to this inequity in myriad ways. *(list 2-3 significant ways that your particular discipline has contributed to or abated structural oppression, think big picture in the field)*. As such, we commit to disrupt traditionally western academic frameworks, which serve to marginalize and inhibit the transmission of broader knowledge. More specifically, *(individual commitment in the course- 2-3 ways the specific course will disrupt and/or acknowledge)*.

## Resources

- *BBC News*. 2018. "Sophia Jex-Blake: The Battle to Be Scotland's First Female Doctor," November 16, 2018, sec. Edinburgh, Fife & East Scotland. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-edinburgh-east-fife-46180368>.  
Short news story about how women were excluded, bullied, and threatened in their efforts to receive training at University.
- Beck, Dani. 2020. "Racism and Academia: Partners in Crime." *Neuro Central* (blog). September 15, 2020. <https://www.neuro-central.com/racism-and-academia-partners-in-crime/>.  
Blog post about the entanglements of science, race, and racism.
- Brown, Nicole, and Jennifer Leigh, eds. 2020. *Ableism in Academia: Theorising Experiences of Disabilities and Chronic Illnesses in Higher Education*. UCL Press.  
Edited volume about different experiences of discrimination and ableism in the academy.
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé Williams, Luke Charles Harris, Daniel Martinez HoSang, and George Lipsitz, eds. 2019. *Seeing Race Again: Countering Colorblindness across the Disciplines*. University of California Press.  
Examines the racial histories and colorblindness in social psychology, the law, musicology, literary studies, sociology, and gender studies.
- Currano, Ellen. 2017. *The Bearded Lady Project*. <https://thebeardedladyproject.com/>.  
Documentary about the inequities experienced by women in the geosciences.
- Dolmage, Jay Timothy. 2017. "Academic Ableism: Disability and Higher Education." *University of Michigan Press*. <https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.9708722>.  
Discussion of the pervasive ableism and exclusion of people with disabilities at the university.
- Editorial Board. 2018. "Academic Racism: The Repression of Marginalized Voices in Academia." *The Activist History Review* (blog). August 29, 2018. <https://activisthistory.com/2018/08/29/academic-racism-the-repression-of-marginalized-voices-in-academia/>.  
White supremacy in academia at the department level—discusses how whiteness is maintained through hires and teaching.
- Greenberger, Alex. 2019. "Maryland Institute College of Art Issues Statement 'Acknowledging Racist Past.'" *ARTnews.Com* (blog). February 22, 2019. <https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/maryland-institute-college-art-issues-statement-acknowledging-racist-past-11956/>.  
Blog post about MICA's statement of historical exclusion and racism as well as efforts toward institutional change.
- Harmon, Amy. 2019. "For a Black Mathematician, What It's Like to Be the 'Only One.'" *The New York Times*, February 18, 2019, sec. U.S. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/18/us/edray-goins-black-mathematicians.html>.

News story about the 1% of doctorates in math that are awarded to Black people and the issues that this creates for navigating departments and P&T, when they are the only Black person in their department.

- Lee, Robert, Tristan Ahtone Image credit: Kalen Goodluck. "Land-Grab Universities." *High Country News*, March 30, 2020. <https://www.hcn.org/issues/52.4/indigenous-affairs-education-land-grab-universities>.  
Discussion of the expropriation of indigenous lands to create the land grant university system.
- Leonardo, Zeus. 2019. "Race(Ing) Across the Disciplines: An Introduction." *Equity & Excellence in Education* 52 (1): 7–11. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2019.1635054>.  
Introduction to a special issue on race and racism in the disciplines of anthropology, law, psychology, and sociology.
- Love, Bettina L. 2019. *We Want to Do More than Survive: Abolitionist Teaching and the Pursuit of Educational Freedom*. Beacon Press.  
Drawing on her life's work of teaching and researching in urban schools, Bettina Love persuasively argues that educators must teach students about racial violence, oppression, and how to make sustainable change in their communities through radical civic initiatives and movements. She argues that the US educational system is maintained by and profits from the suffering of children of color.
- Shattuck, Sharon and Ian Cheney. 2019. *Picture a Scientist*. <https://www.pictureascientist.com>.  
Documentary about harassment, exclusion, and macroaggressions against women scientists.
- Taylor, Astra. 2020. "The End of the University." *The New Republic*, September 8, 2020. [https://newrepublic.com/article/159233/end-university?utm\\_content=bufferb43bc&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_source=twitter.com&utm\\_campaign=buffer](https://newrepublic.com/article/159233/end-university?utm_content=bufferb43bc&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter.com&utm_campaign=buffer).  
Article about the exclusionary character of the university and the canned responses to the Black Lives Matter movement.

