

## **The Antiracist Curriculum Development Initiative in the College of Arts and Sciences**

Universities can play a vital dual role in combatting racism as centers for research as well as key formative institutions in the lives of the next generation of engaged citizens and policymakers. Many faculty have asked how to do this better. Our students, too, have asked us for more courses that take an antiracist perspective. Indeed, the times demand it: as an intellectual issue, as an educational issue, and as a moral issue.

### **Purpose of this Document**

Our students' connections to one another and to our institution can be nourished and strengthened by their classroom experiences but can also be diminished and weakened. This document is intended to give faculty motivation, strategies, and resources to do the challenging work of making their pedagogy and praxis more inclusive and move toward antiracist ideals. For all faculty, this work involves self-

- f. **Facilitated conversations:** Many departments would like to discuss how an antiracist perspective in course design and pedagogy can be applied to their disciplines. We will offer faculty experts to facilitate conversations at a department level aimed not at discussing personal beliefs or behavior but concrete takeaways on how an antiracist perspective can be manifested in STEM fields, the social sciences, the arts, and the humanities.
- g. Faculty experts to **advise chairs and directors:** Many program directors would like to develop (or further develop) an antiracist perspective in their majors, minors, and graduate programs. We will offer faculty experts to work with PDs to assess their curriculum and identify opportunities for expansion.

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- x discussing political, historical, and economic contexts of one's discipline and its conventions
- x critical examination of the persistence and impact of racism and racist policies
- x diversifying course readings and materials to include historically marginalized authors and authors with an antiracist perspective
- x creating an inclusive classroom environment addressing diverse learning styles
- x critiquing the "hidden curriculum" of lessons that are absorbed through the experience of school: that meritocracy is impartial, that failure is merely the student's fault, etc.
- x openness to other epistemologies, traditions, cultures, and languages to reduce Eurocentrism's narrowing of the human experience and knowledge development
- x self-reflection and professional development by faculty
- x campus and societal engagement as part of the learning experience

### **What is critical race theory?**

Critical race theory, which emerged from the legal field and has spread to other disciplines, is an interpretive mode that helps recognize the origins and lasting effects of systemic racism and its utility in maintaining white dominance. As Kimberlé Crenshaw puts it, critical race theory is "a way of seeing how the fiction of race has been transformed into concrete racial inequities." It also examines how other intersecting identity categories such as gender, sexuality, class, and ability affect power relations in society. Applying an antiracist lens in different disciplines to a vast array of complex problems can contribute not only to more inclusive teaching but to new insights that allow solutions to social challenges, from housing segregation to disparate health outcomes, from cultural exclusion and political violence to criminal justice reform.

### **A key new resource at AU: The Antiracist Praxis Subject Guide**

Members of Writing Studies and the University Library on the Information Literacy Committee have teamed up to produce a fascinating [Antiracist Praxis Subject Guide](#). We recommend especially "Racial Justice in Research – Decolonizing Research Methodologies" and "White Supremacy in Scholarly Communications"; "Racial Justice in Education – Decolonization of the Syllabus" and "Antiracist Pedagogy and Praxis," but you may simply wish to browse.

### **CTRL Support**

We also encourage you to seek out [training at CTRL](#) about approaches to evaluation that are consistent with antiracist teaching practices.

### **For further reading**

- x [Antiracist Pedagogy Resource](#). Annotated list of key books and articles.
- x [Racial Justice, Racial Equity, and Anti-Racism Reading List](#) Harvard University
- x "[Antiracist Pedagogy: Definition, Theory, and Professional Development](#)."
- x "[Effective Teaching is Anti-Racist Teaching](#)" Brown University
- x "[Anti-Racist Pedagogy: From Faculty's Self-Reflection to Organizing in and beyond the Classroom](#)."
- x "[Barriers and Strategies by White Faculty Who Incorporate Antiracist Pedagogy](#)"

What follows are pages devoted to how antiracist pedagogy is used in each of the different discipline clusters in CAS. These are intended not as definitive guides but conversation starters! Alternative views are welcome and discussion is encouraged.

This is a work in progress. Please send additions or changes to [vilanova@american.edu](mailto:vilanova@american.edu). Your ideas, questions and insights are crucial for our and our students' success!

## Antiracism in the Social Science Classroom

This section provides suggestions and resources for social science antiracist teaching strategies. Content in this section focuses on broad themes that are relevant to social sciences disciplines. Approaches outlined here reflect efforts toward meeting antiracist pedagogical and curricular criteria such as

- x Creating an inclusive classroom environment
- x Teaching of material outside of the context of personal biases or familiarity
- x Developing an understanding of how oppression and representation operate intersectionally rather than according to individual/singular axes of race/class/sexuality/ability/gender
- x Fostering campus and societal engagement as part of the learning experience
- x Modeling horizontal relationships of mutual respect by listening and learning from students and enabling them to contribute to the shaping of assignments
- x Not mistaking teaching as the exercise of power

### The Social Sciences and Studies of Inequality

Teaching and researching inequality is central to many social science fields, including the intersection of oppressions based on race, class, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, nationality, immigration status, and ability. Scholars whose research focuses on quality might assume that their research skills automatically translate into effective teaching about injustice and equitable teaching practices. These assumptions can cause unintended barriers to the necessary, ongoing process of evaluation and reevaluation of teaching material and practices.

