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## About Us

*Currents in Teaching and Learning* is a peer-reviewed electronic journal that fosters exchanges among reflective teacher-scholars across the disciplines. Published twice a year, Currents seeks to improve teaching and learning in higher education with short reports on classroom practices as well as longer research, theoretical, or conceptual articles and explorations of issues and challenges facing teachers today. Non-specialist and jargon-free, Currents is addressed to both faculty and graduate students in higher education, teaching in all academic disciplines.

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## EDITORIAL

## Teaching in an Era of Political Polarization

—Benjamin D. Jee

Dear readers of *Currents in Teaching and Learning*,

Once again, I am pleased to introduce the latest edition of *Currents*. As I sit down to write this editorial, I am halfway between the end of the spring semester and the beginning of fall. Not a bad time of the year to reflect on current events in higher education, and what they portend for the year ahead.

Surely the most consequential news in American higher education is the U.S. Supreme Court's decision to reverse decades of precedent on race-conscious admissions programs, effectively ending affirmative action as we know it. This decision adds to the contentious atmosphere surrounding diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) policies and practices in schools and in the workplace. While most Americans say that it is a good thing to focus on DEI at the workplace, there is a wide disparity in terms of political orientation. Democrats are far more likely to say focusing on DEI at work is a good thing (78%) than Republicans (30%) (Pew Research Center, 2023).

Political polarization is playing out in numerous ways at colleges and universities around the country and the wider world. One startling example comes from New College in Florida, where five professors were denied tenure by a newly installed—and highly conservative—Board of Trustees. This decision essentially vetoed the approvals that these candidates received at every other step in the process (Moody, 2023). There have been other recent attempts to eliminate or severely restrict tenure at U.S. colleges and universities, notably in the states of North Dakota, Texas, Ohio, Louisiana, and North Carolina. Though anti-tenure bills ultimately failed in these states (for now), conservative politicians may recognize that they can score political points by simply introducing the bills in the first place. As Nietzel (2023) put it, they were “more interested in making noise rather than history.”

Academic freedom also faces challenges from the political left. Faculty who self-identify as politically

conservative are more likely to report that they have personally experienced a worsening “cancel culture” on campus in which actions or speech that is deemed unacceptable is shunned or silenced (Norris, 2023). This trend appears to emerge from power disparities as opposed to liberal ideology per se. In socially conservative societies, left-wing scholars are the ones who report a worsening cancel culture (Norris, 2023). Still, because U.S. faculty members tend to lean left politically (Langbert & Stevens, 2020), there may be a greater risk of intolerance for conservative opinions on college campuses, feeding claims that higher education is unwelcoming of political viewpoint diversity. Indeed, there has been no shortage of media attention when right-wing speakers are shouted down or disinvited (Alonso, 2023).

The intense political and public interest in higher education can make it seem like we're teaching under a microscope. Any word or action in the classroom can be taken out of context and stretched out of proportion. Yet, the outsized interest in higher education provides testament to the important role that college and university instructors play in society. As educators, we occupy a unique position of power, helping to shape our students' minds during a formative time in their political and personal development. In the current politically charged climate, we face difficult decisions about whether and how to teach about controversial topics. Yet preparation and consideration can help ensure that our best intentions materialize into effective pedagogy. The present issue of *Currents* speaks to issues that are on many of our minds at the beginning of the academic year. As you prepare for the challenges ahead, I hope you find something to inform and inspire you in this latest edition of the journal.

The first article in the present issue is “Class Matters: Teaching about Class in U.S. Higher Education” by Joe Bandy and Brielle Harbin. Class exerts a powerful influence in many societies, and often operates discreetly. The authors explore various strategies for teaching about class, aiming to foster honest discussions about this

## Era of Political Polarization *continued*

emotionally complex issue. They discuss the importance of incorporating both cognitive and emotional approaches to foster student learning.

In “Using Community-Engaged Research to Teach Information Literacy,” Julia Waity, Emily Crumpler, Jennifer Vanderminden, and Stephanie Crowe explore how students can be taught crucial information literacy skills through community-engaged projects. The authors connected students to members of their local police department, forming a collaboration to determine why rates of crime vary between districts within their city. Students not only improved their skills at consuming and producing research but also experienced the value of bridging different perspectives through community partnerships.

The theme of bridge-building continues in the paper by Linda Ann Treiber, Evelina W. Sterling, and Ravi Ghadge, titled “Exploring Racial and Ethnic Identities with PechaKucha.” Treiber and colleagues asked students in their Race and Ethnicity courses to create a biographical PechaKucha presentation that touched on race and ethnicity. The authors describe how the assignment allowed students to see and be seen in new ways, promoting understanding and empathy.

Developing student empathy was the explicit goal of Catherine Langran, Aby Mitchell, Sawsen Sabbah, and Georgiana Assadim as discussed in their paper, “Utilizing Simulated Patient Videos to Develop Student Empathy and Readiness for Interprofessional Working.” The authors brought together students from various medical disciplines to discuss simulated patient videos. Students who completed the interprofessional learning sessions showed increased empathy and more positive perceptions of each profession involved. The work provides another example of the power of collaborative learning experiences.

Of course, not all student collaboration is beneficial to learning. In “An Empirical Examination of Undergraduate Academic Dishonesty within the Context of Semantics, Environment, and Role,” David McClough and Jeff Heinfeldt present findings on different forms of cheating

and how they are perceived by students. The authors find cheating to be commonplace, especially outside of the classroom. The article raises important questions about how to design assignments to minimize opportunities for dishonest conduct.

The final article in the present issue also explores the issue of student assessment. In “Toward the Co-Construction of Assessment: Equity, Language Ideology and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy at the Community College,” Jason M. Leggett describes his experiences developing a grading rubric for student writing that sets out clear communication goals without imposing a particular academic style of writing. Like other articles in the present issue, this work demonstrates the value of involving students in the creation of course materials, activities, and policies.

As editor, I am grateful to the authors for choosing *Currents* as the outlet for their scholarly work. I appreciate the generous contributions of the reviewers, copyeditors, and members of the *Currents* advisory board, who help to bring out the best in each article and issue. These individuals are acknowledged in the back section of the issue. I want to recognize Dr. Henry Theriault for his many contributions as the executive director of *Currents*, including his behind-the-scenes efforts to keep the journal running smoothly. Finally, I am pleased to announce that my colleague, Dr. Brittany Jeye, will serve as editor for several upcoming issues of the journal. Dr. Jeye is a cognitive neuroscientist by training, with expertise in human memory and learning. A passionate teacher and scholar, I am sure she will excel in the role. I look forward to her first *Currents* issue next year.

Until next time,

Benjamin D. Jee

# EDITORIAL

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# TEACHING REPORT

## Class Matters: Teaching about Class in U.S. Higher Education

— Joe Bandy, and Brielle Harbin

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### Abstract:

Teaching about class in U.S. higher education is challenging because of the many ways American society insulates class experiences and undermines, obscures, or delegitimizes class consciousness. Yet, educators have developed innovative strategies to empower students to understand historical and social structures of class as it manifests in everyday life. We explore here the challenges of and strategies for teaching class using methods that include a faculty survey, participant observations from an instructor learning community on class in the university classroom, as well as insights from the research on teaching and learning. Based on this, we identify and discuss the primary challenges and opportunities of teaching class. We find that, although there are many critical pedagogies supporting student class consciousness, educators frequently favor cognitive strategies, which focus on students' conceptual gaps, over affective strategies that engage their emotional and interpersonal growth, limiting transformations in our students and in our society.

### Keywords:

teaching and learning, pedagogy, class, social class, higher education, inequality, socio-economic status

### Introduction

Class is a challenging concept for both students and instructors to understand. Confusion often arises because class — something we may define simply as the social distribution of capital, wealth, power, and status — is the product of a complex web of economic and cultural forces shaping every dimension of our history, society, and consciousness. Yet, despite its ubiquity,

class is often invisible (hooks 1994, Kunkel 2018), the elephant in the room that we often fail to see because of more salient intersecting differences, and/or belief systems that — like Marx's "camera obscura" (1845) — obfuscate, diminish, or delegitimize class as a concept. When representations of economic inequality render class more visible, as in popular film or television, it is often merely as a facade without a corresponding edifice of critique, a construct of cultural or psychological conceptions of difference without consideration of the historical, structural, or material systems that produce it. This may be, in part, because when we probe issues of class at this level it can lead to fearsome realizations about the injustices and dysfunctions of our social systems, raising questions about our own complicity and subverting our presumption of a more just world. Rigorous class critique asks us to consider the division of labor and power that undergirds our institutions, our ideologies, and our identities. Precisely because of its elemental role in our lives, class is difficult to confront. Even those who see and wish to challenge class structures can find the scale of the problems daunting and structural change patently unimaginable or impractical. Therefore, simply understanding class, much less transforming it, requires a profound intellectual openness and criticality so that we may come to terms with its manifestations in everyday life: the material and cultural, the political and personal, the historical and social, the rational and moral, the tragic and farcical, the intellectual and the emotional, just to name a few.

Given this, what guiding principles and pedagogical strategies should instructors use to facilitate student learning related to class? In this article, we answer this

## Teaching about Class in U.S. Higher Education *continued*

question using data from three sources. First, we surveyed faculty who teach issues of class at a private research-intensive university. Second, we draw on participant-observations from a faculty learning community on teaching class at the same institution. Lastly, we incorporate a literature review of existing scholarship on teaching and learning to discuss in greater depth the challenges and promising practices of teaching class. While the authors represent the disciplines of sociology and political science, our survey respondents and the scholars from our literature review represent a wide array of fields, ensuring that our findings are relevant to a variety of disciplines.

Our findings reveal complex and overlapping challenges of teaching class, as well as innovative strategies faculty use to meet them. Faculty repeatedly articulated three primary challenges to teaching class: students' simplistic preexisting definitions of class (e.g., as merely an identity, not a social system), teaching students from radically different class positions and experiences, and helping students adopt an intersectional understanding of class that simultaneously addresses race, gender, sexuality, and other differences. Interestingly, while there are many critical pedagogies supporting student growth in this area (e.g., Haltinner and Hormel, 2018), when articulating solutions to these challenges, faculty in our survey most often incorporated strategies aimed at students' *cognitive development* (e.g., conceptual gaps) and secondarily, strategies addressing students' *affective development* (e.g., emotional and interpersonal growth). Consequently, we conclude that instructors display innovation and commitment to developing their students' conceptual understandings of class. However, they also can struggle to empower students to see how class operates in their everyday personal lives, to grapple with the emotional challenges students confront around class identity, to negotiate class conflicts in their social relationships, or to develop their own ethical values as citizens and whether or how to challenge class relations and social inequalities. We will not argue that attending to students' affective learning is the sole or even highest responsibility of faculty, nor that faculty have sufficient training or time to support all the emotional needs of our students. Rather, we contend that inattention to the affective dimension of learning can hinder students' class analysis, and a comprehension of the lived social and emotional complexities of class consciousness. Students, therefore, enter their post-graduate lives less empowered

to challenge or dismantle class injustice, whether it is at work, at home, or in the public sphere.

### Methods

#### Case Study

We have chosen one university as a case study for exploring the challenges and promises of teaching social class—a highly ranked private research-intensive institution located in the U.S. South with over 7,000 undergraduates and 1,400 non-medical faculty (University 2020).

The university *is* and *is not* representative of American higher education when it comes to class issues. Like any other U.S. higher education institution, it is the product of a society thoroughly constituted by class differences and therefore often functions to reproduce class hierarchies even as many of its faculty seek greater equality (Mullen 2010; Shavit 2007). Most colleges and universities imagine themselves to be, in the words of Horace Mann, “the great leveler,” institutions through which anyone can accrue the necessary knowledge or skills (cultural capital) and networks (social capital) to find success in the labor market and a ticket to class mobility (e.g., Laqueur & Mosse, 1967). Our research site represents this ethos in its stated commitments to creating a more diverse student body and faculty, and to realizing a campus and academic life that honors principles of diversity, inclusion, and equity. This is evident in its continuing efforts to recruit and develop faculty and students, to build administrative infrastructure focused on equity, and to diversify its curricular and co-curricular programs. Its financial aid policies have enabled the university to have a more economically and socially diverse student body and has initiated a significant transformation of its campus culture. For first-generation and lower-SES students, the institution works to provide a culture of acceptance and inclusion, resources for academic support, career development, and inclusive teaching. More generally, its curriculum, like other institutions, exposes students to liberal arts traditions and professional education through which they often acquire critical understandings of class as well as the knowledge and skills necessary to ensure their own class advancement. Indeed, it ranks highly among 64 selective universities in the share of students from the bottom 20% of the income distribution who move into the top 20% as adults (Aisch et al., 2017).

## Teaching about Class in U.S. Higher Education *continued*

However, much of U.S. higher education simultaneously functions as a class sorting mechanism insofar as it disproportionately confers cultural and social capital to students who already hold greater class privilege, contributing to the reconstitution of class hierarchies in each generation. Across the U.S., 54.2% of all undergraduates come from the top 25% of the socioeconomic distribution (Aisch et al., 2017; DOE in Lederman, 2018), overrepresenting the professional middle or upper classes. This university, like its highly ranked private peers, has tended to admit and graduate a disproportionate number of students from privileged class backgrounds, as evidenced by the widely circulated research of Chetty et al. (2017), which revealed that nearly three quarters of the students came from the top quintile of the national income distribution, and almost a quarter coming from the top one percent (Aisch et al., 2017). While the administration has worked to diversify the student body further since this research, it continues to be representative of much of private higher education, and the students have raised concerns about the way class-based and other hierarchies shape campus life.

This university and its class dynamics are not dissimilar to those at many other institutions of higher education across the U.S., and therefore we expect our findings to be representative of the challenges and opportunities of teaching class at other colleges and universities. However, the university does not have the class demographics or curriculum as, say, community colleges or many public schools, and therefore faculty experiences may speak to the unique context of private well-resourced research-intensive locations. For example, the combination of, on the one hand, financial aid programs that have diversified the classes represented within the student population, and on the other, the lasting legacies of privileged social networks on campus, make private universities like that in our case study particularly contentious sites for students and faculty engaged in issues of class inequality. These and other factors—student body size, faculty-student ratios, private or public governance, educational mission, and campus culture, to name a few—may vary considerably across different higher education contexts, something we acknowledge openly below when relevant.

### Data Collection

We adopted a three-fold approach to studying the challenges and opportunities for teaching class. First,

we administered a survey in the Spring of 2018 to all instructors teaching courses with titles or descriptions addressing issues of class identity, stratification, inequality, and movements, as identified from the course catalog and faculty specialties noted online. The total sample of instructors receiving our Redcap survey numbered 75. We received 29 completed survey responses (39% response rate). The survey asked course instructors 12 open-ended questions about the greatest challenges of teaching class and the strategies and techniques faculty use to meet them (available upon request). The qualitative responses we then collected and analyzed using conceptual content analysis, which allowed us to measure the existence and frequency of constructs in the texts, and how they relate to the respondents' previous answers and teaching contexts (e.g., Sabharwal et al., 2018). We identified common themes for each question's responses and then grouped all responses into the themes to assess which responses were prevalent.

Second, we collected participant-observations from a faculty and graduate student learning community hosted by the university's Center for Teaching and Learning, which explored issues related to teaching social class and supporting students from first-generation and lower income backgrounds. This learning community took place during the 2016-17 academic year. Approximately 20 faculty members and 10 graduate students regularly attended the 90-minute monthly meetings in which participants discussed readings, teaching experiences, and pedagogy. During these gatherings, we took notes on the issues raised by participants as well as insights offered. We incorporate these insights to further contextualize—and when relevant, *amplify*—responses offered in our faculty survey.

Third, we incorporated a thorough literature review of topics related to pedagogy and social class in U.S. higher education. Below, rather than providing a separate summary of our literature review, we have incorporated insights from it into our findings to place the teaching experiences of our study's participants into dialogue with the literature on teaching class, amplifying, informing, and at times, raising questions about their teaching.

Lastly, it is important to note that our methods entail no direct assessment of student learning, say, through pre- or post-tests of student knowledge or a review

## Teaching about Class in U.S. Higher Education *continued*

of student work. Any claims we make about student learning, therefore, are derived from faculty reflections on what has been effective in their teaching experience.