### **Further Resources**

#### ["Objectivity" and Oppression in Academia- Grollman](#)

Kuelzer, L., & Houser, N. (2019). Addressing the Living History of Oppression and Emancipation in American Education. *Journal of Thought*, 53(1 & 2), 38-54. Retrieved April 9, 2021, from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26727284>

#### [Racism in Academia, and Why the "Little Things" Matter- Nature- Laland](#)

Barbara LeSavoy. (2010). "On the Outside End": Systems of Oppression and Academic Success. *Black Women, Gender Families*, 4(2), 85-108. doi:10.5406/blacwomegendfam.4.2.0085

#### [Psychology Must Reckon with Its Racist Past- and Present- UMN- Syed](#)

Thurber, A., Harbin, M.B., & Bandy, J. (2019). Teaching Race: Pedagogy and Practice. Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching. Retrieved March 9, 2021 from <https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/teaching-race/>.

[Anthropologists on Racism and the History of Inequality- Field Museum- Wali, Williams, & Kelly](#)

[Colleges Must Take a New Approach to System Racism- Inside Higher Ed- Warren](#)

[Silence is Never Neutral; Neither is Science- Scientific American](#)

## C. Creating Care-full Classrooms

*...caring for students through course teachings, resources, and policies*

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### **Summary**

Institutions of higher learning, geared towards teaching and research, are rarely structured around systems of care and holistic support for students. Yet, when students come to campus many experience or bring with them acute and chronic mental and physical health difficulties, experiences (likely ongoing) with systems of oppression, financial stress, caretaker responsibilities, and many other challenges that may impact their success and well-being as a student. Scholars have pointed to the classroom – that most personal space of encounter – as a key site of intervention, calling for instructors to build systems and relations of care into their courses. Crafting a care-full classroom requires educators to center care and an attentiveness to students needs alongside providing a good educational experience. Doing so takes a recognition that the problems students face are not left outside the classroom door. It also necessitates a shift in educational practices and a reorientation of the teacher-student relation towards one firmly grounded in kindness and empathy. In short, crafting a care-full classroom involves creating an educational space where students are approached holistically, are offered empathy, and wherein an educator has the space to be flexible and proactive towards student needs as they arise. This takes work, and a lot of learning and unlearning. Below are guidelines and resources you can draw on as you work towards care-full pedagogic practices.

### **Guidelines**

- Build systems to get ongoing feedback and information on student needs throughout the semester.
  - o Example: this could be actions such as adopting an interactive syllabus or doing daily short feedback surveys.
- Build a syllabus that is not a list of do's and don'ts but that provides explanations for policies and practices and engages students as participants.
- Gauge learning with many different opportunities
  - o Examples: ending class by having students write a short summary of what they've learned on that day and giving them the opportunity to ask questions in a lower-stakes context.
  - o Conduct 1 question exit survey
- Familiarize yourself with your students to the extent possible (larger classes may present some challenges). Familiarize beyond names and let the students get to know you as a university citizen, to work against the distance created in the teacher-student relation, making students more comfortable with asking questions and approaching you.
  - o Example: personalize the classroom with some discussion of your own relationship to the material you are teaching.

