



Diversifying and Decolonizing Our Syllabi

Suggestions to Incorporate Diversity,
Inclusion, and Equity in our Classes
Diversity Committee
2020

In the wake of BLM in 2020, consider:

- ***Have you included readings or text books written by BIPOC (from underrepresented minorities in the US and around the world, from the Global South, etc.)?***
 - Most text books are written by white people which gives the illusion that BIPOC don't do this work, aren't engaged in the heady scholarship in the field, and elevates this one way of understanding as the only way or the most accurate way of viewing the curriculum.
 - Textbooks often flatten and deculturalize curriculum within disciplines. We need to expand the curriculum to include the contributions of BIPOC.
 - Further, curriculum is very Westernized, ignoring the contributions in the discipline, field, or program from people around the world.
- ***Do you introduce students to the contributions of BIPOC to the discipline, field, and program?***
 - Not introducing students to the wide breadth of contributions by BIPOC, allows the illusion of white supremacy to exist unchallenged, allows students to continue to believe that white people have created and built everything when the direct opposite is true.
 - It allows a normalizing of whiteness to go unchallenged
- ***How are BIPOC represented within curricular materials?***
 - First of all, are BIPOC represented and how are they represented within the curriculum?
 - Are BIPOC presented in the full totality of our humanity or are we portrayed as victim, criminal, customer or as contributor, knowledge creator, and leaders in the discipline, field, or program?
- ***Who were the curricular materials created by? Who were they created for? Who is served?***
 - The truth is that white people often create for other white people which leaves little imagination for how whatever the subject matter is impacts BIPOC and their communities.
 - When BIPOC are left out of the knowledge construction in disciplines, fields, and programs, stereotypes and myths are allowed to flourish unchallenged.

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Here, I'm thinking of the myth that Black people can't feel pain that proliferates in the medical professions and the harm in how that myth plays out across industries from medicine to policing. There are other such harmful myths that need dismantling.

- ***What images are on the walls of the classroom and in the program halls?***
 - Do the people of color posters only come out during months or holidays celebrating BIPOC?
 - BIPOC have always been here, creating, and contributing. To relegate our accomplishments to a day or a month does little to fully engage our work throughout the curriculum.
- ***What are the assignments?***
 - Are students responding to deculturalized assignments loosed from their reality and history and the matters that concern their communities?
 - Are students given agency about how to respond to assignments in ways that are meaningful to them?
 - Are the assignments providing opportunity for students to apply what they are learning in the classroom to their own lives, circumstances, and communities?
 - If education is to be liberatory, we have to be showing students how to apply the tools they are learning to solve problems within the world and within their own communities. This is how we build a stronger more sustainable nation.
- ***What is the history of the discipline, field, program?***
 - How has the discipline, field, and program reinforced and resisted white supremacy?
 - What are the racial myths and stereotypes that have been promulgated by the discipline, field, program and how do these still come into play now?
 - Where does inequality exist within the discipline, field, and program? It's there, ignoring it does no one any good. Ignoring it does not move the discipline, field, or program forward. In fact, not identifying where inequality lives allows the discipline, field, or program to grow stale.

Food for Thought

1. Please Diversify Your Syllabi: An Open Letter to Professors

<http://haverfordclerk.com/please-diversify-your-syllabi-an-open-letter-to-professors/>

Excerpt

“I ask you to take a few minutes to do the following: ***tally up the number of authors you will be assigning that identify as white***, and the number that identify as people of color. Do the same for gender identification. Then, I ask that you print these numbers (perhaps as percentages or in a short statement) below your list of course readings for the semester. First, I ask you to reconsider the selection of course material. I know this may seem incredibly daunting, as we live in a world and academic environment with a “Western tradition” of education (read: white-male tradition of education)... When we read books for class, there is an implicit claim that these authors have valuable information to teach us. In

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courses where the books are written by predominantly privileged groups, there is an implicit and incredibly detrimental claim that the voices of these groups are more valuable than those of marginalized populations. The lack of representation in the reading does not slip by unnoticed. Especially in classes where I am one of few women (my economics class last semester was over two-thirds male, and racial distribution in classes tends to be even less equal), I feel less comfortable speaking up and asking questions. ***The more female authors that we read or female scholars we discuss, the more I feel my voice can be heard. Diversifying the syllabus may also diversify the discussion in class,*** encouraging students to speak that might otherwise not feel comfortable. I recognize that finding more diverse voices can be difficult, but that does not mean they are not out there.

For STEM classes, with limited readings assigned, this work is slightly more difficult. However, it is no less important. The mere fact that most of the theorems in my Linear Algebra class are named after white men had an effect on me and my self-confidence in the class. ***Although renaming theorems is not a plausible solution, bringing discussion of female scientists and mathematicians of color is.*** Even posters identifying historical figures such as these can make a huge difference; one such poster adorns the wall of a math seminar room outside Zubrow.