### Participant Characteristics

The 29 instructors who participated in our survey embody a variety of traits and roles. First, they represented various ranks and schools, but an overwhelming majority (27) came from colleges with disciplines in the social sciences and humanities where class is a subject of study. A narrow majority of 15 participants were tenured faculty, seven were Assistant Professors on the tenure track, and the remaining seven were non-tenure track faculty. As such, among the respondents there is great experience teaching issues of class, with 15 having taught 10 or more courses on the subject, and another 10 having taught at least four. Notably, most of the courses that the respondents teach include class as merely one of several issues of inequality or difference.

Regarding participants' demographic characteristics, 23 self-identified as White, two as Black, three as Asian or Asian American, and one as American Indian or Alaskan Native. With respect to gender, 15 identified as women, 14 as men, and none as non-binary. Interestingly, unlike their students, faculty respondents are more representative of the U.S. class distribution, with only three coming from families with an income of \$200,000 or more, while nine came from families with less than \$50,000 (closest to the U.S. median of \$56,310 in 2020), and 10 participants falling in between (US BLS, 2020).

While we did not collect demographic data from the learning community participants, they were similar in most respects to the survey respondents, since they were evenly distributed across cis-gender categories and there was a high proportion of more experienced, white faculty who openly identified as first-generation and/or low-income students. The only significant difference in the learning community was the involvement of graduate student instructors who represented approximately half of the participants, but who were, likewise, predominantly white, first-generation, or low-income.

Instructors' socio-economic backgrounds were salient for many survey respondents and learning community participants as evident in their frequent references to

personal interests in "giving back" by supporting first-generation or lower-income students. This relationship between their class-based academic interests and their identity may not be coincidental, since instructor identity has profound impacts on intellectual affinities, chosen expertise, senses of self-efficacy and authority, relations with students and colleagues, overall satisfaction in academia (Chesler & Young, 2007), emotional difficulties during professionalization (Jones, 1998), and often, critical pedagogical approaches to empowering students and promoting social justice (Taylor et al., 2000). This said, it is not lost on us as researchers the fact that there was little racial and ethnic diversity among the participants. Indeed, these demographic characteristics point to a common issue that arises when discussing differences like class: those who show up are often among the more privileged members of our class system's many Others." after "(US BLS, 2020).

### Findings: The Challenges of Teaching Class

In response to questions about the principal challenges of teaching class, participants' responses fell into three predominant themes: (1) challenges instructors confront complicating students' preexisting simplistic understandings of class, (2) teaching students from fundamentally different class backgrounds, and (3) adopting an intersectional approach to class studies. In this section, we discuss each challenge in turn, drawing on the voices and experiences of our survey respondents, learning community members, as well as existing scholarship.

#### Challenge 1: Complicating Student Notions of Class

Faculty from the survey cited several preconceptions of class common among their students, ones uninformed by empirical studies and intellectual debates surrounding class, and sometimes resistant to change. First, several mentioned that students' understandings of class conformed in some form to Feagin's "gospel of individualism" (1975); that is, they believed one's class status and life chances are ultimately a product of free individual choices, especially dedication to hard work or education, and not social forces (see also, Andrews, 2013; Coghlan & Huggins, 2004; Davis, 1992). As one faculty member put it, "I believe that many students believe that class is determined by effort and intelligence, rather than

## Teaching about Class in U.S. Higher Education *continued*

by systemic inequalities in the US. For example, many students attribute wealth to skill and acumen rather than to privilege, and poverty to 'laziness' or some other 'fault.'" Another respondent was more succinct: "[my challenge is] teaching to a majority of students who were born on third [base] and think they hit a triple" (borrowing from Texas politician, Jim Hightower's 1988 reference to George H.W. Bush). Indeed, some respondents noted that their more privileged students, like many Americans generally, believe in a social order that is consistent with the dominant ideology of the nation—McNamee's and Miller's (2009) "myth of meritocracy"—one in which our socio-economic system justly awards individual hard work with success and status. This can lead some students to articulate, intentionally or not, elitist perspectives that argue class hierarchies are natural and inevitable, even necessary, for a functional society.

Given this, it is not surprising that faculty also experience students who articulate negative stereotypes of the working class or those in poverty. One reported, "Most have little to no knowledge about poverty in America so when they speak or write about a population considered to be poverty level, they speak using stereotypes, [and] unconscious bias comes through in their writing and speaking." Another put it more bluntly: "[students believe] people living in poverty are more likely to be dangerous/violent, bad parents, also drug users, etc." These views echo common, often racialized, discourses in the US that posit the poor as the sole cause of their own poverty—due to self-perpetuating "cultures of poverty" (Lewis, 1966), familial dysfunctions (Moynihan, 1965), or other theories that "blame the victim" (Ryan, 1976). Here, those in poverty or the working class exist as an Other defined by incivility, immorality, criminality, or worse, thus representing an "undeserving poor" (Katz, 1989; Loughnan et al., 2014), obviating the need for any class critique of poverty or inequality.

Respondents also stated that their students express a variety of typical, but more minor, misunderstandings of class. For instance, several claimed that their students often regard income as the defining feature of one's class position, neglecting wealth, capital, and political power as constitutive of class. Similarly, students' preexisting notions of class are absent a conscious understanding of cultural dimensions such as status (the prestige of, say, professional occupations or conspicuous forms of

consumption), "social capital" (one's class-based social networks and institutional resources), or "cultural capital" (one's class-based knowledge, education, or habits of mind) (Bourdieu, 1985). Consequently, students often are not adept at seeing the nuances of class in everyday life, despite its ubiquity, including their own class standing. One particularly striking issue was students' difficulties understanding their *own* class positions, tending to default to normative assumptions about themselves as middle class. In the words of one faculty member, "Most students think they are 'middle class' even though by many objective standards they come from the top 10-20 percent."

The causes of these limited notions of class may be many—(internalized) efforts to pass as middle class, liberal political strategies of appealing to a loosely defined "middle class" (e.g., Greenberg, 1996), meritocratic ideologies about joining the middle class, et cetera. However, multiple instructors mentioned that this is due to most students coming from the professional middle class and having little experience with members of other classes. In the words of one respondent, "Most... students seem to have little direct experience with lower income classes. They very rarely understand rural America. Their conception of urban areas is very much based on stereotypes. Based on empirical survey questions I administer anonymously, I find that most students are highly supportive of capitalism and much less supportive of redistribution. In short, they just don't seem to have much empathy for people who they don't have experience with and therefore can't understand."

Insular class-based social networks have long been a feature of the American class system, despite the persistence of rags-to-riches myths (e.g., Horatio Alger) that would posit more cross-class mobility and interaction (Domhoff, 2013). Given that students in U.S. higher education tend to come disproportionately from the middle or upper classes and perpetuate these networks to secure their class status, this explanation makes sense. More, with class polarization growing, students' class insularity is likely to be more common.

The literature on teaching class echoes this explanation, suggesting that more privileged students have little frame of reference for life outside their own class, and thus presume their experiences are more normal and

## Teaching about Class in U.S. Higher Education *continued*

ubiquitous than they are. Several instructors claimed more privileged students possess a “class blindness” (like “race blindness,” e.g., Williams, 1998), unable or unwilling to see class differences at all. Worse, as Manning, Rich, and Price (1997) suggest, they can “tend to perceive [sociological concepts of stratification] as simply the agenda of those ‘other’ oppressed groups (identity politics) or ‘left-wing’ critics” (pp. 15-16). This is doubly difficult in courses focused on contexts outside the US about which there is even less student experience or understanding. Even for those students who recognize some of the oppressive impacts of class (e.g., homelessness), their insular experiences and meritocratic ideals can lead them to paternalistic, elite-driven solutions (e.g., charitable giving), ones that do not threaten the redistribution of their wealth or power. However, insularity and polarization may not be as common in higher education settings with greater proportions of working-class students, such as community colleges or regional state institutions (e.g., Wruck, 2018).

### **Challenge 2: Teaching Students from Different Class Backgrounds**

The second most common challenge respondents noted was how to teach students of both greater and lesser class privilege simultaneously. Faculty noted how students in their classrooms are more diverse than in the past, and that this creates two different challenges. The first is the curiosity students express about social class as they notice class differences among their peers’ life experiences. One respondent explained, “many [students]... are curious about why others experience poverty, and many students are thinking through how issues of inequality operate and what to do about them.” Instructors in the learning community echoed this by sharing anecdotes about how students, particularly lower income students, are deeply interested in the ways class manifests on campus in conspicuous consumption (e.g., dress, cars, vacations), work experiences, levels of social activity (lower income students cite less active social lives), stratified social networking (e.g., Greek systems, see Sander, 2013; Soria & Bultmann, 2014), student-staff relations, and levels of in-class participation (lower income students cite less comfort with engagement) (see also Cooke et al., 2007). Jack (2019) found that students with multiple class, race, and other disadvantages often retreat and become socially isolated in response to the

culture shocks of an elite college environment.

These and other class matters are of special interest to those students of lower income who are facing difficulties of belonging, often triggering imposter syndrome (Redd, 2016) or potentially traitor syndrome, the fear of betraying their origins as they assimilate to life among the privileged. Class may be invisible to many behind obfuscating ideologies, but it is particularly obvious to those students with less privilege, and they often are eager to learn more (Piston, 2018). In this way, increasing classroom diversity is helping to make at least some students more aware of differences, open to critical perspectives, and more savvy about class analyses (see also Phillips, 2014).

Another effect of a more diverse classroom is that students from different class backgrounds have more occasions to challenge one another, creating opportunities for cross-class conflict. This is not uncommon as students with diverse experiences discuss class ideology, policy, or culture refracted through their own understandings, often with disagreements; and when students experience microaggressions or insensitivities in their peers’ views, emotional responses can occur (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015). For instance, instructors in the learning community shared anecdotes about the offense that less privileged students take to assertions of meritocratic ideology, implying that their class standing is due to a lack of effort and ability. Such anxieties and frustrations are not limited to less privileged students, however, especially when privileged students experience fears of judgment and dismissal for, say, what others may regard as unearned wealth. While a long lineage of pedagogues from Socrates to Dewey and beyond (e.g., Johnson & Johnson, 2016) regard conflict as necessary for the growth of critical thinking, conflict can be unproductive when it is reactionary. This is what the respondents in our survey and learning community frequently feared, creating classrooms that may be disengaged, or worse, traumatic.

Conversely, faculty expressed frustration at the ways students—particularly first generation or low-income students—are reluctant to debate or challenge their peers at all, hiding their identities especially when fears of social rejection, or profound resentments, are piqued. As one faculty member put it, “students... are wary to share their class experiences because it’s such a

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clear divide on campus.” Another faculty was fearful of “offending [students] who are sensitive about their class origins or who are status-anxious.” Students of first-generation or lower income origins may be more reticent to disclose their experiences or identity, particularly on campuses with high proportions of privileged students (Stephens et al., 2014). Existing literature suggests that the classroom participation of first-generation or lower income students may indeed be diminished due to a lack of belonging and voice, as well as stereotype threat (Spencer & Castano, 2007), which in turn can lead to performance and persistence gaps (Havlik et al., 2017).

### Challenge 3: Adopting an Intersectional Approach When Teaching Class

The third most common challenge was that of teaching intersectionality. Intersectionality is a model for identifying the ways multiple forces of exploitation and oppression converge to make some populations—e.g., African American women, or working-class LGBT youth—particularly vulnerable (Crenshaw, 1988). More, in our lived realities class is never isolated from other differences, since as a material and cultural force it has given historical shape to differences such as race and gender—from practices of redlining to domesticity—while race and gender have further instantiated class identities and structures in social life. One instructor stated, “there is a need to remind [students] how class always stands in relation to other identificatory markers and boundaries such as race, gender, etc.” Indeed, several instructors reported that “intersectionality” is an organizing principle of their syllabi and essential to their teaching precisely because it presents so many profound challenges for students.

First, respondents discussed how conceptually difficult it is to provide clear-minded intersectional analysis. Analyzing the impacts of multiple dimensions of power on a micro-level (individual or small group), much less a macro-level (national or transnational processes), requires more information than may be available in one discipline. Combining multiple levels of structural analysis across varying contexts—cultural, economic, political—is conceptually tricky when students have limited social literacy. Faculty also may have difficulties since it requires that they traverse multiple disciplines and attend to material and cultural phenomena simultaneously. These gaps of knowledge

lead to speculation; or worse, it can invite the projection of student preconceptions onto the object of analysis. Further, enjoining students in simultaneous analysis of race, gender, or other differences invites exponentially more preconceptions and biases to resolve.

For example, let’s take intersectional analyses of race and class. As one instructor noted, “maybe highest on the list is how to talk about class and race separately while also acknowledging that they converge.” One difficulty with race and class is that, as one respondent put it, students come to our courses primed to think about the relevance of race (and gender) more than class: “[Students have] little preparation for the topic [class] in school or society. Issues of gender and race are more commonly studied.” Indeed, race is such a primary organizing principle of our social history and so salient a feature of everyday life that students (if not faculty) can slip from class to racial categories with little consciousness, confusing or even conflating class with race, for instance regarding class inequality as an artifact of racial discrimination alone and not a racialized capitalism with multiple effects on inequality across racial groups (see also Croll, 2018; Haider, 2018).

At other times, there may be a displacement of attention from one difference by another, from class to race, for instance. This may occur because prioritizing one issue—for example, class—as more central to their experience may be a way for students to claim an identity or worldview. At still other times, privileging one difference may be an effort to escape or evade discomfort with the other. There are surely students who use discussions of class to avoid those around race, gender, or other differences. For some, however, the inverse is true because class issues may be threatening, since class critique can confound ideologies, provoke identity crises, derail career plans, trigger waves of guilt and anger, and prompt confrontations. It can directly challenge students’ beliefs in a just world and dispel myths of “the American Dream,” raising doubts and fears about the existing social order. Class critique can be profoundly unsettling, living up to Marx’s aspirations of a “ruthless criticism of all that exists” (1843). A refined understanding of class-race intersections, for example, is not possible without a rigorous investigation of both in a variety of contexts, and structural or historical analysis.

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### Findings: Pedagogical Strategies for Overcoming the Challenges of Teaching Class

Despite the difficulties posed by these challenges, respondents consistently saw opportunities to deepen their students' critical consciousness of class, primarily through their pedagogical approaches. Following Bandy, Harbin, and Thurber (2021), we group these pedagogical choices into two categories: cognitive and affective. Cognitive strategies aim to address conceptual gaps in students' understanding of topics related to class largely through the selection of course content. Affective strategies endeavor to hone students' experiential, applied, and sometimes interpersonal exploration of class as it manifests in everyday life, developing skills of empathy, compassion, conflict negotiation, in addition to reflections on (inter)personal values and ethics. Below, we discuss in greater detail these cognitive and affective approaches to teaching class using the voices and experiences of participants in our study and supplement this discussion with insights gained from existing research on teaching and learning.

#### Cognitive Strategies for Teaching Class

First, when incorporating cognitive strategies for teaching class, participants in our study typically did so using **carefully curated content**: literature, films, case studies, and current events that engage students in a critical study of class and capitalism. For instance, some faculty members described curating content that surveys a wide variety of theories, literatures, histories, policies, and most of all, empirical social scientific research, case studies, and first-person narratives about class and its production in everyday life. Others discussed designing syllabi that survey the U.S. or international class structure by using ethnographic and other studies.

Several faculty members also referenced specific authors or texts that touch on economic, political, or cultural dimensions of class—e.g., studies of poverty or labor market networks—that they use to question class-based preconceptions grounded in prevalent political and cultural ideologies. For instance, one faculty member explained that they used the book *The Politics of Resentment* (Cramer, 2016), which explores the rural resentment of whites in Wisconsin through a series of qualitative interviews. They described pairing this reading with another book, *Why Americans Hate Welfare* (Gilens,

1999), to make visible the intersection of race and class for students. The instructor further explained, “I try to incorporate lectures that bring up things students may have never thought about before—such as the fact that there are next to no working-class members of Congress. We talk about why that is and why it matters. Mostly, I just try to expose them to readings that may challenge their preconceived notions.”

This content-based focus on students' intellectual development is a primary method for meeting *all* of the above challenges of teaching class. Faculty in the learning community were especially convinced that when readings are well-chosen and -organized—engaging students in critical narrative, empirical research, and rigorous theoretical analysis—they can effectively challenge preconceptions and insular experiences while empowering students to develop skills of critical structural, multi-disciplinary, and intersectional analyses of class and capitalism. This is particularly so when predominantly privileged students are exposed to the lives of those in poverty or working classes through first-person autobiographical narratives (Kirby, 2021; Parker & Howard, 2009).