- Discuss faculty roles such as service and research as well as university operations
- Provide information in your syllabus and/or elsewhere directing students to critical, non-educational resources on campus and nearby, such as the food bank, sexual assault hotline, title IX office, counseling center, etc.
- Build time into class for mental health breaks and/or reflection. Give students ample time to respond to questions posed in class and provide different ways for students to engage in participation including in class discussion, written format, or other mediums that may be accessible for students with different learning and communication habits. Building assignments that encourage students to utilize resources on campus or to learn how to use you as a resource can be valuable.
- Make it clear from the outset (in the syllabus, first lecture) that life can present unexpected (or, somewhat expected) challenges, and that you will always be as flexible as possible to attend to these needs. Provide clear mechanisms for communicating with you.
- Familiarize yourself with some of the work on care and education.
- Make yourself more easily available to students across different platforms and mediums with awareness not all students are familiar with office hours and how to utilize them.
  - Example: change name to “student hours” and have a thing explainer about what that means and how they may use them
  - Hold your office/student hours in a neutral location instead of your office
- Practice self-care for yourself. It is hard to provide attentive empathy and kindness when you are experiencing burnout. Consider the practices you utilize to care for yourself and others and consider how these might be incorporated into the classroom space.
- Reflect on your relationship with teaching. Is it a burden? A chore? Consider how this orientation may shape your approach to your students, and how you may be able to forefront kindness into your interactions with students.

## **Resources**

- Anderson et al. (2020). Good teaching as care in higher education. *Higher Education*, 79: 1-19  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-019-00392-6>  
 Review of care-full education literature that highlights the recognition (by students) of the importance of care in higher education teaching. Anderson et al. argue for a recognition of teaching as cognitive, emotional, and embodied work, and the power infusing care into the classroom has in producing “good teaching.”
- Gannon, Kevin. (2020) *Radical Hope: A Teaching Manifesto*. West Virginia University Press.  
 In *Radical Hope*, Kevin Gannon looks to the pressures and challenges - from imposter syndrome, to labor precarity and political conflict - built into institutes of higher education. This book details strategies and orientations to return to teaching’s role as an emancipatory and hopeful practice.



- hooks, bell. 1994. *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. New York: Routledge.  
*Teaching to Transgress* is a key work that pushes us to recast education as a practice fundamentally embedded in the pursuit of freedom against oppression. hooks challenges educators to teach students to transgress against systematic racial, gendered, and classed difference, while imbuing their teaching with love and attentiveness to students' emotions and varied experiences. The book provides a number of strategies and critical insights on pedagogy, and how to achieve a hopeful, transgressive, engaged practice. As hooks states, "to educate as the practice of freedom is a way of teaching anyone can learn" (13).
- Interactive Syllabus: <https://www.interactivesyllabus.com/about.html>  
An online resource and guide for transforming the traditional, static syllabus into an interactive document (in the form of a survey). Interactive syllabi present the same information as the traditional syllabus, but provide instructors with a tool for asking students about their goals, concerns, and/or questions, providing instructors with more detailed information about their students' needs, and giving students a bit more agency in the classroom.
- Imad, M. (March 17, 2020) Hope Matters. *Inside Higher Ed*.  
<https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2020/03/17/10-strategies-support-students-and-help-them-learn-during-coronavirus-crisis> (written in the context of CoVid-19 pandemic)  
Written in the context of the CoVid-19 pandemic, this brief article lists 10 strategies for attending to students' emotional needs during this time. The suggestions made, while written with the pandemic in mind, can easily translate into common educational practice that supports and cares for students.
- Madge C, Raghuram P and Noxolo P (2009) Engaged pedagogy and responsibility: A postcolonial analysis of international students. *Geoforum* 40(1): 34–45. DOI: 10.1016/j.geoforum.2008.01.008.  
This article provides a good synthesis of thinking about responsibility and care and bell hooks' engaged pedagogy through a postcolonial lens. The paper thinks through how to approach and imagine responsible, care-full interactions with colonial legacies through transformative teaching.
- Newstead C (2009) Pedagogy, post-coloniality and care-full encounters in the classroom. *Geoforum* 40(1): 80–90. DOI: 10.1016/j.geoforum.2008.04.003.  
Newstead thinks through how care-full encounters and responsibility in the classroom can be used to encourage students towards new ways of relating to and challenging difference and inequality. In this piece there is a long engagement with past literature on care and engaged pedagogy, and is concluded with strategies for building these practices and the challenges and disruptions practitioners can face.