I also realize that many of you may read this article and be unable to change the structure of your course. This brings me to the second purpose of my suggestion: discussion. Even if your syllabus will remain comprised of mainly white or male authors, I urge you to still print that statistic below the list of readings. Allow it to spark conversations. Devote time during class one day to discuss the types of voices that the course privileges. Talk about why this is the case. Brainstorm solutions. ***Let these statistics be conversation starters, not conversation enders. I know it may be uncomfortable to talk about it, but at least in my own experience, ignoring this inequality is the far less comfortable option.***

2. Equity in STEM: Rethinking our Approach

<https://www.rubicon.com/equity-stem-rethinking-approach/>

“1. Student Identity

Our students need to first see themselves as STEM learners, and one major way to do that is to connect what we do in the classroom to their lives. We must consider the context of our students. If we are not familiar with the lived realities of our students, we must make a concerted effort to learn about them. How do they identify themselves? What is important to them? Learning about our students also helps us shift the narrative of STEM education ***from employment-centered to living-centered.***

2. Community Partnership

Next, we must partner with our community. No matter where our students are from, their community has something to contribute to our classroom and it's our job to identify those resources. For example, indigenous communities have unique ways of knowing you can make central during instruction. ***All communities have their own way of sense-making and fund of knowledge vital to everyday life.***

3. The Complicated Process of Adding Diversity to the College Syllabus

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<https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/07/the-complicated-process-of-adding-diversity-to-the-college-syllabus/493643/>

“Some instructors already do it naturally, he said. Others know their subject matter cold, but they “don’t know how to convey that message cross-culturally or cross-generationally.” So when professors or surprised job applicants clam up, **he gives them examples**. In forestry, for instance, people need to secure the trust of landowners from all backgrounds, and the process of earning that trust varies depending on who the landowner is. “Don’t complain about people if you’re not teaching them how to [discuss diversity],” Easley said. “Let’s teach them. Let’s show them so they have a blueprint.”

“That approach means a freshman engineering student could theoretically satisfy his diversity requirement during the first year and spend the next three years in classes that avoid the topic entirely. But **the ultimate goal is to cultivate a roster of courses and a campus climate that are sensitive to different backgrounds and beliefs**, Block said. “This is understanding the audience that you’re teaching to and making sure everybody thrives in the environment. There are large classes and students with very diverse experiences.”

“More faculty seem to be paying attention these days. When faculty, he said, are socially conscious and create safe spaces for people to share their experiences, **more students feel a sense of belonging**. “I think that some of our faculty, those who are self aware, know that they don’t know everything,” he said. “You basically make small pockets of progress.”

4. Diversifying Syllabi

<https://diversifyingsyllabi.weebly.com/reading-list.html>

“Research on racial and gender gaps in various academic disciplines, not just philosophy, points to **a correlation between students seeing someone established in the discipline who looks like them and choosing to enter that discipline**. In addition, researchers have also noted that underrepresented groups may be stereotyped as not having “raw ability” to excel in fields like philosophy and economics. Featuring diverse philosophers from these underrepresented groups on a syllabus is one way to combat that stereotype in your classroom.”

5. The Teaching Workshop: Diversifying the Syllabus

<https://blog.apaonline.org/2016/09/01/the-teaching-workshop-diversifying-the-syllabus/>

“One strategy I have used that falls within the implicit approach is to **put together a powerpoint slide with the faces of every author we would be reading in class**. I recommend this approach not only because it conveys implicitly the diversity of voices you have included in the syllabus, but also because putting together the powerpoint itself can be **a way of forcing yourself to check whether you really have included a diversity of perspectives in your syllabus**.”



Resources

Gender and academia:

Gender Bias in Academe: An Annotated Bibliography of Important Recent Studies

<https://futures.commonsc.gc.cuny.edu/2015/01/26/gender-bias-in-academe-an-annotated-bibliography-of-important-recent-studies/>

<http://science.sciencemag.org/content/347/6219/262>

https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/voices/how-implicit-bias-and-lack-of-diversity-undermine-science/?fbclid=IwAR092I7S2H674w2vulAK6A3Ft1-d_3md1J40ExQ0Ibt1qYtD_TEHZVjJ38M

LGBTQ and STEM

Why (and How) STEM Curriculum Needs to Be LGBT Inclusive

<https://www.glsen.org/blog/why-and-how-stem-curriculum-needs-be-lgbt-inclusive>

https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/LGBT%20inclus%20curriculum%202014_0.pdf

“But what does an LGBT-inclusive STEM curriculum look like? For one, it acknowledges that nature loves gender and sexual diversity. In addition to there being more than two biological sexes, there are even animals who change their biological sex, individual animals with two sexes, and animals that have sex roles reversed from the stereotypes I had been raised learning. And same-sex mating is just the beginning of the diversity of sexual behavior in the animal kingdom. Sex, in nature, just as within human populations, has purposes far beyond reproduction that provide real benefits for individuals and their communities.