The literature on teaching and learning highlights the critical role that course content plays in challenging student preconceptions. Intellectual growth often begins with carefully chosen readings, films, or video that make possible expansive and complicated definitions of class as lived in a variety of social contexts internationally (e.g., APA, 2018; Kirby, 2021; Williams & Melchiori, 2013). Indeed, the primary work of critical thought for any subject occurs through the engagement with existing scholarly research and the critical narratives they produce, so that existing conceptions may be challenged, informed, and developed. Authors such as Leistyna and Mollen (2008) further champion the use of film to enable students to critically engage in the study of audio/visual popular culture, uncovering diverse attitudes about class across student identities, generating debate about how pop culture reinforces or challenges class ideology, and encouraging interdisciplinarity.

Second, in both the faculty survey and learning community discussions, faculty members also referred to **collaborative learning strategies** they used to facilitate student learning. The participants most often used semi-

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structured discussions of student reactions, applications, and analyses of the readings. For the most part, they incorporated exercises that encouraged students to engage one another in open inquiry. For instance, one faculty member explained that they “emphasize the scientific process and [that] the goal of the class [is] to understand aspects of society better and more empirically.” Rather than quickly pivoting to the course material, this instructor begins by asking students how they believe class works. Using student responses, they build a model on the board and identify areas where students might derive testable hypotheses. The instructor then uses the course materials as opportunities to test and refine the students’ model week by week, challenging and refining it along the way. In their own words, they found this approach useful because the main conclusions of the course “are 1) arrived at by the students’ own observations and ideas, and 2) objective and scientific—thus, not seen as an ideologically motivated attack on them or their friends and family.” This method lets students address their preconceptions directly, enabling meta-cognitive evaluations of their mental models via rigorous analysis via empirical scholarship. This said, exploring class experiences need not be done purely through empirical social sciences; indeed, several instructors argued that first- or third-person narratives of class relations in testimonials and biographies are powerful tools in helping students question the ways they make meaning of class in their lives. As one instructor explained, “I’ve started to use more biographical materials for unpacking tensions in literary work, that can then disclose an experience of class.”

Instructors in our study also discussed using collaborative case-based analysis of class as it manifests in everyday life, for instance in students’ secondary schools—social cliques, zoning, admissions (e.g., Reay et al., 2001), labor market networks, or other class-laden aspects of education. This helps students to compare experiences and thus see class relations in their everyday world as they apply class analysis to salient personal experience. Similarly, faculty described how family institutions often prove to be useful objects of analysis because they can help students to develop better understandings of the cultural and economic bases of class position, or inter- and intra-generational mobility, for example. Beyond family and school,

instructors mentioned using discussions of consumer culture and advertising as ways to lead students to more nuanced understandings of class in a capitalist society, particularly the role of cultural capital and consumerism in reproducing or challenging class hierarchies (see also Edwards, 2018). Lastly, faculty members explained how they use current events to spark curiosity and develop analysis of the way that class is woven into our economic and social structure, including housing crises, student indebtedness, environmental injustices, mass incarceration, and social movements. Of course, existing scholarship on teaching and learning suggests that when done well collaborative learning strategies like these enable effective learning (Lage et al., 2000; Mulholland & O’Connor, 2016) enhancing memory, cognitive development, analysis, synthesis, and problem solving, not to mention students’ social skills—all elemental to teaching issues of difference.

### Affective Strategies for Teaching Class

A less frequent but still common set of strategies used by participants in our study were those focusing on students’ affective development. Instructors expressed a pedagogical focus on fostering class self-awareness and empathy, with the goals of helping students find greater empowerment of, and compassion towards, themselves and others. When done well, instructors found that students may overcome many of the challenges of understanding class—constrained self-awareness, insular class experiences, individualist worldviews, stereotypical understandings of different class groups, and limited intersectional analysis of class with other differences. Yet they may also grow emotionally as well, developing awareness of their attitudes and emotions surrounding class issues, including investments in privilege, experiences of marginalization, alienation, fears of falling (Ehrenreich, 2020), prejudices, empathy for others, conflict negotiation, and social values, to name a few (e.g., Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007).

To realize these goals, instructors principally adopted a range of **reflective assignments and activities**. Some incorporated personal reflection in the form of class discussions and writing assignments, both designed around student experiences of class. Most often, faculty deployed autobiographical assignments such as an essay, or more commonly, journal reflections (including audio/

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video formats) in which students interrogated personal experience with course concepts. One faculty member explained that simple subjects like students' experiences with high school cliques, food, or distant family can be the subject of complex reflections on class identity and conflict. The literature on teaching class confirms the usefulness of reflection exercises that involve tests of bias, debates about the ideals of "The American Dream," or experiences of oppression through photo-voice projects (e.g., APA, 2018). Indeed, class autobiographies afford students profound opportunities to clarify the influence of class in their lives, integrating personal experiences with social history and critique (the "sociological imagination" [Mills, 1959]), and thereby empowering personal growth and social agency (Williams & Melchiori, 2013). Although this may be beneficial to students of any class background, this personalized, experiential way of knowing is a "signature genre" of working-class narratives (Linkon, 2021) and will likely be more supportive of working-class and lower-income students. This is likely, not only to grant these students much needed voice, enhancing belonging and performance (e.g., Green, 2003), but also to transform our institutions by moving class critique to their centers (Kirby, 2021).

To **model critical self-reflection**, instructors in the learning community emphasized their need to share stories of their own class experiences and identity—when it is safe to do so. Similar to Williams (2016), who described concluding her initial class meeting of her courses with an introductory monologue to establish the tone of "radical honesty," instructors in our study discussed how modeling reflexivity promotes greater student engagement, trust, and openness to class critique (see also Docka-Filipek, 2018; Marshall & Leondar-Wright, 2018). Instructors' personal narratives can prove useful for students as a model of unflinching, introspective class analysis about, for example, their class origins and struggles, the labor relations of the academy, issues of class mobility, intersectional subjectivity, or the complexities of "contradictory class locations" (a term Wright [1985] uses for, among others, "semi-autonomous employees" such as faculty who possess significant autonomy but no productive capital).

A common tool of promoting empathy, as well as ways to productively understand how class outrage or sorrow is refracted through other differences, is to provide readings and exercises that **encourage intersectional analysis** of social forces as they collide in the experiences of groups—e.g., working class gay men of color. This helps students tease out the social forces of race, class, gender, sexuality, and others as they overlap, interact, and contradict one another in various contexts, shaping unique subcultures and issues of injustice. Students also can develop critiques of class relations and power by studying the experiences of those with multiple, intersecting forms of privilege, for example in studies of predominantly white male elite social networks. Studying privileged groups, as merely one specific set of experiences, also has the advantage of helping students to deconstruct the intersectional hegemonies of class, race, gender, and other forms of power (Dhamoon, 2010) while deepening understandings of capitalist class systems.

Whatever the privilege or oppression of groups studied, intersectional analysis of structural or social forces also can confound stereotypes and open opportunities for greater empathy. For example, having students reckon with the existence of upper-class African Americans, or conversely working-class whites or Asian Americans, may help dispel racialized class stereotypes while also deepening understandings of how class and race are distinct yet overlapping (e.g., Michaels, 2018). As another example, intersectional teaching can help students move beyond two-dimensional stereotypes of the Other as an object of pity or paternalism. As one of our respondents colorfully puts it, "what rises to the top for me is how to... emphasize that [poverty] is a problem *while also* not making it seem like anyone who lives in poverty has a shit life and those of us who don't live in poverty should feel sorry and/or 'save' them [original emphasis]."

A few instructors mentioned the ways that **case studies and simulations** are critical to their teaching, mostly well-informed vignettes that can be the basis of group discussions and debates that support student understandings of lived class relations. Some even used the university itself as a site of analysis, uniting personal reflection with structural critiques of higher education's

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function in capitalism (see also Archer et al., 2003; Brewer, 2018). Yet the literature on teaching class goes further to explore a variety of simulations designed to create empathy. One example are poverty simulations like that of the Missouri Community Action Network that focus on helping students understand the hardships, stresses, and traps experienced by people in poverty (MCAN, 2018). Another set of examples are games like Kirk McDermid's (2010) use of the Poker Market, a learning game that arranges students in different social roles denoted on cards. Each card, which can be traded or redistributed at different junctures, differs in levels of wealth that, in turn, constrain students' ability to trade. The game prompts debates about wealth distribution and thus leads students to see the connections between one's material wealth and one's interest in advocating policies and ideologies about class (McDermid, 2010). A variety of authors advocate for such games to help students see how class structures shape the distribution of wealth and life chances, as well as expand empathy for a variety of perspectives (APA 2018; Carreiro & Kapitulik, 2010; Hamilton, 2020; Peretz & Messner, 2013; Richards & Cumuso, 2015; Sandoz, 2016; Willis et al., 2005).

Finally, a few but dedicated members of the learning community were also champions of **service-learning or community engagement (SLCE)** projects. They pointed to the ways these assignments break down barriers of class insularity and promote less stereotypical understandings of class groups, and thus have great power in facilitating intellectual, social, and emotional learning. They echoed existing scholarship in this sentiment, that requiring students to observe, work with, and learn from community members of different class backgrounds—when done well—builds empathy, cooperative social skills, in addition to critical class analysis of capitalism in everyday life (Williams & Melchiori, 2013). Further, service learning can involve collaborative research and problem-solving that supports students' affective development via civic and leadership skills, as well as interpersonal competencies, furthering both a sense of effectiveness and commitment in public life that has long-term benefits for students, communities, and universities (Eyler et al., 1997; Straus & Eckenrode, 2014).

However, learning community participants emphasized how SLCE projects work best when they are well-integrated with course materials, involve truly co-creative campus-community partnerships, and eliminate potential harms to communities (see also Eyler et al.,

1997). One major risk worth noting is inadvertently creating assignments that ask students to treat others' class experiences as exotic or token, offer no mutuality or reciprocal benefit for community partners, or teach students a form of exploitative tourism or voyeurism (e.g., Tilley-Lubbs, 2009). Noting risks like these, the faculty in our survey shared a common emphasis on using such research with depth, breadth, and ethical purpose to empower students, if not also community members, in attenuating the inequalities and injustices of class. This emphasis on the development of students' commitments to social engagement has long been a focus of those who teach class (e.g., Manning et al., 1997).

By far the most common approach among participants in our study (including all the survey respondents) was implementing cognitive strategies for teaching class such as the careful selection of readings and films designed to correct student preconceptions and deepen their understanding of class formations under capitalism. Fewer participants (including 15 of the 29 survey respondents) focused on affective strategies. It is worth noting that several strategies of affective development went unmentioned at all. Respondents and learning community participants did not focus much on the affective learning possible through cross-class dialogue or conflict resolution in their classrooms. Despite helping students think about class in their own lives in individual assignments written for instructors alone, they shied from strategies that would turn the classroom into a cross-class dialogue about differing class identities, privilege/marginalization, and a transformation of conflict towards reconciliation.

Further, despite expressing hope that students would use class assignments to find moral commitments to diminish class inequality on campus or in the public sphere, they were averse to dialogues that might be misunderstood as moralizing or activist, favoring more empirical or analytical to discussions of class action. What becomes clear, therefore, is that, while instructors in the study seemed to recognize that cognitive and affective learning are mutually interdependent, necessitating holistic pedagogies, they stopped short of those that would encourage students to leverage personal experiences and conflicts around class identity. This limits faculty or student abilities to model ways to resolve class conflict, engage in moral debates about class structure, and commit to social action on class issues on campus or beyond. This is certainly understandable given that instructors have reasonable fears about privacy and confidentiality, about

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how conflict could lead to emotional harm for students, and about how instructors are ill-equipped to assist students with challenging emotions and trauma. Further, despite cherished academic freedoms, the increasingly neoliberal governance of the academy as well as ongoing culture wars create a context in which instructors have legitimate trepidations about the repercussions they may face if students (Sethuraju et al., 2013) or administrators regard their work as activist.

While we feel these trepidations ourselves in our own teaching, we also must acknowledge that judicious and well-planned efforts to engage students in dialogue about their class experiences and values can open new opportunities for student transformation intellectually, as well as socially and emotionally. According to Bandy, Harbin, and Thurber (2021), when teaching on topics related to difference instructors can limit their students' learning if they do not attend to both the cognitive and affective dimensions of students' development, since each enhances the other (118). Immordino-Yang and Damasio (2007) go so far as to argue that, for any subject, "[w]hen we educators fail to appreciate the importance of students' emotions, we fail to appreciate a critical force in students' learning. One could argue, in fact, that we fail to appreciate the very reason that students learn at all" (p. 9). Indeed, when done well via honed strategies of, for example, Intergroup Dialogue (Dessel et al., 2006; Fisher & Checkoway, 2011; Wayne, 2008-), culturally responsive pedagogy (Ladson-Billings 2014), or conflict transformation practices (Reimann, 2004), a more affectively intentional discussion of class can offer students greater safety, motivation, and insight. There is a growing literature of critical pedagogies and inclusive practices that can aid in fostering productive interpersonal dialogues around class, or other differences (Addy et al., 2022). These strategies enhance, not only student intellectual growth opportunities, but also moral and emotional clarity, attitudinal shifts, and the empowerment that students so often crave as they confront the social problems of class and capital in everyday life.

### Conclusion

The preceding points to a not-so-surprising conclusion: that U.S. students struggle to understand the complexities and problems of class in modern society, and that educators, while innovative in using a

variety of strategies to promote cognitive and affective development around class, also struggle to find the best ways to deepen students' class awareness and help them draw lessons for their future lives. Students, despite their curiosities and profound insights born of the contradictions of class they witness in everyday life, often arrive in our classrooms hindered in their understanding by insular privileges, classist prejudices, and limited literacy of difference, intersectionality, and social structures of power. Instructors, for our part, bring to the classroom much expertise in our disciplines and in teaching, and with it many skills of course planning, content selection, critical reflection, and collaborative education that serve to engage and empower. Through our survey and learning community participants we have learned that instructors deploy creative, holistic methods of teaching social class.

Yet, most of those who teach issues of class have not fully embraced pedagogies that research suggests are likely to generate the greatest affective development, such as in-class simulations, community engagement projects, or interpersonal dialogue among students about lived class identities. This can leave students and educators alike struggling to comprehend the full web of class relations that have entangled their lives, not to mention how they may work to diminish class inequalities on our campuses and in our society. Too often our universities are of little assistance in this endeavor because of limited curricular or institutional space for such discussions, often aided by neoliberal orientations that eschew class critique and academic activism in favor of various moderate or conservative visions of the university.

Still, in these challenges come opportunities. If we believe that our courses can either empower or disempower students' class consciousness, then we must enable not only their intellectual appreciation of what class is, but also the full range of consequences class systems have on their identities and life chances. To do this requires a radical honesty and reflexivity of educators and students alike as they examine the complexities of class in their lives and their roles in reproducing it, individually and collectively. As we develop collaborative learning partnerships with one another and with communities off campus, especially about class structure and policy, we can improve students' abilities to discern their individual *and* collective strategies for diminishing

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inequalities and challenging class-based social systems. If we are to teach students about class so they may be more effective citizens, then student work needs to not simply analyze class in abstract intellectual terms, but in its complex, affective, and moral realities as lived. This demands that we as educators help empower students to embrace a radical honesty about themselves and the world in which they find themselves, developing an agency that is personally and socially transformative.

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# TEACHING REPORT

## Using Community-Engaged Research to Teach Information Literacy

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### Abstract

Through a librarian-faculty partnership, we endeavored to teach information literacy through a large-scale applied learning project. We argue that a benefit of community-engaged research could be to teach information literacy, specifically dispositions that are difficult to teach in a traditional classroom context. We found that we were successful in helping students learn to consider contextual authority and to be more critical consumers of information as evidenced through both quantitative and qualitative data. We had mixed results on encouraging students to move away from defaulting to reliance on those sources they learned about as authoritative earlier in their education, though they were aware in most cases that these sources could also be biased and/or not the most appropriate source for the question.

### Keywords

Information literacy, community-engaged research, applied learning, authority

Teaching information literacy—a nuanced, ethical, and participatory interaction with information discovery and creation—in a way that students can thoroughly understand and apply is challenging for several reasons, including the fact that we are attempting to introduce nuance after years of learning a very specific and straightforward type of information literacy throughout

K-12 and early higher education, because it is complicated and cannot be done with a single acronym or shortcut, and because we are using a university environment to teach about information literacy beyond the classroom. Students' interpretation of information literacy can be limited to its perceived value within the walls of the university (e.g., I need to use peer-reviewed sources when looking up information). Using applied learning, such as community-engaged experiences, may be a method of teaching information literacy in a way that resonates with students.