- O'Brien-Richardson, P. (October 15, 2019). 4 Self-Care Strategies to Support Students. *Harvard Business Publishing*. <https://hbsp.harvard.edu/inspiring-minds/4-self-care-strategies-to-support-students>  
This brief article highlights research detailing the high rates of mental health difficulties among higher education students, and provides 4 strategies to bring care and support for student mental health into the classroom.
- Samuel, K. (August 3, 2017). Creating more caring university classrooms. *The Brookings Institution*. <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/creating-more-caring-university-classrooms/>  
Brief article arguing for the infusion of care into classrooms to nourish students and faculty. Arguing for a new set of the "3 R's" - Respect, Recognition, Reciprocity - Samuel provides some examples of producing more caring relations between students and faculty in the classroom, and argues for care's importance in supporting students, faculty, and the world.
- Suipano, B. (August 29, 2018). One Way to Show Students You Care – And Why You Might Want to Try It. *Chronicles of Higher Education*. [https://www.chronicle.com/article/one-way-to-show-students-you-care-and-why-you-might-want-to-try-it/?bc\\_nonce=ykunqc5vok4zafigpwyq6&cid=reg\\_wall\\_signup](https://www.chronicle.com/article/one-way-to-show-students-you-care-and-why-you-might-want-to-try-it/?bc_nonce=ykunqc5vok4zafigpwyq6&cid=reg_wall_signup)  
In this piece, the author highlights a single strategy for better supporting students; from the outset make it clear that they can come to you when disruptions in their lives occur. The author notes that this alone may not be successful, as it can be intimidating for students to approach instructors to ask for extra time or support. Suipano argues, and provides examples, for instructors to practice vulnerability and compassion to break down barriers to student communications.
- Sara Goldrick-Rab blog post with language for a basic needs statement: <https://saragoldrickrab.medium.com/basic-needs-security-and-the-syllabus-d24cc7afe8c9>  
Short article describing the importance of a basic needs statement. Students who are experiencing difficulties accessing food, shelter, or experiencing financial difficulty may struggle in classes. A basic needs statement acknowledges that, showing students you are aware, and points them towards assistance. An example is given.

#### Podcasts:

- Tea for Teaching: [teaforteaching.com](http://teaforteaching.com)  
Hosted by John Kane and Rebecca Mushtare, Tea for Teaching is a podcast featuring informal conversations around innovations in effective teaching strategies.
- Teaching in Higher Ed: <https://teachinginhighered.com/episodes/>  
A weekly podcast hosted by Bonni Stachowiak, Teaching in Higher Ed focuses on pedagogical topics ranging from diversity and inclusion, creativity in teaching, and instructional design (to name a few).

## D. How to Talk about Structural Oppression in the Classroom

*...approaching difficult conversations, resources you and for the syllabus*

### **Author**

Lindsay Naylor

### **Summary**

Discussions about race and racism, gender and sexism/anti-LGBTQIA+, disability and ableism are difficult to have and are rarely had in the classroom space. Many classes often gloss over such subjects or if the content of the class lends itself to the conversation, struggle to have meaningful dialogue. Ongoing white supremacy and the enactment of white, cis-gender and other privileges in the university setting masks the real need to have these conversations and to consider the very setting of the classroom as a potential site of structural oppression. Moreover, the training of faculty members on issues of structural oppression and how to teach about it is lacking. Complicating these issues is that the majority of faculty are white and some may not recognize their privilege and therefore may be unwilling to discuss issues of structural oppression. While it might not be a core component of the class being taught, these are guidelines and resources for both having the conversation in the classroom, and to be made available to students in your syllabus so that they can educate themselves.

