Pod B: Culturally Relevant Course Content

# Choosing Content

**There is no culturally neutral content.** Despite our insistence that a particular article is “simply the best,” or “this is just an objective description of x issue,” all of the readings, books, and artworks that we assign to our classes exist in and are shaped by a cultural context. Dr. Geneva Gay writes:

Culturally responsive teaching... is at once a routine and a radical proposal. It is routine because it does for Native American, Latino, Asian American, African American, and low- income students what traditional instructional ideologies and actions do for middle-class European Americans. That is, it ﬁlters curriculum content and teaching strategies through their cultural frames of reference to make the content more personally meaningful and easier to master. It is radical because it makes explicit the previously implicit role of culture in teaching and learning, and it insists that educational institutions accept the legitimacy and viability of ethnic-group cultures in improving learning outcomes.

A model for culturally relevant teaching identiﬁes ﬁve key categories in which instructors can develop their pedagogy: (1) content integration, (2) facilitating knowledge construction, (3) prejudice reduction, (4) social justice, and (5) academic development. This exercise addresses the ﬁrst, but there are many ways to create culturally relevant classrooms beyond integrating culturally relevant content.

1. **Reflect:** What are the metrics you use to decide what content (readings, books, art, speakers, etc.) to include in your course? List them below.

*Type here…*

1. **Reﬂect*:*** Think about your area of research. What groups, genders, and cultures tend to be represented more often? Which aren’t represented as much? Why? What would transforming your area of research to be more diverse and inclusive look like? How might you amend the metrics (above) you use to ensure you include diverse perspectives?

*Type here…*

1. **Assess:** Use the course content survey tool (below) to assess the content of your course (adapted from the “Inclusion by Design” worksheet, linked on Sakai).

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| **Perspectives:** To what extent do the course materials (readings, guest speakers, multimedia, etc.) provide a full spectrum of perspectives on topics? |
| 1: The material presents one perspective.2: The material presents mostly one perspective.3: The material presents some different perspectives. 4: The material presents a wide variety of perspectives.5: The material presents a wide variety of perspectives and actively dismantles oppressive structures. |
| **Voice:** To what extent does the material present a wide variety of voices? |
| 1: The material presents one voice, the dominant one.2: The material presents mostly one voice, the dominant one. 3: The material presents some different voices and identities.4: The material presents a wide variety of voices and identities.5: The material does the above and works to dismantle the silencing of marginalized voices. |
| **Pace:** To what extent does the pace of the course content allow for multiple processing speeds? |
| 1: Content requires one processing pace.2: Content encourages one processing pace.3: Content encourages one processing pace but allows for others.4: Content encourages multiple speeds.5: Content encourages multiple speeds and teaches helpful learning skills. |
| **Course Materials:** To what extent does the format of the course material respond to a broad range of learning preferences (reading written text, visual and audio media, etc.)? |
| 1: Material is only in one format.2: Material is mostly in one format.3: Material is in mostly two formats (e.g. reading and video).4: Material is available in a diversity of formats.5: Material is available in a diversity of formats and different learning preferences are encouraged. |
| **Accessibility:** To what extent is the course material accessible to all students, including those with disabilities? (For example, do visual media have subtitles, can online readings be recognized by screen readers, etc.?) |
| 1: Material is not accessible.2: Material is somewhat accessible. 3: Material is often accessible.4: All material is accessible.5: All material is accessible and material values access and disability justice. |
| **Equity and critical pedagogy:** To what extent does the course content critically address and combat biases and inequities in the area of study (including racism, sexism, ableism, sexuality, etc.)? |
| 1: Content does not address biases, inequities, or structural oppression.2: Content rarely addresses biases, inequities, or structural oppression.3: Content sometimes addresses biases, inequities, or structural oppression. 4: Content addresses biases, inequities, or structural oppression.5: Content addresses and combats biases, inequities, or structural oppression. |

## When totaling the scores on this tool:

A score close to 30 means your course is highly inclusive in many areas. Are there ways you can share this knowledge and skills with fellow instructors? How might you keep on pushing change forward?

A score below 20 means there are exciting opportunities to re-envision your course to remove structural barriers and foster inclusivity and cultural responsiveness in your content.

# Creating Change

Of course, many instructors do not have the authority to change their curriculum or large portions of their course content. But focusing on what you *can* do, what is **one area** in which you can revise your course content to be more culturally responsive and inclusive?