Applied learning as a pedagogical tool includes student learning through community-engaged research (also called community-based research), internships, study abroad, service-learning, and other strategies, with considerable overlap across these categories. Applied learning allows students to learn and develop skills outside of the classroom (Ash & Clayton, 2009). We define community-engaged research as research done with the community on an issue of local relevance. While the degree of community partner/organization involvement varies across projects, we place importance on a shared understanding of the problem and a focus on collaboration to better understand the issue and serve the community. Community-engaged research is particularly well suited to teaching information literacy because of its emphasis on being mutually beneficial and reciprocal. Through respecting the authority of the community and

## Teaching Information Literacy *continued*

community members, we introduce sources of authority beyond traditional texts or the academy.

In this paper we present a project that incorporates information literacy into community-engaged research projects and highlights the potential of faculty-librarian collaborations. The three goals of our project were to (1) provide students the information literacy skills, knowledge, and resources to be better consumers and producers of information, (2) help students to understand that traditional academic sources are not always authoritative, and (3) enable students to apply information literacy concepts beyond the classroom. Our findings were mixed, with some evidence of students learning information literacy dispositions in the post-test and reflections, but not as much of a change in their overall information literacy knowledge as we were hoping, especially related to goal 2. We hypothesize that this is likely due to how engrained other approaches to information literacy are, and perhaps how we are assessing student learning.

### Information literacy

Information literacy is a broad term, encompassing “the set of integrated abilities encompassing the reflective discovery of information, the understanding of how information is produced and valued, and the use of information in creating new knowledge and participating ethically in communities of learning” (*Framework for information literacy for higher education*, 2015, p.8). Research has identified the importance of information literacy (IL) as an essential component of a university education, though opinions differ on the method of delivery and extent of material covered related to IL (Bury, 2016).

Many students are introduced to information literacy as a concept before entering college, though issues of equity are inherent to the information literacy education that students receive in their high school environments (Valenza et al., 2022). While crosswalks between Common Core standards, the American Association of School Librarian Standards, and higher education information literacy outcomes (the *Framework for information literacy for higher education*, 2015 discussed in detail below) have been developed (Fuchs & Ball, 2021), there can often be gaps between the way information literacy is taught in high school and the way

it is taught in higher education. For example, Saunders et al. (2017) found that some high school librarians may not be clear as to the information literacy knowledge and skills emphasized at the college level, leading some high school librarians to focus on skills that are viewed as less important in college-level information literacy education. Their survey of high school librarians indicated that the three most commonly taught information literacy skills were proper citation methods, plagiarism avoidance, and research question definition. In addition, some school districts have eliminated or have stopped filling school librarian positions entirely, which decreases the likelihood that students graduating from these districts will have received information literacy education that translates to the higher education environment (Ahlfeld, 2019; Valenza et al., 2022). Students entering college are often therefore ill-prepared for the way information literacy will be taught in their college careers.

From 2000 to 2016, the accepted model for teaching information literacy in higher education was to apply the *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* (Information literacy competency standards for higher education, 2000). The *Standards* were the first attempt at establishing a set of national guidelines for information literacy and focused on the idea of the student as critical consumer: an information literate student should, for example, “evaluate...information and its sources critically and incorporate...selected information into his or her knowledge base and value system” (Information literacy competency standards for higher education, 2000, p.11).

In 2016, the Association of College and Research Libraries replaced these *Standards* with the *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* (*Framework for information literacy for higher education*, 2015). This change was prompted by the growing realization that in a more modern information ecosystem, students can no longer simply be information consumers. Rather, students are an integral part of this ecosystem: they have “a greater role and responsibility in creating new knowledge, in understanding the contours and the changing dynamics of the world of information, and in using information, data, and scholarship ethically” (*Framework for information literacy for higher education*, 2015, p.7). The goal of further integrating students into this ecosystem clearly maps on to using community-

## Teaching Information Literacy *continued*

engaged research projects as a mechanism to teach information literacy.

The *Framework* incorporates six interconnected core concepts: “Authority is constructed and contextual”, “Information creation as a process”, “Information has value”, “Research as inquiry”, “Scholarship as conversation”, and “Searching as strategic exploration.” Within each of these concepts are sets of “knowledge practices” (loosely, skills and abilities) and “dispositions” (essentially, mindsets and mental approaches) that together involve students in all facets of information gathering, assessment, ethics, and production.

Examples of dispositions in the “Authority is Constructed and Contextual” frame (discussed in more detail in the next section) include “develop and maintain an open mind when encountering varied and sometimes conflicting perspectives,” “develop awareness of the importance of assessing content with a skeptical stance and with a self-awareness of their own biases and worldview,” “question traditional notions of granting authority and recognize the value of diverse ideas and worldviews,” and “are conscious that maintaining these attitudes and actions requires frequent self-evaluation” (*Framework for information literacy for higher education*, 2015). While knowledge practices are generally more concrete skills and abilities (for example, “define different types of authority, such as subject expertise, societal position, or special experience”) and thus are relatively straightforward to assess, research shows that there are challenges in assessing and evaluating the impact of information literacy education on students’ mindsets and affective outcomes. For example, Mabee and Fancher (2020) examine ways that external stress and anxiety are barriers to students’ abilities to engage with the affective dimensions of information literacy in a meaningful way, and Lenker (2022) discusses the difficulties inherent in attempting to pin down or define what these affective traits mean in practice, examining the concept of “open-mindedness” as an example.

### Authority is Constructed and Contextual

In this community-engaged research project, we focused on the *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* concept “Authority is Constructed and Contextual.” In the *Framework*, this concept is further defined as “Information resources reflect their

creators’ expertise and credibility and are evaluated based on the information need and the context in which the information will be used. Authority is constructed in that various communities may recognize different types of authority. It is contextual in that the information need may help to determine the level of authority required” (*Framework for information literacy for higher education*, 2015).

Since the publication of the *Framework* in 2015, there has been an extensive amount of research into ways this concept might be applied most effectively. A main thrust of the scholarship has been to challenge a previously widely-used model for the evaluation of sources, known as *CRAAP* (for currency, relevance, authority, accuracy, and purpose). According to recent research, the *CRAAP* test, due to an increasingly complex and sophisticated digital information environment, is no longer particularly effective in helping students to accurately evaluate information they find online. In their working paper “Educating for Misunderstanding,” more commonly known as the “Stanford study,” Wineburg et al. (2020) demonstrated that the *CRAAP* test and similar methods that teach students to evaluate an information source in a vacuum, by trusting the content that the source supplies about itself, no longer help students become critical consumers of information and may actively hurt these efforts.

While a number of academic libraries do still seem to rely on this model based on its fairly frequent appearance on library websites, an increasing number of libraries have discarded it in favor of various lateral reading or fact-checking models. Lateral reading is a multi-step process in which, rather than simply analyzing one source in great depth, students fact check a source based on an investigation into what other sources say on that same topic. Lateral reading allows students to research, understand, and investigate where information is coming from rather than taking one piece at face value (Baer & Kipnis, 2020; Caulfield, 2020; Fielding, 2019; Seeber, 2018).

Other research has focused on the ways in which the *Authority* frame encourages librarians and teaching faculty to move away from reflexively situating expertise and cognitive authority within traditional academic scholarship. Researchers have noted that this frame

## Teaching Information Literacy *continued*

makes room for nontraditional authorities. For example, White (2019) discusses the value of using the online community Reddit in teaching students about cognitive authority outside the typical scholarly world; Watkins (2017) describes how this frame encourages students, teaching faculty, and librarians to look at authority cross-culturally rather than focusing exclusively on a Western system of knowledge; and Waity and Crowe (2019) describe a project helping students to learn to differentiate the authority situated within a community versus the authority given to a professor or scholar.

### Collaborations Between Faculty and Librarians

Historically, in higher education, information literacy has been taught through the one-time demonstration model (colloquially known as a “one-shot”) by a librarian. This model, in which a librarian is invited by a faculty member into the classroom for one class session to provide information on research, search strategies, and even Framework-based information literacy concepts, contains several inherent assumptions: 1) information literacy can be bounded by a 50-minute class session, rather than systematically integrated across the curriculum, 2) information literacy skills should be taught directly by a librarian, but 3) the content and timing of this session should depend upon the individual faculty member and what they view as necessary for that specific course. In recent years, studies have explored the potential drawbacks to this model, such as its role in librarian burnout, its emphasis on the transactional rather than the relational; its disempowerment of the librarian as expert; its focus on the individual rather than on solving systemic issues; and the lack of space and time it provides for deeper and more thoughtful conversations about issues inherent to the Framework and to information literacy writ large (Bowles-Terry & Donovan, 2016; Leung, 2022; Nataraj & Siqueiros, 2022; Nicholson, 2016; Pagowsky, 2020, 2021, 2022; Pho, et al., 2022). The Framework appendix itself indicates both that information literacy “is intended to be developmentally and systematically integrated into the student’s academic program at a variety of levels” and that librarians should work with others on campus to “design information literacy programs in a holistic way” (*Framework for information literacy for higher education*, 2015). One alternative model to relying on the one-shot approach is to develop and sustain deep collaborations between teaching faculty and librarians.

Through collaborating with librarians, faculty members can integrate and enhance information literacy skills throughout the curriculum, allowing students to incorporate the material and knowledge into other courses (Bartow & Mann, 2020; Caravello et al., 2008). Faculty-librarian collaborations on information literacy have been well-documented in the literature and can take a number of different forms, all of which focus on maximizing positive information literacy outcomes for students. Lindstrom and Shonrock (2006) discuss formats such as collaborating on course integration beyond the one-shot model, integrating information literacy into learning communities, and working to build information literacy into general education curricula. One common approach to information literacy collaborations in the academy is through communities of practice, commonly facilitated by librarians, through which teaching faculty gain a fuller understanding of information literacy and can then apply those concepts to their classes (Crowe et al., 2019; Saines et al., 2019). All collaborators must share a vision for goals and best practices for teaching information literacy as well as learning outcomes and assessment of information literacy knowledge and skills attained (Brasley, 2008).

### Using Applied Learning to Teach Information Literacy

Applied learning allows students to extend their learning and educational experiences beyond the traditional classroom or teaching style and apply their skills to real world problems (Acharya et al., 2018). Literature on applied learning has discussed the benefits of applied learning projects as such projects allow students opportunities to reflect on their learning, gained skills, experiences, and how to be engaged in various ways through non-traditional teaching pedagogies. Applied learning merges a variety of instructional models, such as experiences, classroom material, lectures, and readings (Ash & Clayton, 2009). Integrating applied learning into student learning outcomes reinforces to students the educational goals of the material and allows for them to reflect on a deeper, more in-depth understanding of their work (Sipos et al., 2008).

Research on the incorporation of information literacy into other areas of applied learning, like service learning, cites benefits to students including improved problem solving and critical thinking skills (Kennedy

## Teaching Information Literacy *continued*

& Gruber, 2020) and acquisition and application of research related information literacy skills (Janke et al., 2012). Information literacy combined with community-engaged research allows students to research and critically examine real-world examples and information relating to the topic and use appropriate information literacy processes to explore and evaluate existing research (Ross & Hurlbert, 2004). Students taking part in an applied learning project have the opportunity to practice critical thinking and information literacy skills by applying academic content to a “real-world” situation (Waity & Crowe, 2019; Worosz, 2009).

Library intervention (the teaching of information literacy skills) can aid students in looking past a surface-level problem and digging deeper into structural/systematic explanations (Caravello et al., 2008). Previous research has shown a combination of service learning and information literacy can positively impact students’ perceptions and knowledge of their community and reduce associated biases (Kennedy & Gruber, 2020).

While there is a great deal of potential in aligning information literacy with applied learning, there is limited research exploring the benefits of community-engaged research in helping students understand higher-order information literacy concepts. In this paper, we will discuss how we collaborated with our local police department on a research project to teach students about different sources of authority. As we will discuss, the mixed success of this endeavor may have been due to several factors, including the COVID-19 pandemic, the way we assessed their knowledge of the topics we were trying to teach them, and the way that students have learned information literacy previously.

### Project

This project involved using community-engaged research across several courses in the sociology curriculum at a mid-sized public university in the Southeast US as an opportunity for students to consider how they know what they know and how they gather information. The courses included in this model were Introduction to Applied Social Research, Methods of Social Research, Data Analysis, and then a senior seminar capstone course, either the General Sociology senior capstone or the two-semester Public Sociology/Criminology capstone. Ideally, students take the courses in this sequence so they

can build on their knowledge of information literacy across these courses. We matched specific information literacy learning dispositions to the course learning outcomes, with one common outcome across all five courses. In all courses, we wanted students to be able to “question traditional notions of granting authority and recognize the value of diverse ideas and worldviews” (*Framework for information literacy for higher education*, 2015) and we included an additional disposition for each of the courses to align with the content and type of project for that course. Each of the information literacy dispositions are listed in Table 1. Our goal was to help students understand an overarching concept concerning the social construction and contextual nature of cognitive authority and to have a more nuanced understanding of information literacy in general.

The courses were all part of a larger strategic initiative to embed community-engaged research across the sociology curriculum. In these courses, students worked on components of a research project on social determinants of crime while working through course material. We partnered with the local police department to determine why rates of crime varied across districts within our city. In addition to the overall research project that students worked on, students also completed a specific activity related to information literacy, such as reading articles with different perspectives related to their research topic. Prior to that, students viewed a prepared lecture by the librarian about information literacy, specifically focusing on the concept of authority and the learning outcome that spanned the courses (to question traditional notions of granting authority and recognize the value of diverse ideas and worldviews). Providing opportunities for students to apply their knowledge and skills beyond the classroom is a well identified strength of community-engaged research. We argue that a less well-established benefit of community-engaged research could be to teach information literacy, specifically dispositions that are difficult to teach in a traditional classroom context.

## Teaching Information Literacy *continued*

*Table 1: Authority is Constructed and Contextual Dispositions By Course*

All courses: Question traditional notions of granting authority and recognize the value of diverse ideas and worldviews.
292: Intro to Applied Social Research: Develop and maintain an open mind when encountering varied and sometimes conflicting perspectives.
300: Research Methods: Motivate themselves to find authoritative sources, recognizing that authority may be conferred or manifested in unexpected ways.
301: Data Analysis: Develop awareness of the importance of assessing content with a skeptical stance and with a self-awareness of their own biases and worldview.
391 and 496: Senior Seminar in Public Sociology and Criminology: Are conscious that maintaining these attitudes and actions requires frequent self-evaluation.
495: Senior Seminar (capstone) in Sociology: Are conscious that maintaining these attitudes and actions requires frequent self-evaluation.

### *Methods*

At the beginning of each course, students were given a pre-test and were required to write an intention paper. The pre-test asked about their familiarity with these information literacy concepts using a knowledge survey. A knowledge survey asks students to indicate how confident they are in answering the question (from 1=not at all confident to 3=very confident) but not to answer the question itself. Students also wrote an intention paper that described their knowledge of community-engaged research, their expectations for the course, and how they choose what sources of information to trust as authoritative (to get them to think about the constructed nature of information authority). In addition, we included a question specific to the information literacy concept the course was focused on (see Table 1 for the specific focus of each course). For each information literacy-specific activity in the course, students wrote reflections at the beginning and end of the activities as well. At the end of the semester, students were given a post-test and required to write an ending reflection (mirroring the start of the semester). The post-test was in a similar format to the pre-test with knowledge survey questions in addition to content questions.

We used a mixed methods approach for assessment of the information literacy components of this model, including quantitative data from pre- and post-tests and qualitative data from intention and reflection assignments. We conducted two-sample t-tests to determine if there was any significant change from pre-test to post-test on students' confidence in answering questions related to information literacy. The total number of students who consented to have their course materials included in this research was 106, with 13 students enrolled in more than one course (11 students were enrolled in two courses and 2 students were enrolled in 3 courses). Given the potential for having students included in the data several times, we ran the analyses for the question that overlapped across courses with and without duplicate cases by including only those with complete data (pre and post) and then the most recent course in the cases of complete data. The results of the analysis with duplicates excluded yielded the same results.