### **Guidelines**

- Become familiar with terminology such as: white supremacy, white privilege, and appropriate language for talking about race, gender, LGBTQIA+, and disability (beginning with the resources outlined below and throughout this guide)
- Consider your own positionality and intersectionality in the conversation
- Consider whether discussing structural oppression in the academy can be added to a class curriculum
- Learn more about how to have these conversations by engaging the resources provided in this guide and seeking out others, such as university trainings
- Investigate your department's building, the classrooms you teach in and consider accessibility
- Discuss with department faculty: advocate for further information and training regarding structural oppression at a department level. Bring these conversations to Faculty Meetings and other department spaces. This kind of work is especially important for faculty members with tenure to do, since their own positionality may make them more comfortable in broaching these topics
- Recognize the importance of diverse hiring practices in addressing structural oppression, and where appropriate, advocate for diversity in all positions, whether faculty, teaching assistants, staff, or others
- Make resources available to students

## Resources

- Aspen Institute. n.d. "Fundamentals, Core Concepts, Structural Racism." Racial Equity Tools. Accessed April 26, 2021. <https://www.raciaequitytools.org/resources/fundamentals/core-concepts/structural-racism>.  
Racial Equity tools, a page filled with additional resources for discussing structural oppression based on race.
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé Williams, Luke Charles Harris, Daniel Martinez HoSang, and George Lipsitz, eds. 2019. *Seeing Race Again: Countering Colorblindness across the Disciplines*. University of California Press.  
Examines the racial histories and colorblindness in fields as diverse as social psychology, the law, musicology, literary studies, sociology, and gender studies, *Seeing Race Again* documents the profoundly contradictory role of the academy in constructing, naturalizing, and reproducing racial hierarchy.
- "Definitions." n.d. *TSER* (blog). Accessed April 26, 2021. <https://transstudent.org/about/definitions/>.  
Terminology for discussions of LGBTQIA+ experiences of structural oppression
- "Disability-Friendly Terminology." n.d. DisabilityInfo.Org. Accessed April 26, 2021. <https://disabilityinfo.org/fact-sheet-library/information-referral/disability-friendly-terminology/>.  
Terminology for people-first discussions about disability.
- Laws, Mike. 2020. "Why We Capitalize 'Black' (and Not 'White')." *Columbia Journalism Review*. June 16, 2020. <https://www.cjr.org/analysis/capital-b-black-styleguide.php>.  
Explanation for the importance of a capital "B" when writing about Black people, and why a capital "W" is an extension of white supremacy.
- McIntosh, Peggy. 1988. "Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack." *Gender Through the Prism of Difference*, 235–38.  
On how to recognize and discuss white privilege.
- Oluo, Ijeoma. 2019. *So You Want to Talk About Race*. Basic Books.  
Lessons on how to have discussions about race and white privilege, unpacks terminology and offers opinion on best practices.
- Project Change. 2019. "Power of Words." [https://www.udel.edu/content/dam/udelImages/ceoe/documents/about/RET\\_Glossary\\_Updated\\_October\\_2019\\_.pdf](https://www.udel.edu/content/dam/udelImages/ceoe/documents/about/RET_Glossary_Updated_October_2019_.pdf).  
Updated glossary on terminology for racial equity.
- Saad, Layla F. 2020. *Me and White Supremacy: Combat Racism, Change the World, and Become a Good Ancestor*. Sourcebooks, Inc.  
A guide to recognizing white privilege and how to dismantle it step by step.