

Strategies for Antiracist & Decolonized Teaching

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In the wake of the 2020 [summer of racial reckoning](#) (Chang, Martin, and Marrapodi 2020), faculty and educators have increasingly felt the pressure to examine the [role of institutions of higher education](#) (Pasquerella 2020) and their teaching in challenging white supremacy and oppression. Many educational institutions and academic associations [published statements condemning police brutality and racism](#) (McKenzie 2020); signaling that academia was embarking on a journey of self-reflection and renaissance. Despite the efforts of [many faculty across the United States](#) (Scholar Strike for Racial Justice) to [display their commitment to racial justice](#) (Larkin 2020), curricular and campus reforms have been slow to come. When the Trump administration issued an [executive order against diversity trainings](#) (Executive Order 13950) and prompted several universities and colleges to abandon their [diversity, equity and inclusion](#) (Flaherty 2020) programs.

This piece builds on [our initial call to action](#) (Twyman-Ghoshal and Carkin Lacorazza 2020) directed at our colleagues in criminology. As faculty and criminologists, we felt especially responsible for initiating and sustaining change, an issue that directly relates to our discipline; however, it has become increasingly clear that our call to action for antiracist and decolonized teaching requires a broad commitment across all scholarly disciplines. On October 9th, 2020, the White House issued a proclamation that sought to protect the celebration of Columbus Day from “[radical activists \[that\] have sought to undermine Christopher Columbus’s legacy..](#)” and from “[extremists \[that\] seek to replace discussion of his vast contributions with talk of failings, his discoveries with atrocities, and his achievements with transgressions](#)” (Proclamation 10100). It is precisely such legacies that we are concerned about - mythologized characters, such as Columbus, and associated [doctored propaganda](#) (Minneo 2020) does not provide students with an accurate understanding of history. Beyond history, antiracist teaching is about changing a culture that maintains a system of oppression and upholds disparities in education, health care, criminal justice, politics, science, and business. [Institutions of higher learning are the critical node for stimulating such change](#) (Davis 2020) and our aim is to provide faculty with a framework to assist in this process.

It is important to mention that we approach concerns over racial and social justice as practitioners and learners who strive towards the goal of antiracism and decolonization of the curriculum. This is ongoing and the purpose here is to share strategies to bring us closer to being ethical educators. The list and framework suggested here is not comprehensive and there is much more learning and growth that needs to be done particularly when it comes to acknowledging our own biases and how they manifest in the classroom. It is important to realize that you do not have to be an expert on these topics to actively engage in these conversations with students. However, to effectively guide these conversations, faculty need to continuously educate themselves.

The aim is for teaching practice to be more honest and encompassing. We are not challenging academic freedom, but rather encouraging a reflection on how our knowledge is abridged and distorted. Academic freedom does not give us the right to disregard integrity,

professional values, and human rights. As scholars we have a social responsibility to provide students with the comprehensive education they deserve, not one that is inherently racist and colonizing.

Ethical and comprehensive teaching and learning begins with intellectual reflexivity; according to Emirbayer and Desmond (2011) reflexivity requires that individuals engage “[in rigorous institutional analyses of the social and historical structures that condition one’s thinking and inner experience](#)”. Such reflexivity requires a recall of the principles of antiracism and decolonization. Antiracism requires an acknowledgement of the role race plays in society and the recognition that reality is constructed around a person’s social identity, location, and experience. As faculty, we need to actively engage with what is absent and missing in our courses. This requires a [decolonization pedagogy](#) (Behari-Leak 2020) and a move away from the [Colonial University](#) (Smart 2020). Education needs to be unfettered and actively recognize selective narratives that exclude the knowledge, culture, and history of black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC).

Antiracist and Decolonized Teaching and Learning Framework

The framework incorporates five key areas of action. The aims of each are supplemented with a series of questions that guide faculty in the reflection and the recall of antiracist and decolonizing strategies.

1. Acknowledge Our Own Biases & Privilege

According to Kendi (2019), active bias control “requires persistent self-awareness, constant self-criticism, and regular self-examination” (23). [Racial bias is interwoven in society and culture structuring how people think](#). It is a systemic problem that has created an unequal social reality. Knowing your biases is the first step toward becoming antiracist rather than nonracist. Being an ethical and antiracist educator requires regular and repeated reflection on the Eurocentric assumptions and education that guide our thoughts and actions.