Next, we used the qualitative data analysis software ATLAS.ti to facilitate the analysis of the written reflections from students across the two years that we ran this model. We began by coding for emergent themes related to the information literacy frame "Authority is Constructed and Contextual" in the intention and reflection assignments that students wrote both at the beginning and end of the course, as well as before and after they completed the specific information literacy activity. Overall, we wanted to determine if students were using traditional methods of information literacy evaluation (ensuring an article was peer reviewed, for example) or taking new concepts into account from the "Authority is Constructed and Contextual" frame (such as recognizing that authority can come from both academic and community sources), and also if the work they did in the course, especially related to community engagement, facilitated any changes in their concepts of information literacy. These included who or what the students considered as sources of authority, how they made that decision as to what counts as an authority, and if there was a change from the intention to the reflection. For this last concept, we looked at students' ending reflections to determine if what they wrote at the end of the course was similar to or different from what they wrote at the beginning of the course.

Teaching Information Literacy *continued***Results****Analysis of quantitative data, including pre and post-tests**

Looking at the knowledge survey questions that asked about information literacy topics, students scored higher on the post-test than the pre-test in all measures, with one exception where the scores were the same. However, when examined separately by measure and class not all differences were statistically significant. Table 2 shows the results from the t-tests. Due to the low number of students in individual sections, we determined it would be beneficial to look at overall significance of pre- and post-test information literacy questions by course.

**Table 2: t-tests comparing pre and post test results for IL knowledge survey questions (N=106 students)**

Class	IL knowledge survey question	Pre	Post	Sig	N
292	Critically assess the value of various sources of information regarding a social problem to determine how they would be useful in providing evidence on a research topic.	1.75	2.57	.026	7
300		1.78	2.63	.002	8
301		1.99	2.63	.000	64
391		2.57	2.00	.580	6
495/496 <sup>1</sup>		2.36	2.86	.017	14
292	Review conflicting sources of information on a social problem with an open mind.	2.67	2.75	.728	8
300	When conducting research on a social problem, describe what sources of information you consult to learn more about the issue(s)?	1.71	2.77	.000	13

Class	IL knowledge survey question	Pre	Post	Sig	N
301	Overcome your preconceptions of social problems when taking in information rather than using selected information to confirm your preconceptions	2.31	2.81	.000	69
391/496 <sup>2</sup>	Find authoritative sources by keeping an open mind and recognizing biases through frequent self-evaluation	2.80	2.80	1.00	5
495		2.85	2.85	1.00	13

*Notes.* <sup>1</sup>Capstone course data is presented together for this measure, <sup>2</sup> 391/496 is a yearlong two course sequence, so the pre-test was given at the start of fall semester and the post-test was given at the end of Spring semester. In all other courses, pre was given at the start of the semester and post at the conclusion of the semester long course.

In Table 2, we can see that students seem to have made more gains in the lower-level courses (292) and those courses where the course topic directly aligned with the information literacy component (e.g. 300- Research Methods students on “When conducting research on a social problem, describe what sources of information you consult to learn more about the issue(s)?”), though students in these courses also scored the lowest on the pre-test questions overall so they had more room for gains relative to students in the higher-level courses in the model. Students in the 391 course were part of a two-course sequence and did not see any significant gains, in fact reported slightly lower on the post-test. Students in the capstone courses (495/496) started quite confident and ended very confident (2.86). Given that these students started with a high score on the pre-test, they had less room to make gains on this question.

**Analysis of qualitative data, including intention and reflection papers**

**Changes to traditional notions of information literacy.** To determine if students were changing their

## Teaching Information Literacy *continued*

perceptions of information literacy, we first looked at who or what they considered to be a source of authority in their intention papers. The main sources of authority that students wrote about were academic researchers (sometimes referred to as authors) who wrote journal articles. One student wrote in their intention before they completed the information literacy activity:

For an author to be an authority on their topic, the author should have some sort of focus directly correlating to their degree on the topic they are in. They should be active in the community where their research takes place, whether that be physically or mentally, and most of the information they pull from should be recent sources that have equal acclaim to the author.<sup>1</sup>

We then delved into how students made the decision about whether a source was authoritative or reliable. In their intentions, we saw students recognize that inaccurate information was present, which factored into how they judged whether something was a source of authority or not. One student wrote, “In all honesty, much of the information I consume I do so without doubting the credibility of it. This has to change because many of the information found on the internet is not reliable...”. At the same time, students did not necessarily know where to find reliable information. Another student wrote:

A way that I determine if a source is reliable is by looking at the domain name system... I honestly don't know if this is the most accurate way of determining if a source is reliable but I find that this works for me...

Many students continued to hold similar views in their ending reflections as well. While recognizing that evidence was needed, they did not all take the step to critically examine that evidence. Some students did seem to understand the importance of looking beyond traditional academic sources, demonstrating that some of the information literacy activities may have broadened their views on what counted as an authoritative source. One student wrote in their reflection after completing the information literacy activity about using governmental reports as a source of authority, writing, “I used google scholar to find a article written by the Department

of Justice. I think the source is qualified because it is a government agencies who's task is to handle crime.” Students also began to see the community and community partner as sources of authority that they had not previously considered.

Most students, however, continued to turn towards standard sources like peer-reviewed articles from the library's databases. A student wrote in their reflection, “To determine of a source is reliable or not you need to make sure it is peer reviewed and that it is unbiased and backed up with evidence for the claims it is making.” Even though they were mostly turning towards the same sources as before, students did show evidence of having more of an open mind to new information and understanding multiple viewpoints. One student wrote in their information literacy activity reflection, “It's also all about thinking critically and looking at all the facts and not just those that support your opinion.” Another student summarized their experiences with what they learned related to information literacy throughout their college career as well as this particular course. They wrote:

I would like to at least think I can critically assess a source, but at the same time, I am going to put weight on whatever academic source I am reading because it is what I've been socialized to do. The module on authority was helpful for this understanding this element of academia. Not all authors are created equal and lived experiences are often better producers of comprehension than text.

It is evident from the ending reflections that some students continued their traditional views of information literacy while others broadened them to include other sources that they learned about from the frame “Authority is Constructed and Contextual.” The question then becomes: did the work in the community change the students' minds?

**Impact of the activities and community-engaged work on information literacy.** As described above, our goal was that the community-engaged activities would help students to understand information literacy concepts at a deeper and more nuanced level. In their intentions, students wrote about how on-the-ground knowledge from sources such as police departments

<sup>1</sup> Student quotations are presented exactly as written.

## Teaching Information Literacy *continued*

might differ from traditional sociological knowledge. One student wrote in their intention, “I anticipate learning about the police department’s interpretation of data which will differ from what I learned in academic sources because of the differing perspectives. Sociologists tend to utilize the sociological imagination and other methods that differ from police departments.”

In the student reflections, we found that information literacy activities encouraged students to consider different types of sources and feel confident critically assessing the content they are consuming. One student wrote in their information literacy reflection, “I feel like I was able to have a more open mind and was able to make my own judgement on the topic after I had read it from multiple perspectives and hearing some conflicting points of view.” A second student wrote, “I already sought reliable sources for my research projects, but I feel that this project has made me more comfortable with taking initiative and gathering information beyond academic articles and preexisting studies.” Finally, an additional student wrote, “I feel comfortable with my ability to critically assess the content I consume but I understand that there is always room for improvement.” Despite their confidence in their ability to critically assess content, they recognized that they should continue to improve. This reflects that the student both became more comfortable with information literacy as a result of their experience and that they realized it would be an iterative lifelong learning process.

**Capstone student gains in information literacy.** Based on the findings described in the quantitative results section above, we conclude that capstone students made gains in information literacy, but they had less to gain. So, we turned to student intention and reflection assignments with a specific focus on capstone students’ starting and ending levels of information literacy knowledge. Students learn about information literacy throughout their college careers. One student even wrote about this in their intention, saying:

The ability to critically assess data is something I have been learning to do for the last four years of college and this is a chance to apply it to a real social problem and for my confidence to increase in my ability to do so.

In their intentions, some students already displayed behaviors that we would expect at the end of a semester, such as one student who wrote, “I make an effort to check myself and participate in evaluative thinking and behaviors, especially in an academic environment.” This was not the case for all students, however, with one writing, “When looking at research for classes, however, I don’t feel like I have as good as an eye and may miss crucial evidence.” Students were also asked in their intention assignments to describe how they kept an open mind. One student wrote that they felt prepared to critically assess content with an open mind but recognized that “it can be challenging to keep an open mind when deeply rooted in your own experiences and ways of thinking.” Being able to recognize this demonstrates some proficiency in the disposition “Are conscious that maintaining these attitudes and actions requires frequent self-evaluation,” which was the disposition we focused on in the capstone classes.

When describing what might be beneficial working with a community partner, one student wrote, “While objectivity is important in sociological studies, when studying human experience I wonder if a certain level of subjectivity might be helpful.” This comment demonstrated that the student recognized the subjectivity of research and that our community partner had knowledge that might be different from academic sources.

After completing the reflection assignments at the end of the capstone course, it seemed like the process of collecting data themselves enabled students to understand more fully how methodology can determine the authority of a source. One student wrote, “To evaluate data, you will need to determine how and by whom the data was initially collected.” This student recognized that researchers can have an influence on how data is collected. Another student who was collecting their own data as part of their internship pointed out the importance of nonprofit organizations in collecting local data about issues, thus becoming a source of authority as well. This student wrote, “Traditional institutions may not encourage study into local issues, preferring that large-scale projects be taken place for more generalizable information.”

Overall, capstone students started with a relatively

## Teaching Information Literacy *continued*

high level of understanding these information literacy concepts, so we did not see as much improvement over the courses like we did for lower-level courses. We were able to see that by working directly with community data, students gained knowledge of how to interpret data instead of just reading interpretations that had already been done. One student wrote in her reflection:

Working directly with the [community data] allowed me to form my own thoughts and opinions without the influence of someone's interpretation, something that I could not do with academic sources... Approaching data with a kind of "blank slate" was something that I hadn't done previously. It changed the way I approach academic papers and challenged me to more critically assess data.

Another student shared a similar view about how conducting this community-engaged research increased their information literacy knowledge. They wrote:

After all it's *said* and done, my ability to critically assess data has been substantially increased due to the research we had to conduct in the course. Obtaining information literacy via the project is helpful not only within academia, but also in the real world.

Not all students felt like they had the information skills at the beginning of the class, but believed that working on the project helped to develop them further. One student wrote:

As far as my ability to critically assess information, I was not very confident before taking this class, but I do feel that working on this project, as well as all our discussions in class and hearing [the professor's] perspective on things has helped me improve on this.

Overall, there was mixed evidence from all the student reflections about how impactful these information literacy activities were in the context of our original three goals. Students began thinking more critically about the authority of information and were aware that there are limitations to how they often consume information, both in academic and non-academic contexts, which reflects success with goals 1 and 3. However, students seemed to still rely on those early learned ideas of authority (e.g., peer-reviewed research), which reflects less success on

goal 2. While the evidence from the reflections provides insight into why students conceptualized information literacy in certain ways, especially sources of authority and the community, the reflections also make it clear that not all of their information literacy preconceptions (e.g. edu is always an authoritative source) changed.

### Discussion

Community-engaged research is one way to teach students information literacy that challenges them to think in a broader and more nuanced way about sources of informational authority. Students made gains on goals 1 (becoming better consumers and producers of information) and 3 (applying information literacy beyond the classroom). Students did not make as much progress on goal 2 (understanding different sources of authority). This method of teaching information literacy challenges students to dig more deeply and think more critically about information than students have typically been taught up to this point (even sometimes in their first classes at college). If we hope to help students move beyond what they have been taught in middle and high school to succeed at goal 2, we need to disrupt the script, but doing so requires regular reinforcement, opportunities for application, and collaboration between faculty and librarian experts.

Students receive information from a variety of sources such as peers, professors, family members, and the internet. This information overload can create challenges in sorting or filtering through the meanings and reliability, which can lead to them rarely questioning or challenging that information (Saunders, 2012). Students are also looking for shortcuts to understand these information literacy concepts, which we cannot provide because critical consumption of information cannot be boiled down into a checklist approach (such as CRAAP) (Wineburg et al. 2020). As instructors, we give students the information literacy knowledge and resources to be able to determine if something is a reliable source of authority, but the students still have to put in the work to figure out if it meets their information need.

Learning about information literacy is not a linear process (Mazella & Grob, 2011). Throughout these community-engaged experiences, students slowly learned how to incorporate these information literacy concepts into their toolkit, in some cases disrupting

## Teaching Information Literacy *continued*

what they learned in K-12 and earlier in college. Embedding community-engaged experiences into the classroom allowed for weekly reinforcement of the information literacy concepts, which extends beyond the traditional information literacy “one-shot” guest lecture from a librarian and instead aligns with a curriculum integration approach (Lindstrom & Shonrock, 2006). Consistent with existing research, collaborating in a relational manner with other faculty and librarians, and incorporating various information literacy modules into the course curriculum throughout the semester allowed for higher growth and retention of information literacy skills than with the one-time lesson (Black et al., 2001). This non-linear path may help explain why the efficacy of our activities were not as clear cut as we predicted.

The knowledge survey responses become even more meaningful when considering changes over the different courses in the model. We see that the pre-test scores in 300 are lower than in 301 and both 300 and 301 are lower than the capstone courses. This demonstrates how the students are making gains as they go through the sequenced courses. Students who start out as confident in their knowledge, which is common in the upper-level courses, cannot possibly have significant gains on the three-point scale. Students getting to the upper-level courses and already being very confident in their knowledge is a great outcome. In future semesters we will try two additional ways of measuring information literacy gains: focus groups, where students can have an open discussion of what they learned; and lower-stakes ungraded assignments that still get at the information we are trying to measure. It may be that students did better on the knowledge survey questions since those were not graded as right or wrong; they got credit just by completing the post-test. Students may feel pressured to have the “right” answer as a result of being socialized to be afraid of giving the wrong answer and/or to want to increase the probability of a high score on the assignment, which explains some of our findings.

### Limitations

Due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, the students were not able to work as closely with our community partner as we had hoped. This may have limited the value that they could have gotten from this work. Stress related to the pandemic could have also inhibited students' ability to engage with the dimensions of information literacy, as suggested in Mabee & Fancher (2020). In

addition, because of COVID, some of the classes were delivered in an online asynchronous format, in which there was less room for conversations that reinforced learning because everything was prepared in advance.

Additionally, in the knowledge survey questions for the pre- and post-test, we asked only how comfortable students were answering these questions, not if they actually knew the correct answer. We can see that this might have caused an issue with measurement because students may already have been confident, so their gains may not have shown up as significant even if they learned additional important information. In addition, the scale ranged from 1=not at all confident, 2=somewhat confident, to 3=very confident. Students may have preferred “confident” as an answer. However, we based the scale on Nilson (2013) (although we did not include the “not sure” response), on whose work we modeled this assignment. Students may also have overestimated their skill level, selecting that they were very confident when in fact their knowledge may have been more limited, especially among poor performing students (Bell & Volckmann, 2011; Miller & Geraci, 2011).

### Conclusions

Community-engaged learning is a valuable way to teach information literacy dispositions and is a strategy that can be used in a wide range of disciplines. Whenever students are able to go out into the field and engage in the community, no matter the discipline, this engagement can strengthen understanding of information literacy.

It is important to remember here that the terminology that we use to talk about these experiences can be siloing. By referring to the work we are doing as community-engaged research, we may not be addressing similar experiences referred to as service learning. Future work should explore definitions of key concepts to ensure all disciplinary perspectives are included. In our case, the applied learning experience enabled our students to achieve two out of the three goals we set. The lack of achievement of the third goal (help students to understand that traditional academic sources are not always authoritative) has led us to conclude that a big challenge is de-socializing knowledge. We would need to re-socialize students around a new way of thinking about information literacy. This is a big ask so it is unsurprising that we didn't accomplish all three of our goals in our pilot attempt. Since this work is part of a larger project

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that involves scaffolding learning, we hope that the information literacy values and mindsets with we have engaged students will take root later in their college careers and contribute to their lifelong learning.

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# TEACHING REPORT

## Exploring Racial and Ethnic Identities with PechaKucha

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### Abstract

To better understand how individual experiences and racial and ethnic identities are connected to broader patterns of social structure, we asked students in our undergraduate Race and Ethnicity courses to complete a “PechaKucha” presentation assignment emphasizing the intersections of race and ethnicity in each student’s biography. PechaKucha is a 20x20 PowerPoint presentation format involving 20 slides that transition automatically every 20 seconds, yielding a total presentation length of six minutes and 40 seconds. We evaluated the effectiveness of this innovative pedagogical technique in six different sections of our race and ethnicity courses, including one entirely online, totaling 180 students. Results indicated that PechaKucha was perceived as enhancing student learning about diversity. Our students’ PechaKucha presentation assignments revealed several sociological patterns, including the social construction of race, discrimination, and stereotyping. In this article, we share our assignment guidelines and suggestions for successful assignment implementation.