Area for revision:

What is your plan for implementing this revision of your course content? For example, simple revisions you might make could include:

* **Use full names** rather than initials in reading lists, which encourages students to envision the authors as persons.
* **Add authors’ proﬁle links** to the electronic version of the syllabus so that authors are easier to look up, thus making their group membership salient (Jenks and Saul 2018).
* **Add short bios of content authors** to slides, syllabus, or Lessons pages to demystify how they got their expertise and emphasize that you value individual’s embodied identities.
* **Avoid having the only content** about marginalized people be focused on racism, disparities, suffering, and trauma, which reduces the experiences of marginalized people to their oppression. **Include the power, joy, resilience, and leadership** of structurally marginalized communities in your content.
* **Avoid giving the impression that works by members of under-represented groups are marginal** or less important by putting them in the ﬁnal week of the class or making them optional rather than required (Jenks and Saul 2018).
* **Be mindful of the cost of your course materials.** Put off requiring the newest edition of an expensive textfor a year or two. Include open source texts or library-subscribed journal articles in the reading list instead of requiring a purchase.
* **Invite in critical perspectives** to work in your ﬁeld. For example, if you are required to teach X canonical ﬁgure, consider adding a critical perspective from a traditionally marginalized viewpoint to model critical engagement for students through your course content and include voices that challenge and question dominant narratives. Research shows that presenting critical perspectives aids students’ feelings of belonging in the field.
* **Explain why:** For each reading on the syllabus, include a note explaining 1) *Why* you assigned it and 2) What you hope for students to take away from it. A short summary of the critical context the reading exists in can also help students who are less familiar with academic conversations get up to speed.
	+ For example: Geneva, Gay. “Chapter 2: Pedagogical Potential of Cultural Responsiveness,” pages 28-56. 2000. Note: Dr. Geneva Gay is a nationally-known expert on multicultural curriculum design and pedagogy (the study of teaching methods). I assigned this reading to illustrate the power of culturally responsive curricula to empower all students. When reading, please look for ways that this argument challenges your values in terms of course content.
* **Leave room** in your syllabus for students to choose readings. Ask your students what they want to learn about or present them options from which they can choose.
* **Research** the disparities in your ﬁ eld and prioritize discussing them with your students. If, for example, you can’t ﬁnd any articles by women researchers about x topic, explain why the readings you have assigned are all by men, and discuss how this gender imbalance was established and is perpetuated in this ﬁ eld.
* **Review all of your course content for accessibility**, ensure all video/audio content is captioned, all documents are accessible with screen readers, and that all material is affordable for students. Consider including alternate ways of accessing expensive materials and note these on your syllabus.
* **Diversify the forms and modes of your course content**. Include a mix of video, audio, and written content. Especially for remote learning, be aware that students will have varied access to technology and bandwidth—include low-bandwidth options whenever possible.
* **Examine the pace of your content** and think critically about what students (who are generally in 3-5 other courses) can accomplish in a timely manner. How many hours do you expect them to work on your course outside of class time? Is the actual amount of time students are taking lower or greater? Use this Rice CTE tool (linked in Sakai) to estimate the number of hours a week your students will be working on your course.
* **Include the number of pages for readings** or runtime for video or audio on your syllabus, along with **an estimate** (use Rice CTE tool) for how long it will take students to read/view/listen/respond to the content so that students can budget their time. Include ways to reach out for help if students ﬁnd they are consistently taking much longer than they would prefer to complete readings, etc.

**What one revision do you plan to make in what content you assign or how you introduce course content?**

**How will you assess that revision’s impact? How will you measure if it is supporting your course to be more inclusive, accessible, and culturally responsive?** (E.g., mid- semester feedback, question on course evals, MCAD data, invite qualitative student feedback, etc.)

# Further Resources

**Tool for Estimating Out of Class Workload, Rice Center for Teaching Excellence**

This is a robust tool that allows you to estimate the amount of time students will spend on reading (allows for customization of word/page density, level of new concepts, and the purpose of the reading), writing (allows for customization of page density, genre of writing, and amount of drafting) and exams. If you input the workload over the semester into their tool, it will generate an average number of out-of-class work hours per week for your course.

**Resources on soliciting feedback from students**

Get Feedback on Your Teaching, UNCCH CFE

Sample Exit Tickets, Brown U Center for Teaching and Learning Exit Tickets’ Effect on College Classrooms, conference paper

Exit Tickets Open the Door to University Learning, InSight Journal Sample Questions for Getting Feedback from Students, GWU

Soliciting and Utilizing Mid-Semester Feedback, Vanderbilt Center for Teaching Mid-Semester Evaluations, Inside Higher Ed

Mid-Semester Feedback, UNCC CTL

UNCCH Department Course Evaluation Questions

UNCCH Instructions to add questions to end-of-course evaluations

**Gender Balance Assessment Tool**

This tool estimates the gender balance of your course content. You must upload a reading/resource list with authors’ full names. You can also check the racial balance of your course using this tool, which uses another algorithm to estimate the racial identities of course authors based on names.

**Inclusion by Design Syllabus Assessment Tool**

This assessment tool allows you to analyze your syllabus across many areas of course design.

**Open Syllabus Project**

This open-source project aggregates syllabi across disciplines and around the world, with over 6 million syllabi uploaded. You can use it to explore common reading assigned in your ﬁeld, and ﬁnd alternate ones.

**Decolonizing and Revolutionizing Your Syllabus**

“Do Not ‘Decolonize’…If You Are Not Decolonizing: Progressive Language and Planning Beyond a Hollow Academic Rebranding” by Nayantara Sheoran Appleton

“Decolonization is Not a Metaphor” by Tuck and Yang “Revolutionizing my Syllabus: the Process” by Chanelle Wilson Decolonising Science Reading List