An LGBT-inclusive STEM curriculum is also one that acknowledges the lives of LGBT individuals in the field. For instance, *Sally Ride was a physicist and astronaut. She was also a lesbian. Let’s talk about the whole lives of LGBT professionals in STEM so that anyone with the skills to go to space wants to get off the launch pad and go to that inclusive party in the sky.*”

Cultural diversity and STEM

Why it is crucial to make cultural diversity visible in STEM education

<http://stemteachingtools.org/brief/55>

“Science education in the U.S. has often centered on Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic (WEIRD) societies—and predominantly on the work of white men recognized as scientists in society. This narrow view of science has made broad claims about science, and it often dominates the pages of leading journals. It incorrectly and adversely narrows the image of who does science, why they do it, and how it is done. Instruction should acknowledge *the specific contributions of members from diverse cultures to scientific and technological enterprises* related to the topic, practices, and knowledge involved. It is important for these accounts to be substantial, accurate, and

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respectful to the originating work and community (see examples).

Diverse images of STEM endeavors should be described in historical, contemporary, and future-focused terms. Do not inaccurately portray the diversity of STEM endeavors of cultural communities as strictly historical ones—as this may inadvertently render diverse communities’ contributions to STEM as something of the past. Highlight how past and present contributions of peoples from diverse communities influence STEM knowledge production today.

STEM has a broad range of purposes. Highlight a range of purposes for understanding science and engineering, including: community endeavors and justice projects, forms of civic engagement, personal pursuits of learners or families, and 21st century global challenges and decision-making—and ***not just STEM career possibilities.***”

Ready-made discussion plans that include one of many foci of diversity

“On Tolerating the Unreasonable”

https://diversifyingsyllabi.weebly.com/uploads/3/8/1/8/38180217/kelly_mcpherson_template.pdf

“The Problem of Speaking for Others”

https://diversifyingsyllabi.weebly.com/uploads/3/8/1/8/38180217/alcoff_handout.pdf

“Why Should a Knower Care?”

https://diversifyingsyllabi.weebly.com/uploads/3/8/1/8/38180217/dalmiya_diversify_handout.pdf

“Capitalism and Gay Identity”

<https://diversifyingsyllabi.weebly.com/uploads/3/8/1/8/38180217/capitalismgayidentity.pdf>

“Anorexia Nervosa: Psychopathy as the Crystallization of Culture”

<https://diversifyingsyllabi.weebly.com/uploads/3/8/1/8/38180217/bordotemplate-2.pdf>

“Neuroscientific Challenges to Free Will and Responsibility”

<https://diversifyingsyllabi.weebly.com/uploads/3/8/1/8/38180217/roskiestemplate.pdf>

“Health Disparities: Bioethics and Racial Equality”

https://diversifyingsyllabi.weebly.com/uploads/3/8/1/8/38180217/diversifying_syllabi_handout_roberts.pdf

“The Discourse of Pathology: Reproducing the Able Mind through Bodies of Color”

https://diversifyingsyllabi.weebly.com/uploads/3/8/1/8/38180217/taylor_handout_-_the_discourse_of_pathology.pdf

“Epistemic Injustice and Illness”

https://diversifyingsyllabi.weebly.com/uploads/3/8/1/8/38180217/kidd_carel_handout.pdf

“Disability, Minority, and Difference”

https://diversifyingsyllabi.weebly.com/uploads/3/8/1/8/38180217/handout_for_barnes.pdf

“The Animal Rights and the Values of Nonhuman Life”

<https://diversifyingsyllabi.weebly.com/uploads/3/8/1/8/38180217/anderson-2.pdf>



“The Sexual Politics of Meat”

https://diversifyingsyllabi.weebly.com/uploads/3/8/1/8/38180217/adams_handout.pdf

“Eating, Energy, and Bioethics”

https://diversifyingsyllabi.weebly.com/uploads/3/8/1/8/38180217/shotwell_alexis_-_against_purity_ch._4_handout.pdf

Videos about diversity and academia (TEDX)

STEM and Race <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Hb0vkdzaWg>

https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/a-black-female-astrophysicist-on-making-stem-more-inclusive?fbclid=IwAR0VgMdAbP8zfagU_u1deTABBSnxf5oc9I9qCLRKF9QKchsot3asz2erE4g

Engineering <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FEeTLopLkEo>