### Keywords

Critical pedagogy, race, ethnicity, identity, diversity, PechaKucha

To paraphrase sociologist C. Wright Mills, students may approach coursework on diversity unaware of the connections between the patterns of their lives and global events. They may conceptualize their identities as the result of genetics, biology, or psychological temperament, yet overlook the specific cultural or historical contexts that have shaped them. Engaging students to process these links between their individual selves and broader social forces can be difficult, particularly when students from various racial and ethnic backgrounds are in a shared space.

As institutions become increasingly diverse, college educators need to help students understand the structural underpinnings of racial and ethnic identities and appreciate and conceptualize varied lived experiences. A related challenge is encouraging student engagement with culturally diverse expressions of racial identification within a context that denaturalizes the dominant racial order (Haugen et al., 2018). Indeed, students with multiracial and multiethnic backgrounds may find their experiences underrepresented in course materials and class discussions (Haugen et al., 2018; Khanna & Johnson, 2010; Rockquemore & Brunson, 2002). While classroom lectures and assigned readings are helpful, more is needed to garner active participation from students. Students are often reluctant to problematize race, given the complex emotions and memories that may arise (Bell et al., 2007; Bonilla-Silva, 2019).

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To overcome these challenges, one requires a self-consciousness that enables individuals to observe the intersections of their biographies and history and between the self and the world (Mills, 1959). This entails a structural and relational understanding of how racial identities are constructed within a social system. Experience of one's racial or ethnic identity is mediated by other identities related to class, gender, age, sexuality, ability, religion, region of origin, and overall power and privilege (Collins, 1990; Desmond & Emirbayer, 2016). In addition to individual characteristics, racial and ethnic identities are shaped by structural variables such as dynamics within the family, historical factors, and sociopolitical contexts (Tatum, 2000).

Previous research has highlighted the positive role of diversity and non-discriminatory environments for learning and development outcomes (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Whitt et al., 2001). In a meta-analysis of 27 diversity-related initiatives, Denson (2009) found that diversity-related interventions had a moderate effect on reducing racial bias for all students and were particularly effective in reducing racial bias among White students. Exposing students to diverse cultural practices and worldviews is critical to multicultural competence (Haugen et al., 2018). Various educational practices are designed to help students identify oppression considering individual experiences while facilitating active learner involvement (e.g., Ghoshal et al., 2013; Jason & Epplen, 2016; Johnson & Mason, 2017; Khanna & Harris, 2015). While the PechaKucha assignment described here is not designed to replace these activities, it adds another option for helping students understand diversity and social group interactions.

### The PechaKucha Format

PechaKucha (translated as “chit-chat” in Japanese) is a 20x20 PowerPoint presentation format involving 20 slides, with each slide transitioning automatically every 20 seconds, yielding a presentation length of 6 minutes and 40 seconds (Anderson & Williams, 2013). Originating in 2003 by architects Mark Dytham and Astrid Klein to make presentations more engaging and dynamic, PechaKucha presentations have become popular worldwide (Klein & Dytham, 2017; Snow, 2006; Tomsett & Shaw, 2014). Since 2008, college instructors have been using PechaKucha in undergraduate and graduate courses as alternatives to traditional student

presentations across multiple academic disciplines (Ave et al., 2020; Warmuth, 2021), including architecture, art, and design (Klein & Dytham, 2017), language (Coskun, 2017; Solusia et al., 2020), marketing (Levin & Peterson, 2013; McDonald & Derby, 2015; Oliver & Kowalczyk, 2013), psychology (Beyer, 2011), user experience/UX (Nyguen et al., 2017), and in medical and nursing programs (Abraham et al., 2018; Byrne, 2016; White & Louis, 2022).

PechaKucha presentations are visual and auditory and engage students through multiple cognitive processing mediums (Warmuth, 2021). PechaKucha slides have only images and no text; therefore, presenters must interpret the slides for the audience instead of reading from them. Likewise, PechaKucha avoids the pitfalls of small text font size or numerous bullet points common to traditional slideshow presentations. Although the format is structured, PechaKucha encourages creativity in thinking about and presenting relevant information. Because of its fast pace, a PechaKucha presentation requires planning, research, and rehearsal. Unlike traditional time-consuming class presentations, PechaKucha's unique presentation style enables more students to present their biographies in a short time. Moreover, its concise style and time constraints help students organize their experiences more thoughtfully and encourage deeper reflection on salient aspects of their racial and ethnic identities.

The PechaKucha presentation assignment is a unique way to facilitate student understanding of how race, ethnicity, and biography are structurally connected to broader institutional patterns and processes. Simultaneously, it provides a different opportunity for students to observe and appreciate the culturally diverse experiences of their classmates. Although implemented here in a Sociology course, the assignment would be helpful in any course where learners are asked to connect their identities to diversity-focused course content, including disciplines such as African American/Black Studies, Gender and Women's Studies, Multicultural Education, Psychology, and Teacher Education. In the following sections, we further explain the PechaKucha concept and offer a detailed description of the assignment with suggestions for its incorporation. We then present student evaluations of the PechaKucha project with implications for future implementation.

## Exploring Racial and Ethnic Identities *continued*

### Description of the Race and Ethnicity PechaKucha Assignment

We asked students to create and present a PechaKucha in the 20x20 format with the overarching theme of race and ethnicity in personal biography and its links to social and historical contexts, employing applicable course concepts. The learning goals relate to exploring one's racial and ethnic identity and developing an appreciation for diversity by observing others' presentations. We believe this engagement with the self and others is an essential step toward creating a more inclusive and open dialogue on issues related to race and ethnicity. Moreover, by observing their classmates' PechaKucha presentations, students engage with culturally diverse articulations of racial identification. This diverse exposure validates culturally heterogeneous lived experiences and helps students appreciate normatively different life experiences. Although the focus of this assignment and its learning goals are about racial identity and diversity, students learn about other critical dimensions of racial identity and inequality/justice in different units and assignments of the course.

### The specific goals for the PechaKucha presentation assignment are to:

- *Explore* racial and ethnic biography, identity, and experiences and its social and biographical historical intersections.
- *Apply* personal and biographical events to course concepts (e.g., the social construction of race and ethnicity).
- *Synthesize* various ideas, images, and experiences relating to racial and ethnic identity into the PechaKucha.
- *Present and Explain* the PechaKucha images in the 20 slides x 20 seconds format.
- *Learn* about classmates' racial and ethnic biographies, identities, and experiences by viewing their presentations.

Students need clear directions and ample time for reflection and preparation. We usually discuss the PechaKucha assignment and its learning goals in the

4th/5th week of a regular semester after students are introduced to concepts of diversity, race, ethnicity, discrimination, privilege, and other theories about power. We provide students with information on creating their PechaKucha template and links where they can learn more about PechaKuchas. Various writing assignments, discussion topics, and readings help direct the project. For example, one of the instructors assigns a short Race and Sociological Imagination written assignment (2-3 pages) that encourages students to explore how their life experiences are shaped by racial and ethnic relations in the society in which they live. Other preparatory assignments ask students to consider a list of racial and ethnic identity questions adapted from Bell et al. (2007, p.132):

1. What is your racial and/or ethnic identity? When did you first become aware of your racial and/or ethnic identity?
2. When were you first aware of people from other racial and/or ethnic groups?
3. How does your racial/ethnic identity set you apart from others?
4. In terms of your racial/ethnic identity, what customs or traditions do you enjoy (food, clothing, rituals, language, etc.)?
5. If there were one thing that you want people to know about your racial/ethnic identity, what would it be?
6. How is your racial/ethnic identity typically portrayed in the media? Do you agree with this portrayal or not?
7. Is there a creative work (art, music, literature, drama, etc.) that you feel represents your racial/ethnic identity?
8. Is there a historical event or social movement that influenced the way you feel about your racial/ethnic identity?
9. When was a time that you were proud of your racial/ethnic identity?
10. What do you hope to pass on to your children or significant others about your racial/ethnic identity?

Although there is an active visual and aesthetic component to PechaKucha, artistic ability is not needed to complete it successfully. The slideshow should be organized to make it easy for the audience to follow key themes, while the images on the slides should be clear

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and uncluttered. Personal photographs are not required as students may not have easy access to family pictures or family history due to exceptional life circumstances (e.g., seeking asylum due to persecution or ethnic conflict) or strained relationships with family members. Students often seek additional information about their family background and history to complete the assignment; however, access to a family tree is not essential. Narration should be provided for the entire 20-second duration of each slide without “dead airtime” or running over into the next slide. Once the twenty seconds automatic timer starts, the slides quickly advance. Practice improves the narrative’s timing, pacing, and clarity and helps identify unforeseen glitches.

A multi-category assessment tool clarifies expectations for the assignment (Appendix A). Areas include technical aspects of PechaKucha delivery (e.g., the automatic timing for slide advancement), topical knowledge, aesthetics/creativity, organization/preparation, and presentation delivery. We encourage students to view additional instructional videos and sample PechaKucha presentations online as needed. Additionally, as instructors, we model the assignment by presenting our PechaKuchas to the class, following the assignment guidelines. Our students learn more about us through this demonstration, and the criteria for the assignment are made explicit through our examples. Students respond to our PechaKuchas with various questions, and it often spurs more interest in the assignment.

### Pedagogical Framework

Our foundational approach is influenced by Paulo Freire’s critical pedagogical approach that values students as equal partners in learning. Freire’s critical pedagogical approach emphasizes dialogic and experiential learning where teaching is not viewed as an “act of depositing” information into students’ minds but as making them active participants (Freire, 2000, p.80). Students’ views, perceptions, stories, and experiences create meaningful content for all involved in the course. In addition to presenting topical material, we ask students to express what they already know, believing their experiences will enhance everyone’s learning (Hooks, 1994). We are not only “teachers;” we are also “learners” embedded within the broader social contract that links biography and history (Freire, 2000; Mills, 1959).

While acknowledging the merits of diversity, we consciously try to avoid the pitfall of engaging in “empty diversity talk” (Desmond & Emirbayer, 2016) by stressing the processes by which differences often reflect and lead to unequal rewards. We emphasize that these racial and ethnic differences are socially constructed as part of an extensive system of sorting people to maintain social hierarchies and privileges.

### Implementing the PechaKucha Assignment

The setting for the PechaKucha presentation assignment was a large, primarily undergraduate-focused suburban state university (approximately 43,000 students) in the southeastern United States. The student population of 52 percent men and 48 percent women includes the following self-reported racial and ethnic backgrounds: 54 percent White, 22 percent Black/African American, 11 percent Hispanic/Latino, 5 percent Asian, 4 percent Multiracial (non-Hispanic/Latino), 2 percent unknown, and less than 1 percent American Indian, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (Kennesaw State University, 2022). Moreover, 87 percent of our students receive financial aid, and about 38 percent of students identify as first-generation, which the university defines as students whose parents or guardians did not attain a four-year college degree (Kennesaw State University, 2022). Most students taking this race and ethnicity class are Sociology or Criminal Justice majors, with 20 percent coming from a wide variety of other majors offered, such as psychology, integrated health sciences, history, English, and anthropology. Although we use the PechaKucha assignment in a diverse setting, we are confident it could work equally well in more racially homogenous contexts. For example, a lack of diversity in presentations may be a learning opportunity to discuss the history of class, race, and segregation. Although we use this assignment in a class size of 30–40 students, it can be adapted for large classes.

Students presented their PechaKuchas during the final weeks of the term. In the face-to-face classes, students were required to attend each other’s presentations. In rare cases, students with severe or disabling public speaking anxiety could present to the instructor in alternative settings such as a conference room or office. In the asynchronous online class, students recorded their PechaKucha slides with voiceover video software (e.g., Media Space, Kaltura, Panopto, or YouTube), keeping

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the 20x20 format. Students were required to watch each other's PechaKucha presentations in the online course and share their insights via the discussion board. The discussion boards were designed to encourage open discussion and feedback without grade stipulations; however, students were required to respond with at least 75 words of meaningful text. At the end of the semester, we asked students to complete a short survey evaluating their experiences. Prior to implementing the survey, we obtained university IRB approval for the educational evaluation of the PechaKucha assignment and its content.

### General Themes within the PechaKucha Content

Virtually all students showed pictures of their families to illustrate their racial and ethnic backgrounds. Images of traditional foods, clothing, national flags, festivals, art, and other cultural objects represented significant elements of a biography. Images of hometowns, schools, and neighborhoods were frequently shown to illustrate segregation, gentrification, or other aspects of place and space. Media images depicted the importance of music, social media, television, books, and films. While many chose entertainment or sports celebrities, several students used photos of President Obama and his family to symbolize the positive impact of his historic election. Some students illustrated the institutionalization and creation of racial categories using examples from the US Census. For example, some students demonstrated the inadequacies of specific racial/ethnic labels or boxes to be checked on surveys. Instead, many variations in experiences existed within a specific racial/ethnic category.

Students also depicted connections between biography and world events. Students used examples of the 9/11 attacks on the New York World Trade Center, images of protests and riots in Los Angeles (after the Rodney King verdict), and the Black Lives Matter movement to illustrate concepts of racial profiling, segregation, police brutality, and violence. Descriptions of intersectionality (particularly involving gender, socioeconomic status, and sexuality) were also common. Numerous students provided insights about privilege (or a lack thereof) through narratives of poverty, religion, disability, single-parent families, and interracial dynamics (dating or marriage).

### Evaluating the PechaKucha Assignment

180 students participated in the PechaKucha survey assessments from six sections of Race and Ethnicity (four face-to-face and one online) across four regular semesters and a summer session. To ensure accurate feedback and maintain anonymity (particularly among under-represented groups), students were not asked to indicate their race or ethnicity on the survey. The survey included the following topics: 1) students' overall experience with the PechaKucha assignment; 2) students' attitudes toward using the PechaKucha assignment; 3) the value of the PechaKucha assignment in learning about race and ethnicity, and 4) the impact of the PechaKucha assignment on discussions about race and ethnicity.

Students were asked to rate 16 items on a six-point Likert scale (1=strongly agree; 2=agree; 3=somewhat agree; 4=somewhat disagree; 5=disagree; and 6=strongly disagree). The response categories of strongly agree, agree, and somewhat agree were combined in the final analysis, as were the categories of somewhat disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree. Quantitative items were analyzed through SPSS 24, focusing primarily on descriptive statistics.

Additionally, seven open-ended questions were included: 1) What else could have been done in order to prepare you for doing your own PechaKucha?; 2) What surprised you the most about the PechaKucha?; 3) What is the main thing you will take away from this PechaKucha assignment; 4) What was it like to put together your PechaKucha?; 5) What was it like to present your PechaKucha to the class?; 6) What did you learn from the other students' PechaKucha presentations?; and 7) What advice would you give to other students about doing a PechaKucha? For the open-ended questions, common themes and sub-themes were identified through a modified grounded theory approach of constant comparison until theoretical saturation was reached. We received university IRB approval before data collection began.

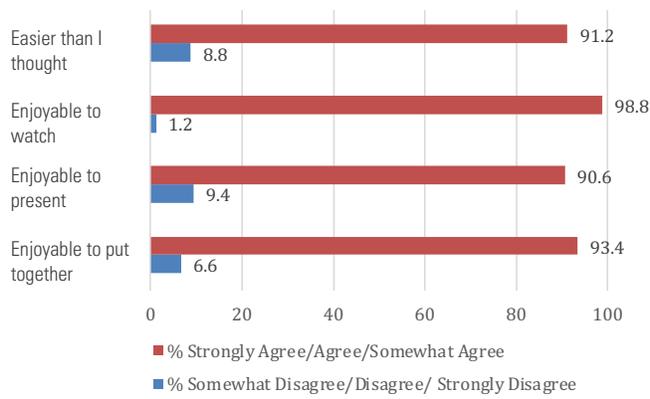
### Quantitative Results

**Students' attitudes and experiences with PechaKucha.** Although students expressed pre-presentation anxiety, experiences with the PechaKucha assignment were positive (Figure 1). Most believed the

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PechaKucha assignment should be used in all race and ethnicity classes (99% strongly agree/agree/somewhat agree). Many would like to do a PechaKucha in another class (83% strongly agree/agree/somewhat agree). Over ninety percent of students agreed that the assignment was “easier than I thought.”