We encourage faculty with different degrees of skill and familiarity with antiracist pedagogy to confer with one another about their respective approaches to teaching material. This is especially the case for faculty teaching different sections of the same class within a department. Some level of commitment to consistent teaching practices and content is an important part of addressing structural inequalities in the context of teaching and learning. Measures developed to evaluate learning within a single class and across sections.

Based on general characteristics of social science classes and the topics covered, we suggest covering these core themes/ideas in lectures, readings and other assignments:

1) Histories of methodological practices- A key aspect of antiracist pedagogy in the social sciences involves presenting how research methods and popular theories have changed over time. Social science studies began as colonial enterprises, promoting studies that aligned with hierarchies justifying the observation, subjugation and displacement of people considered to be at a lower stage of cultural and biological evolution. We encourage professors to address how research

identities and interlocking oppressions are parts of scholar-activist movements led by queer Black women such as the Combahee River Collective. Similarly, recent proposals to broaden the scope of intersectional studies of oppression are also being spearheaded by Black and BIPOC women. Therefore, we encourage professors to use intersectionality as an opportunity to demonstrate the broad significance of BIPOC scholarship methodological and theoretical developments in the social sciences.

3) BIPOC Representation– Related to item 2, we encourage professors to go beyond the inclusion of BIPOC scholars in lectures, readings, and other assignments for the sake of presence. BIPOC scholarship should be presented in a way that demonstrates how it is central to intellectual production in a given discipline. Making sure that BIPOC scholarship is integrated into the syllabus, 3ni-3

## Antiracism in the Humanities Classroom

This section is intended for those in the humanities who would like to incorporate antiracist strategies into their teaching. This document is also useful for those who have already started building an antiracist classroom but would like some additional resources.

### Relevance for the Humanities:

In the humanities, our use of critical methodologies and analyses, historical research, and investigations into the most important aspects of life make our classrooms well situated for discussions about race, racialization, privilege, and antiracism. Our centering of texts in our work provides many opportunities for antiracist teaching. The humanities classroom has also-- both historically and currently-- been a site where racism is reproduced.

Incorporating antiracism into the humanities classroom. The humanities center for teaching antiracism. [TJ -11.085 -1.125<01 Tw [(s)-6 631.1 ( r)-3-1 (u)

provide students with tools to identify, engage with, and learn from those contradictions and tensions.

Voice: Including diverse perspectives from a variety of authors and narrators. Think about which perspective(s) are represented by the materials you have selected.

However, if possible, avoid the “class model.” Having one class on “women’s poetry” or “Black literature” while the rest of the curriculum remains white, male and straight inadvertently reinforces the idea that racial, gender and sexual minorities and women are what Sara Ahmed would call “conditional guests” of the academy, not an integral part of it. Therefore, try to include female, nonwhite, and other authors from historically marginalized backgrounds throughout the curriculum. Colleagues are a good source of suggestions, as well as the resources below. Also, consider whether the course assignments encourage students to engage with the voices or perspectives that are at the margins of the text.

Representation: Old and new texts may represent individuals and groups using stereotypes, mischaracterizations, or cultural appropriation. Rather than removing problematic texts from one’s syllabus, providing students with the tools to be able to identify and discuss this common phenomenon can equip them to read critically long after class has ended. To reflect on what is represented and how it is represented is a skill that will be of enduring value to the students.

Difficult texts: When introducing students to concepts, themes, and narratives that challenge traditional views and discourses and/or are difficult to parse, help to provide some insight and context to help them to navigate the information. Some texts can be intimidating if encountered “cold” without introductory framing to make them more accessible to all students rather than only those who have experience with such texts. Complex or abstract language in theoretical texts should be rendered clearer with the instructor’s guidance. Faculty may benefit from recent work on [nonstandard codes of English](#) and moving from “code-switching” to “code-meshing.”

The Archive: Metaphorically speaking, the archive is preserved, published, and widely available texts and images that have only recently and unevenly begun to represent marginalized communities. This was not accidental but by design, and has not ended, as preservation, publication, and exhibition have historically been closely linked to dominant systems of power. Discussing this with students may help provide them with the necessary perspective on whose voices have been valued and why.

