

Anti-Racist Syllabus Workshop



Key Concepts to Get Started

1

Your syllabus sets the tone of your course and your relationship with your students.

A syllabus is often seen as a contract, set of rules, etc. Presenting it like this sets a tone that students need to be kept in line and creates a feeling that students can't be trusted.

Think about what kind of class culture you want to create and how your syllabus can help to create that culture.

2

Making a few changes to your syllabus is not enough to disrupt systems of white supremacy.

Showcasing an anti-racist syllabus but not implementing anti-racist practices in your classes is an example of performative allyship.

Performative allyship can do more harm to students if they falsely believe they can trust you and are later betrayed.

3

Employing anti-racism in your classes is an active, ongoing process.

Systems of white supremacy are deeply embedded in our institutions of higher education and in our scholarly disciplines. Identifying and disrupting them requires constantly rethinking ways of doing and thinking.

Commit to continuous learning and self-scrutiny of your teaching practices.

Be open to and elicit critical feedback from trusted peers on how you can do better.

4

Examine what your discipline considers to be the "canon" or foundational texts.

Identify how many of your discipline's core texts were written by white males and how this privileges certain views and epistemologies.

Consider how you can center the work and voices of BIPOC scholars and transform the way foundational knowledge is taught in your discipline, as well as what is considered foundational.

5

Reconsider traditional forms of assessment.

Do not use video-proctored examinations, which are invasive and problematic for students in non-ideal study conditions.

Avoid high-stakes, timed, closed-book assessments.

Adopt culturally relevant and inclusive assessment methods (for example, the C.A.P. model of assessment).

6

Identify what counts as "learning" in your classes and whom this might privilege.

Learning is often conflated with compliance (e.g., turning in assignments on time), which privileges silence over questioning and challenging.

Identify how you can assess learning without heavily basing grades on compliance.

7

Students bring their own identities and experiences to the learning environment.

As educators, we need to find ways to incorporate the diverse perspectives that students bring to the course and course topics, even if those perspectives challenge dominant paradigms of thinking and knowing.

Students are experts on their own lived experiences. Find ways to incorporate and build on the expertise that students bring with them.

8

Knowledge production and learning are inherently political, historical, embodied, and culturally situated.

Many educators have been told that they should remain neutral on political, racial, or controversial topics. However, choosing neutrality is itself a political choice.

The sciences are not exempt from dealing with racism historically and in the present.

Consider (or learn) the history of your discipline and its role in white supremacy.

9

Scrutinize deficit framing of students and their behaviors.

Don't assume that students from certain backgrounds lack adequate intellect for higher education or for specific subjects.

Students may struggle in courses for reasons they may not want to reveal, such as lack of funds for textbooks or electronics, childcare or eldercare responsibilities, housing or food insecurity, access to a safe, quiet study space, etc.

Consider whether any of your course requirements restrict access to content or resources for students in non-ideal study conditions.