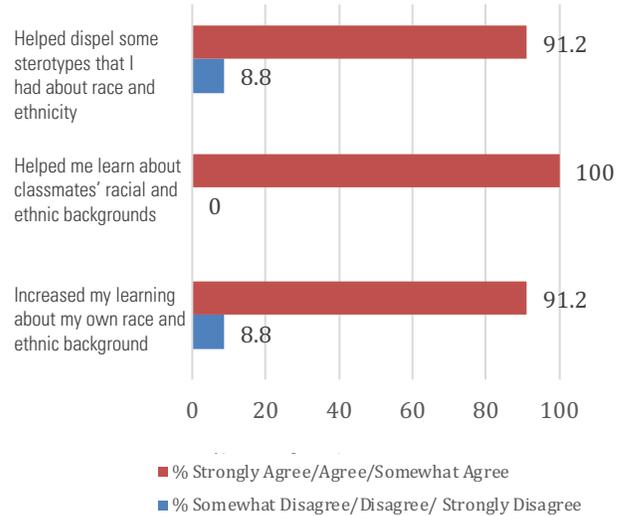
**Figure 1:** *Students’ Experiences with the PechaKucha Assignment*



**Impact of PechaKucha on increasing discussions about race and ethnicity.** Although students indicated that they were already talking to family and friends about issues related to race and ethnicity before this assignment, they reported curiosity and engagement with issues of race and ethnicity, leading to more discussions with family and friends. Most students indicated they are more open to discussing race after this PechaKucha assignment (89% strongly agree/agree/somewhat agree).

**Value of PechaKucha on learning about race and ethnicity.** Students indicated in the survey that the PechaKucha assignment increased learning about their racial and ethnic backgrounds and that the PechaKucha helped dispel racial and ethnic stereotypes (Figure 2). There was overwhelming agreement that the PechaKucha assignment helped them learn about their classmates’ racial and ethnic backgrounds (100% strongly agree/agree/somewhat agree).

**Figure 2:** *Perceived Value of the PechaKucha Assignment*



### Qualitative Results

**Students’ PechaKucha experience.** Some students described the PechaKucha experience as “nerve-racking,” but the general agreement was that creating, presenting, and watching a PechaKucha was enjoyable. Many used the word “fun” to describe their experiences with PechaKucha. The time-bound format of PechaKucha also provided students who were anxious about class presentations an alternative and less intimidating option for presentation. As one student explained, “I don’t like talking in front of people, but it’s easier to do when you have a time limit on each slide.”

**Students’ advice to others.** Regarding advice to others, students emphasized the importance of being yourself, taking the assignment seriously, and practicing beforehand. Examples included:

- “No matter how interesting or non-interesting you may think your life is, be open to sharing because someone may learn something from it.”
- “Don’t be afraid to be raw and vulnerable!”
- “Have meaningful topics that relate to your presentation. Have fun discovering yourself.”

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**What surprised students most?** In researching their backgrounds, some described a renewed connection to previously ignored or unknown aspects of their identity. For example, a student wrote: “I was most surprised about my father’s background. I never knew he was mixed with Italian, Polish, Irish, and European. I always just thought he was White. The main thing I will take away from this assignment is learning to embrace the cultures of both the Black and White side of me.” Another student wrote, “I was surprised at how much I didn’t already know about my family. We have talked about where we come from, but with this assignment, I was able to get more details.” Another noted, “My race and ethnic background is more interesting than I realized when I put it into 20 slides.”

One student remarked, “You can learn a lot about someone in 6:40” (i.e., 6 minutes 40 seconds, the presentation length). Students were surprised by “how pictures can describe so much” and “how informative and revealing the presentations [were],” acknowledging that “most of the time people aren’t as open to discuss themselves and race in the same realm out of fear, objection, or continued prejudice, but this was refreshing.” Another wrote, “I learned that everyone has a story. Most people don’t mind sharing their stories when given the opportunity to use their voice.”

Some class members assumed they could accurately identify a person’s race or ethnicity through visual or cultural cues alone and were surprised they were wrong. Students wrote, “You can’t tell a person’s race just by looking at them” and “No specific race looks a certain way.”

Likewise, comments revealed pre-existing assumptions about the rigidity, permanence, and monolithic nature of racial and ethnic groups. Examples include:

- “Honestly, almost every Black student was not ‘just Black.’ Most people’s race and ethnic story is a lot deeper than what you think.”
- “Everybody has a different family dynamic even if they are the same race.”
- “The ideas you may have had about a particular race may not be true once you hear other people present their PechaKuchas.”

As illustrated in the following examples, several were surprised by the hidden diversity in classmates’ lives.

- “My perception of people in my class was totally wrong. I didn’t know how diverse people were who go to (our university).”
- “As cliché as it may sound, you really can’t judge a book by its cover because this class was way more diverse than I anticipated.”
- “I learned more people are in an interracial relationship than I thought.”

### Students’ reflection on key learnings and takeaways.

Survey comments also reflected awareness of interconnections, differences, and similarities. When students shared their experiences with others, it reinforced the idea that their individual experiences about race were both unique and alike; as one student noted, “I never knew one class could have so many similarities and differences at the same time!” Another student commented, “I had a deeper appreciation for the lives my fellow students had lived to this point, and I was much more hopeful for a future that could combat the racism and oppressiveness we currently face.”

For some, the reflective experience of the PechaKucha assignment sparked a process of self-discovery. For example, one student was surprised by “How much everything in my childhood had to do with my race and ethnicity.” Other examples include:

- “Race is prevalent in life whether you realize it or not.”
- “I see race and ethnicity in my life now.”
- “I didn’t realize how much race and ethnicity, stereotype, and history of my family affected who I am today.”

Students who may not have believed that their life experiences were affected by race sometimes discussed that this assignment led to an awareness of the salience of race and its relation to privilege. Several commented that, before participating in the assignment, they did not think of themselves as having an ethnic background but

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were “just White.” Some found the assignment more difficult because they had not given race much thought.

Students highlighted that they were willing to carry forward dialogues of race and ethnicity beyond the course. One student observed: “I noticed how many people shared their experiences of them facing discrimination at some point in their life. By knowing this information, I would do whatever I can to help sure no one is discriminated against in my workplace, and if they were, it doesn’t go unreported.” Another student added: “We must continue to share our lives so others can have a better understanding of the impact(s) that their attitudes, behaviors, and words have on those whom they affect, positively or negatively. I think the more we know and understand each other, the less likely we as a society will be so inclined to batter someone else. Community and cohesiveness can still be our saving grace.”

### Discussion

Any assignment on the personal impact of one’s race and ethnicity involves challenges and rewards. Therefore, it is vital to establish an environment of trust, mutual respect, and collegiality. We believe that by employing critical pedagogy, student empowerment, and awareness of interconnections, the PechaKucha presentation assignment can be a successful learning opportunity. However, there is a concern that the assignment may unfairly highlight students from less advantaged or minority racial and ethnic backgrounds. There is also a risk that these students might appear as “tokens” charged with representing their entire group. We take tokenism seriously and acknowledge the possibility of its occurrence while also taking steps to reduce its likelihood. At the outset, we reiterate that this assignment aims to promote an inclusive dialogue that leads to a deeper appreciation for diversity by learning more about your and your classmates’ racial identities and histories. We also emphasize that when we speak of diversity, we are interested in learning from the experiences of all groups of students. We sought to protect students from overexposure by stressing that they share only as much about their backgrounds as they felt comfortable doing.

Students of color were not singled out for special attention during presentations or asked to provide “the minority or diversity perspective.” This initiated the opportunity for discussion after the presentations

in which students were asked if that occurred, if it was problematic, and how to manage it. We also acknowledge the structural forces that produce the heightened visibility and the disproportionate burden of representation for racial and ethnic minority students. Despite these limitations, the PechaKucha assignment provides an alternative space for minority group members to express their emotions and experiences about race. It leads to a reexamination of myths and stereotypes and, thus, offers possibilities for empowerment.

We also recognize the risk of reifying racial categories. To counter this tendency, we reinforce the concept of race as a social construction and, therefore, subject to change. Further, by encouraging students to connect concepts of race to their everyday lives, we seek to demystify it, opening possibilities for critical understanding. Thus, we view the PechaKucha presentation assignment as a source of potential student empowerment. Some comments on classmates’ PechaKucha presentations reflected hidden biases. Although we are optimistic, our data do not allow us to assume these beliefs were abandoned due to the assignment. But as indicated by students’ evaluations, the PechaKucha assignment led to a deeper appreciation of diversity and a potentially transformative impact of applying this understanding to their everyday lives.

PechaKucha presentations could be beneficial early in the term to set the stage for discussing complex topics; however, we scheduled presentations later in the course after most course content had been covered. Individual-level demographics were not collected on the post-assignment survey to preserve anonymity among underrepresented groups, thereby precluding the possibility of cross-tabulations on specific demographic characteristics. However, written open-ended comments often made clear the race and ethnicity of the student. In future research, we will consider adding individual-level demographic information to the survey. We did not measure differences between the face-to-face and online sections, which might be an interesting future study. We also plan to add supplementary writing and reflection assignments that focus exclusively on the impact of PechaKucha on student understanding of diversity and oppression.

### Conclusion

The strengths of the PechaKucha presentation

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assignment include its short, fast-paced format, visual attractiveness, and focus on stimulating core thoughts (rather than lengthy explanations). Moreover, each student is given a specific time slot, allowing for more presentations in a short, predictable time. Unlike traditional assignments, the PechaKucha presentation allowed students to focus on their lived experiences of race and ethnicity through images and spoken words. Learning about their own and classmates' racial experiences helped them connect personal reflections to extensive theoretical and societal arrangements of discrimination, inequality, and opportunity structures.

Students were often surprised to learn about their classmates' diverse heritage and experiences, reinforcing an appreciation of multi-faceted identities and an enriched understanding of the social construction of race. They also appreciated other students' PechaKucha presentations, especially regarding culture, beliefs, backgrounds, and experiences, allowing comparisons from multiple perspectives. Students indicated that PechaKucha was a bit nerve-wracking, especially since this concept was new for most. Still, with preparation and practice, it can be a helpful tool for reflecting about the significance of race and ethnicity within individual lives and broader society. We hope students carry forward the knowledge and skills gained through this assignment as they negotiate race and ethnicity within their social worlds.

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## Exploring Racial and Ethnic Identities *continued*

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### Appendix A: PechaKucha Presentation Assignment Goals and Assessment

**Goal 1:** Does the PechaKucha demonstrate an exploration of intersections of biography and history?

- Links to biography and history are clearly analyzed and explained.
- Focus on racial and ethnic identities is apparent.

**Goal 2:** Does the PechaKucha give evidence of the application of course concepts (e.g., the social construction of race, White privilege, spatial inequality, etc.?)

- Links to course concepts are clearly analyzed and explained.

**Goal 3:** Does the PechaKucha give evidence of synthesis of a variety of images used to demonstrate experiences and ideas?

- Images are varied and of excellent visual quality.
- Images are used creatively to illustrate topics.
- Slides are free of text and bullet points.

**Goal 4:** Was the PechaKucha created following the technical aspects of the presentation format?

- The presentation includes 20 slides timed to advance automatically every 20 seconds.
- The presentation runs smoothly- without technical problems.
- The presentation shows evidence of logical progression and organization.

**Goal 5:** Was the PechaKucha presentation effectively delivered and explained using the 20 slides 20-seconds-per-slide format?

- Slides were interpreted for the audience.
- No dead airtime-narration flows smoothly.

Exploring Racial and Ethnic Identities *continued***Appendix B: Means and Standard Deviations of Survey Questions**

1=strongly agree; 2=agree; 3=somewhat agree; 4=somewhat disagree; 5=disagree; 6=strongly disagree

<b>Survey Question</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Survey Question</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
1. PechaKucha should be used in more classes.	1.99	0.93	9. The PechaKucha assignment increased my learning about my own racial and ethnic background.	2.12	1.08
2. PechaKucha should be used in all Race and Ethnicity classes.	1.71	0.75	10. Before this assignment, I rarely talked to friends and family about issues related to race and ethnicity.	3.43	1.48
3. The PechaKucha was of little value to me in learning about race and ethnicity.	4.73	0.12	11. The Pecha Kucha assignment increased my conversations with my family about race and ethnicity.	2.70	1.37
4. I enjoyed putting together my PechaKucha.	1.97	0.96	12. The PechaKucha assignment increased my conversations with friends about race and ethnicity.	2.63	1.19
5. I enjoyed presenting my PechaKucha.	2.26	1.06	13. In preparation for the PechaKucha, I asked my parents and/or other relatives about my racial and ethnic background.	2.31	1.41
6. I enjoyed watching other students present their PechaKuchas.	1.43	0.73	14. As a result of this assignment, I am more open to asking about race and ethnicity with others.	2.29	1.10
7. The Pecha Kucha assignment helped me learn about my fellow students' racial and ethnic backgrounds.	1.43	0.54	15. The PechaKucha assignment was easier to do than I thought.	1.98	1.11
8. The Pecha Kucha assignment helped dispel some stereotypes that I had about race and ethnicity.	2.20	0.96	16. I would like to do another PechaKucha assignment in another class.	2.42	1.26

# TEACHING REPORT

## Utilizing simulated patient videos to develop student empathy and readiness for interprofessional working

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### Abstract

Healthcare degrees routinely provide interprofessional learning (IPL) opportunities for trainees to prepare them for practice. This study explored the use of simulated patient videos within IPL to develop student empathy and interprofessional readiness. A series of simulated patient videos were created for the clinical topics: diabetes, dementia, asthma, and falls. The videos followed each patient's disease trajectory over a six-to-18-month period. Pharmacy, nursing, occupational therapy, paramedic, and physiotherapy students, who attended the IPL teaching sessions, were asked to complete the Jefferson Empathy Scale for Health Professional Students (JSE-HPS) and the Readiness for Interprofessional Learning Scale (RIPLS) at the beginning and end of each IPL session. Students were also invited to attend a focus group. Mean total JSE-HPS and RIPLS scores significantly increased. Students described the patient videos as reflective of real-life, engaging, and memorable. The IPL facilitated student learning and developed positive perceptions of each profession.

### Keywords

Interprofessional, simulation, pharmacy, nursing, allied health professionals, pedagogy, empathy

With an ever-evolving healthcare provision where professional roles are overlapping and expanding, it is essential for future health care professionals (HCPs) to fully understand the roles of healthcare team members and to develop the skills to work cohesively. One way of doing this is by preparing students pre-qualification via the use of interprofessional learning (IPL) within the classroom setting to develop key knowledge and skills which are desirable within health and social care settings (Lachini et al., 2019; Shakhman et al., 2020). The reality of delivering high quality patient care requires a range of HCPs to collaborate, share decision making and appreciate each other's knowledge and expertise (Merriman et al., 2020). Multi-disciplinary teams (MDT) can provide a significantly higher quality of care compared to that delivered from a single discipline (Maharajan et al., 2017).

Interprofessional learning (IPL) at an undergraduate level plays a major role in preparing health professional students for future collaborative healthcare practice. IPL is defined as occasions “when two or more professions learn with, from and about each other to improve collaboration and the quality of care” (CAIPE, 1997). Pirrie and colleagues (1998) suggested that, through the sharing of knowledge, IPL can be beneficial in preventing barriers arising between different HCPs. Clark (2009) also highlighted the importance of IPL in

## Utilizing simulated patient videos *continued*

enabling students to gain an insight into their own self, profession and their abilities to work as a team, whilst also supporting students in shaping their professional attitudes and developing their own professional identity. Whilst there is some knowledge in the topic area, little has been written with regards to the use of IPL and its effectiveness when adapted for remote use and engagement.

Multiple health regulatory bodies recognize the importance of integrating interprofessional learning within undergraduate curriculums. The Universities of Reading and West London have been co-delivering interprofessional learning between pharmacy and nursing students since 2014. These IPL teaching sessions typically follow paper-based patient scenarios where students work in mixed professional groups to discuss the patient case. Student feedback has been collected at the end of each IPL and has consistently been positive in relation to students relishing the opportunity to learn with and from other healthcare students. However, students have fed back that they wished for the cases to be more realistic and reflective of real life. Therefore, this study presents the collaborative creation, incorporation, and evaluation of simulated patient videos within IPL sessions. The aim of these patient videos was to make the students' IPL experience more engaging and representative of clinical practice.