Self-Assessment Guide Questions:

- How does my social and geographical location influence my identity, knowledge, and accumulated wisdom? What knowledge am I missing?
- What privileges and power do I hold? How do I exercise my power and privilege?
- How does my [power and privilege show up in my work](#) (Simmons 2019)?
- How do my biases and privileges [take up space and silence others](#) (Simmons 2019)?
- Am I [nonracist or antiracist](#) (The Guardian 2016)? How do I hold myself accountable?

2. Revising Courses and Curricula

Courses and curricula need to ensure that [social and racial inequalities are not re/produced](#) (University College London 2014). This requires a critical assessment of the core objectives of individual academic fields and an examination of the concepts that guide disciplines. Such work asks that faculty critically review the materials they were taught and identify how they perpetuate systems of injustice. As academics we need to interrogate established paradigms and canons, and identifying racial undertones in writings, productions, art, and other work. Faculty need to actively democratize and internationalize

their courses and materials; non-Western approaches need to become integral to scholarship and education.

Self-Assessment Guide Questions:

- How does your course/curriculum interrogate inequalities and injustices?
- [For whom is your course/curriculum designed](#) (Morreia and Luckett 2018)? What assumptions do you make about your students' backgrounds and culture?
- In what ways does your course recognize and tackle the dominance of Western pedagogy, content, and philosophy?
- How are you working to ensure your course/curriculum is valuing a diversity of approaches and not privileging dominant forms of knowledge?
- How are you acknowledging and addressing the omissions within the field through your coursework and lectures? What is given priority and what is relegated to less important?
- How are you encouraging healthy skepticism which allows students to question what they are learning?

3. Amplify Minoritized Voices

The ivory tower needs to be diversified; this needs to be done meaningfully without allowing collectivity to overlook particular minoritized groups or intersectional experiences. Beyond ensuring that campuses are diverse, this requires that the expertise of Black and Brown scholars be integrated into disciplines, including in coursework, conferences, and other academic spaces. This cannot be tokenized inclusion, but requires incorporating materials that represent the scholarship, research, and firsthand experiences of BIPOC and those from the Global South. This requires consistent individualized efforts so that race and equity work is not borne by minoritized individuals.

Self-Assessment Guide Questions:

- How have you incorporated BIPOC work into spaces where it has previously been excluded?
- How are you integrating storytelling into your course? Whose stories are being told? What are you communicating when you exclude certain voices?
- If your institution is located in a postcolonial secular nation, how are indigenous narratives integrated into your courses?
- In what ways are you keeping up to date with scholarship in your field? Are these methods inclusive of minoritized voices?
- How are you [supporting and valuing your BIPOC students](#) (Kachani, Ross, and Irvin 2020) without assuming assimilation?

4. Incorporating High Impact Learning Activities

High impact learning activities engage students in material on a personal level. Students are required to use critical thinking and analytical skills as they immerse themselves in hands on exercises. Such activities allow students to recognize the historical biases that remain inherent in research, development, practices, programs, and policies. This affords

students the opportunity to better understand the effects of systemic racism, racial disparities, and injustice. As students engage with material more holistically, they are better prepared to confront social problems.

Self-Assessment Guide Questions:

- What types of coursework are you engaging in outside the typical assessment modalities?
- What content in your course lends itself to hands-on engagement?
- How do the assessments engage students in questioning and critiquing existing and established content?
- In what ways does the activity require students to question their biases and knowledge to work toward a solution?
- How do class activities encourage students to be self-critical and engage in self-improvement, both intellectually and civilly?

5. Developing Community Partnerships

Community partnerships enable students to engage with material in real-world settings. Agencies which work with historically underprivileged populations, assisting justice involved individuals, and reintegrating populations, are underfunded and overworked. This is the perfect opportunity to connect students with advocates. Students gain an array of tangible learning opportunities whilst communities and agencies receive needed support.

Self-Assessment Guide Questions:

- What community agencies engage in the work you teach? How can students in your discipline support diverse community agencies that support the underprivileged, underserved, and underfunded?
- What projects can benefit both the community partner, the individuals they serve, and the student(s)?
- How are you ensuring the relationship is reciprocal and you are not adding labor to the community partner?
- In what ways are your students learning more about the world around them?

It is not enough to be nonracist, faculty must make their courses and curriculum actively antiracist. This requires a decolonizing pedagogy that lifts those that have been oppressed. Many have already begun this work, however, it is high time for us to reach a critical mass. Students of all backgrounds benefit from ethical and inclusive teaching. Collectively, we must provide students with an honest representation of knowledge to heal and push toward a just society. Students deserve the opportunity to think critically about the world around them and as faculty, our job is to give them the tools they need to make the world a better place.

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