## Antiracism in the STEM Classroom

If science and racism have been linked in history, antiracism is relevant to science classrooms. All academic and scholarly disciplines can make positive, antiracist changes to how courses are structured and taught. STEM fields may seem disconnected because of their commitment to objectivity, empirical thought, the scientific method, and disciplinary culture that claims that peer review and iterative experimentation result in refutable facts until proven wrong, yet implicit bias and lack of diversity hinder scientific achievement and produce unintended consequences. There are many ways that STEM faculty can take steps to be more antiracist and inclusive in their classrooms to improve outcomes for all students pursuing STEM degrees. The traditional format of natural science courses was honed over decades of teaching a homogeneous student body but may not support the diversity of students in our classrooms. Strategies for improvement include broadening the choices of assessments, adapting course policies, adding evidence-based pedagogical strategies like active learning and inquiry-based thinking, adopting an asset-based model of student as well as expanding content and assigned readings to include voices of historically marginalized scientists. By starting with small steps to create a more inclusive STEM classroom, one may also create more satisfaction, joy, and discovery for oneself and one's students.

### Some Unique Challenges and Erroneous Claims in STEM

1. How do you create a rigorous course that invites students to work hard and learn versus a course that weeds out students through relationships, assessment design, and other techniques described below.
2. Claim: STEM fields are free of bias. But disciplines such as physics, chemistry, biology, and earth science are not immune to bias.



sequencing of a white male genome as the normative ~~disparate~~ effects of climate change on marginalized populations, the eugenic origins of statistical population analyses, and a general failure to share the benefits of scientific discoveries with the populations being studied. More information can be found in recent histories of racist [pseudoscience](#) and [medical racism](#)

c. Acknowledge the inherent bias in selection of what has been studied in the past: what species, spaces, and human communities are favored; who is admitted to clinical trials; in which countries environmental sensors are located, etc. Consider the “streetlight effect” this may produce (like the drunk searching for his keys under the lamppost, where it is easier to see) that can have a reinforcing effect in what is studied and funded—in the present.

d. Recognizing that there is an added cognitive load on BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) and Latinx students, especially in the STEM fields. As [Killpack and Melon](#) put it, “Teachers and students in the United States have an awareness of both positive and negative stereotypes related to race and academic expectations in STEM fields. A phenomenon called stereotype threat occurs when an individual is performing a difficult task on which members of their group are thought stereotypically poorly. Stereotype threat can lead underrepresented students to feel additional mental and emotional pressure to succeed, which increases cognitive load, depletes working memory, and induces ph1

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- d. Assign readings from scientists outside the academy - include naturalist journals, original experimental notes, blog posts, or other original texts outside of the traditional peer-reviewed primary literature, to be assessed critically.
- e. Discuss theories that were largely believed to be true until a paradigm shift

## Antiracism in the Arts Classroom

The Arts provide a unique place within the educational system precisely because practice and interpretation come down to a very personal level. In an academic way, the Arts are challenging and rigorous because they are not just about memorizing an idea but about processing the idea through the individual. Through implicit bias of historical and current ways of learning, the Arts can function as a mode where racism is reproduced and maintained. We can ensure our learning spaces are aligned with antiracist pedagogy methods to respond and react with the flexibility to bring together theory and practice to combat racial injustice through craft.

Incorporating antiracist teaching strategies into courses and teaching practices is essential for ensuring that the course is an inclusive and welcoming space for all students, including Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) learners. This helps equip all students with the tools they need to resist and dismantle racism as they encounter it in their daily lives, and to come to terms with and make use of the privilege they may have. We recognize that, particularly for the Arts, instructors' own identities may bring special challenges and significance that we process through our work.

Topics for Arts Faculty to Consider as they Integrate Antiracism into their Classroom

The following suggestions come from conversations with fellow AU Arts faculty for how you might approach rethinking classroom-

x Think beyond the degree experience. All the arts are changing rapidly: if our students are going to work professionally in the arts and we are preparing them for now, are we preparing them for the evolving arts scene 5-10 years from now? This idea extends to recruitment strategies: recognize that some of the most promising students might have applications that don't match traditional expectations (for example, those applications that are incomplete). The field itself needs educating as well, where employers might need help interpreting applications for internships and job prospects from diverse applicants.

Want to workshop syllabi, confer with colleagues, or meet a faculty member? Contact [vilanova@american.edu](mailto:vilanova@american.edu)

### Resources particular to the Arts

- x [Diversity in Visual Arts Education](#) National Art Education Association
- x ["I'm So Offended"](#) Curriculum Flashpoints and Critical Arts Education, by Amanda Krahe et al.
- x [We See You, White American Theaterability Report](#) pp. 24ff
- x [Inclusivity and Diversity in Music Education](#)
- x [Equity, Diversity, & Inclusion Resources](#) Massachusetts Arts Education Association
- x [Decolonizing the Dance Curriculum in Higher Education](#) by Nyama McCarthy Brown
- x [A Music Theory Curriculum for the 90s](#) by Trevor de Clerq
- x [Cultural Diversity Curriculum Design: An Art Therapist's Perspective](#) by Cheryl Doby-Copeland
- x ["Reconstructing Practice: Toward an Artist Arts and Design Field"](#) Art Center College of Design
- x [California College of the Arts, Decolonial School](#)
- x [Equality and Diversity in the Arts](#) University of the Arts in London.

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