### Methods

#### Ethics

Ethical approval was granted by the lead author's higher education institute (HEI), protocol number 09/2020. Written information about the study supported with an animated video was provided to students before the IPL. This included details on anonymity, confidentiality, publication, recording of the focus groups, the right to choose whether to participate and the students' right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. Students were informed that their participation or lack thereof would not impact on their academic results. All students provided written consent prior to entering the study.

### Study design

The study was underpinned by a constructivist, social learning theoretical approach which proposes that people actively learn from each other through observing, modelling, and imitating behaviors and attitudes of others (Mertens, 2019). This theoretical approach fits with the use of simulated patient videos in IPL and supports the theory that multidisciplinary discussion allows learning to occur by direct engagement in an authentic situation and through interactions among participants in social practice (Rocca, 2010). A mixed method, pre- and post-intervention design was used to elicit insights and a greater understanding of the phenomena in question (Tariq & Woodman, 2013).

### Setting and participants

The study was undertaken in collaboration with the University of Reading Pharmacy department, and the University of West London College of Nursing, Midwifery and Healthcare. A purposive sample of pharmacy, nursing (adult, child, and mental health), occupational therapy (OT), physiotherapy, and paramedic students were invited by the authors to take part in the study, totaling 1428 potential participants. In the UK, the MPharm degree is a four-year undergraduate program, the Nursing, Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy programs are three-year undergraduate programs and Paramedic Science is a two-year postgraduate program. For each IPL session the students were matched by year of program, i.e., first- and second-year students, third and fourth and MSc students. Pharmacy and Nursing students attended all the IPL sessions. Paramedic students joined the falls and diabetes IPL, and Occupational therapy and Physiotherapy students attended the Falls IPL (Appendix 1). As detailed in the Ethics section, students were emailed before the IPL event to notify them of this study, and they could choose at the beginning of the IPL whether they wished to complete the consent form and complete quantitative and/or qualitative data collection. All students attended the IPL session regardless of whether they were involved in this study.

## Utilizing simulated patient videos *continued*

### The intervention

A family of five characters was created, whom students would follow within IPL teaching sessions throughout their course (Table 1). Throughout the design process there was strong collaboration between the universities to ensure disciplines were fully represented within the cases. The authors were experienced practicing pharmacists and nurses and drew upon their own personal experiences of managing patients to build the cases. By doing so, they aimed to give life and personal meaning to the patient's cases.

**Table 1**

The family of characters

Patient name	Age	Relations	Medical issues
Bob	80 years	Married to Freda	Dementia
Freda	74 years	Married to Bob	Falls
Sarah	44 years	Freda and Bob's daughter	Bob's carer
Hussain	50 years	Married to Sarah	Diabetes
Lottie	12 years	Sarah and Hussain's daughter	Asthma

Three to five short videos (one to five minutes) were created each for Bob, Freda, Hussain, and Lottie, demonstrating their biopsychosocial and pharmacological health needs and their own personal disease trajectory over a 6-to-18-month period. Four IPL teaching sessions were scheduled, focusing on dementia, falls, diabetes, and asthma respectively. Two videos of Sarah were also created to describe her experience as a carer and shown within the dementia IPL teaching session. These IPL teaching sessions were all attended by pharmacy and nursing students, and when available other health care students also attended, such as paramedic, occupational therapist, and physiotherapy students. Students were allocated to multi-disciplinary groups where they could get to know each other, discuss the simulated patient scenario, and make a plan for assessment, treatment, and management from each discipline's perspective. The authors and other clinical lecturers acted as facilitators to stimulate individual and group discussions, provide feedback, and respond to answers and queries from students.

In February 2020, the Falls IPL session and Freda's videos were delivered face to face at the University of Reading. Following Covid-19 lockdown restrictions, all subsequent IPL sessions were delivered as live online sessions through the virtual learning environment (VLE) with the use of breakout rooms for smaller group work; Hussain/Diabetes in October 2020, Bob/Dementia in February 2021, Freda/Falls in February 2021, and Lottie/Asthma in March 2021.

### Procedure

For students who consented, they were asked to complete the Jefferson Empathy Scale for Health Professional Students (JSE-HPS) and the Readiness for Interprofessional Learning Scale (RIPLS) at the beginning and end of each IPL session (Parsell & Bligh, 1999, Hojat, 2016). The Jefferson Empathy Scale for Health Professional Students is a widely used instrument developed to measure empathy in the context of health professions education and patient care. Evidence has been reported in support of the reliability and validity of the Jefferson Empathy Scale for Health Professional Students (JSP-HPS) when used with nursing, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, and pharmacy students (Petrucci et al., 2016, Walker et al., 2022, Ward et al., 2009). The RIPLS is designed to measure the perceptions of health care students towards interprofessional learning. RIPLS incorporates the interprofessional collaborative practice four core domains (values, knowledge of roles, communication, and teamwork) set out by the Interprofessional Education Collaborative (IPEC 2016). Both JSP-HSE and RIPLS have been previously validated, are designed to be self-administered and are appropriate to collect pre- and post- intervention data (Hayyer et al., 2016; Sulzer et al., 2016). JSE-HPS and RIPLS data was collated, and only paired data retained.

Students were also invited to attend a focus group after each IPL session to further explore their perceptions on the use of patient videos in IPL. Different cohorts of students attended each IPL session; therefore, students only completed the JSE-HPS and RIPLS questionnaire once and participated in the focus group only once. A total of ten focus groups were undertaken, each with between three to nine students (see Appendix 2 for focus group topics and participants). Students from each degree were represented across the focus groups. The total

## Utilizing simulated patient videos *continued*

number of students participating in the focus groups was 57. The length of each focus group ranged from 24 minutes to 57 minutes, with the average length being 34 mins. Each focus group was facilitated by one of the four authors, who had not been involved in facilitating that IPL session. For consistency between focus groups, a semi-structured approach was utilised with eleven pre-agreed focus group questions (Appendix 3).

### Results

#### Data coding

Data from the focus groups were thematically analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step approach (familiarization with the data, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining, and naming themes, and writing up) to derive key themes shaping the phenomenon of interest. The researchers individually familiarized themselves with the data and used the prompts from the focus groups to provide a broad framework for coding the transcripts. Following this, the data were analyzed line-by-line by the authors to identify the themes and the connections between them. The analysis was carried out via a recursive and iterative process, comparing, and connecting the coding, nodes, and themes. The research team followed multiple steps to assure the trustworthiness of the analysis (Nowell et al., 2017). The authors met regularly to discuss and refine these themes, thus ensuring the reliability of the analysis.

The results will be presented as the quantitative results from the JSE-HPS and RIPLS, followed by the three qualitative themes: student perceptions of the simulated patient videos, interprofessional learning experience, and preparation for future practice.

#### Empathy and readiness for interprofessional learning

A total of 1428 students attended over the five IPL sessions from February 2020 to March 2021. This was distributed as 617 pharmacy students (43%), 535 nursing students (37%), 124 Physiotherapy students (9%), 101 Occupational therapy (OT) students (7%), and 51 paramedics (4%),

The response rate for the pre and post JSE-HPS and RIPLS and paired responses are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Student completion of JSE and RIPLS pre and post IPL**

	No. completed Pre-IPL	No. completed post IPL	Total paired responses	Distribution of paired student responses
JSE-HPS	477	265	230	Pharmacy n=121 (53%) Nursing n=60 (26%) Physiotherapy n=24 (10%) OT n=19 (8%) Paramedic n=6 (3%)
RIPLS	484	250	210	Pharmacy n=117 (56%) Nursing n=53 (25%) Physiotherapy n=25 (12%) OT n=9 (4%) Paramedics n=6 (3%)

Each JSE-HPS and RIPLS response was converted to a numerical score, with reverse scoring for negatively worded items. Total JSE-HS scores range from 20 to 140, with a higher score reflecting greater patient empathy. Total RIPLS scores range from 19-95, with higher scores indicating a greater readiness for interprofessional education. The responses were found to be non-normally distributed, and a Wilcoxon signed rank test was undertaken to test significance between pre and post-IPL scores. For both JSE-HPS and RIPLS, there was a significant difference ( $p < 0.001$ ) between scores given pre and post IPL (Table 3).

Within JSE-HPS, ten questions relate to 'perspective taking', eight questions relate to 'compassionate care' and two questions relate to 'walking in patient's shoes' (Table 4).

Utilizing simulated patient videos *continued***Table 3: Mean JSE-HS and RIPLS pre and post IPL.**

	<b>Mean total score pre-IPL</b>	<b>Range pre-IPL</b>	<b>Mean total score post-IPL</b>	<b>Range post-IPL</b>	<b>Paired changes</b>	<b>Wilcoxon signed rank test*</b>
JSE-HPS	108.9 (SD 11.52)	80-137	112.9 (SD 13.99)	78-140	163 pairs increased 55 pairs decreased 12 pairs stayed the same	P<0.001*
RIPLS	81 (SD 7.75)	62-95	84.6 (SD 8.13)	60-95	126 pairs increased 28 pairs decreased 16 pairs stayed the same	P<0.001*

Note. \*Significance level is 0.05

**Table 4: Scores for the three components of JSE-HE pre and post IPL**

<b>JSE-HPS component</b>	<b>Mean Pre-IPL</b>	<b>Range</b>	<b>Mean Post-IPL</b>	<b>Range</b>	<b>Paired changes</b>	<b>Wilcoxon signed rank test*</b>
Perspective taking	57.9 (SD 6.6)	22-70	60.2 (SD 6.65)	39-70	143 pairs increased 59 pairs decreased 28 pairs stayed the same	P<0.001*
Compassionate Care	42.4 (SD 6.25)	20-56	43.7 (SD 8.2)	14-56	133 pairs increased 71 pairs decreased 26 pairs stayed the same	P<0.001*
Walking in patient's shoes	8.5 (SD 2.83)	2-14	9 SD (2.99)	2-14	103 pairs increased 80 pairs decreased 47 pairs stayed the same	P=0.16

Note. \*Significance level is 0.05

## Utilizing simulated patient videos *continued*

For RIPLS, nine questions relate to ‘teamwork and collaboration’, six questions relate to ‘professional identity’ and three questions relate to ‘roles and responsibilities’ (Table 5).

**Table 5: Scores for the three components of RIPLS pre and post IPL**

RIPLS	Mean Pre-IPL	Range	Mean Post-IPL	Range	Paired changes	Wilcoxon signed rank test*
Teamwork and collaboration	40.3 (SD 3.8)	28-45	42.1 (SD 4.21)	29-45	126 pairs increased 30 pairs decreased 54 pairs stayed the same	P<0.001*
Professional Identity	29.1 (SD 3.58)	22-35	30.5 (SD 3.92)	19-35	117 pairs increased 46 pairs decreased 47 pairs stayed the same	P<0.001*
Roles and responsibilities	11.6 (SD 1.78)	6-15	12 (SD 1.88)	7-15	88 pairs increased 54 pairs decreased 68 pairs stayed the same	P <0.001*

\*Significance level is 0.05

For the “perspective taking” and “compassionate care” components of JSE-HPS and all components of RIPLS the pre and post responses were significantly improved after the IPL. For ‘walking in patient shoes’ there was an increase in scores post IPL compared to pre-IPL, however this was not statistically significant.

### Qualitative results

The following sections present the key findings and quotes from the focus groups. These have been grouped into three themes: student perceptions of the simulated patient videos, interprofessional experience, and preparation for future practice.

#### Student perceptions of the simulated patient videos.

Students expressed that the patient videos caused a strong emotional engagement and in particular empathy for the characters and their situation. The videos created an extra dimension of reality which was closer to real-life situations. The students described that this evoked a strong sense of compassion and desire to help the

patients professionally within the scope of their practice.

I just wanted to be able to help him...as a nursing student that's one of the key things is being able to get to know people and kind of journey with them for a bit and get to know them more than just their condition or more than one particular thing, it's like the holistic view and I felt like we really got that with him. [Hussain FG2]

I feel really sad ... 'cause that could have been my father or someone that I knew. I wish I was there to help them. [Bob FG2]

The students described how videos provided a rich insight into people’s personal circumstances and the actual patient journey. This provided a greater awareness into the complexities of managing patient care and patients own perspectives.

I've only ever met fallers, when they have fallen. It just made me think a bit more about the actual

## Utilizing simulated patient videos *continued*

sliding journey from someone fully independent to someone who has these new dependencies, and what the emotional impact on them going through that process would be. [Freda FG2]

I learnt how she feels about her condition and how peers may make her feel regarding her medications. Applying a scenario to a specific patient and her story helps to show how different people have different needs and wants. [Lottie FG2]

Several students expressed how they preferred the patient videos to traditional paper-based teaching tools. The students felt that they were able to holistically assess the patients not just what they were saying but also from body language, facial expressions and from the environmental factors which were more relatable to practice.

It just gives a little bit more at perspective on a person and being able to look at their body language and how it affects them. [Hussain FG2]

I think if for me if it had been without the videos and it would have been just paper and group discussion I would have struggled a lot more with that, but I think having the videos and being able to apply something that was more like the real world, which is more like how it's actually going to experience it, it makes more sense, and it's much more useful than just having a theoretical basis for something for me. [Hussain FG1]

Many students commented that the authenticity of the videos contributed to the learning experience. Some students believed the actors were real patients, whilst others realized these were actors in the videos but it didn't distract from their engagement or learning.

She sounded just like my grandma when we were trying to convince her to have a stick. "I'm not having that. I'm not an old lady." It's just like what their response is. They just don't want to be perceived as being old, and they take a lot of persuading to get her to change her habits. [Freda FG3]

The students enjoyed that fact that this was a whole family and that they benefited from seeing the different relationships within the family.

I can see the benefit of that in terms of seeing how relationships interact and how that affects somebody's ability to deal with their own health. [Hussain FG2]

Students felt that the videos made the patient cases more memorable, that that characters would stay with them and influence how they thought about other patients with asthma, dementia, diabetes, and falls.

The videos definitely make it real, put it into real life scenarios. And it definitely helps you to remember it more as well. I'd remember a video more so than just reading it off a sheet of paper, definitely. [Lottie FG1]

It will remain in my brain forever because it is real ... it gave me better understanding on how to handle dementia. [Bob FG2]

### **Student perception of the Interprofessional learning experience.**

Students explained the most significant outcome of working in interprofessional groups was gaining a better understanding of each other's roles, training, and expertise. Students recognised the specialised knowledge gained from other students and felt valued as they shared their knowledge with the group.

They [pharmacy students] had a lot of knowledge about medication and I [nursing student] was able to add some of my own knowledge about pain or stool assessments which they didn't consider. [Bob FG1]

I think it's a good idea how healthcare students from different disciplines were discussing the same topic and that we need to work in the in a team. It's like a holistic approach to the patient. [Hussain FG2]

## Utilizing simulated patient videos *continued*

Students enjoyed the opportunity to interact and talk to other students, particularly during Covid-19 where they had limited social interactions. The IPL sessions developed students' positive perceptions of other healthcare professions and increased their own confidence working in an MDT though sharing knowledge.

I really liked the fact that we were mixed groups because it was really nice to see it from different angles that really did bring everything together. It really highlighted the fact that you do need to be multidisciplinary. [Freda FG1]

I really like the fact that it does bring us from different aspects of healthcare together and we don't get that opportunity very often. So, to be able to learn from other professionals is really, really helpful and I like the variety. [Hussain FG2]

Watching and discussing the videos as an interprofessional group, allowed students to discuss, compare, interlink, and gain an appreciation of the different roles of each healthcare professional in patient care.

I just found it fascinating, listening to everyone else, and how they would treat, and then how that would impact on how I would treat, and how my treatment would impact on how they do it. The importance of understanding the other people's roles that you're working alongside, that collaborative approach, and how important that is getting your patient back on their feet. [Freda FG3]

Students felt at the end of the IPL they had a better understanding of the importance of all healthcare professionals in patient care and that no single profession was more important than another.

I got a lot of the value from the session, with people from different professions look at the situation differently. [Freda FG2]

The visual impact of the videos further highlighted the multidisciplinary roles. For example, students described how seeing Freda's living room allowed them to identify the interventions needed by occupational therapists to prevent falls, or they could see the Lottie's inhaler

technique to choose the most appropriate inhaler device for her. Thus, the videos gave students an opportunity to see the management of a patient case through multiple interprofessional perspectives.

With the video I think it made people discuss more cause people picked up on different things throughout the video. So, then you could all share the different things you'd picked up so then you're looking at it from each perspective from each person in the group, which was really good. [Freda FG1]

### **Impact of the IPL on students' preparation for future practice.**

Students felt establishing good working relationships with other healthcare professional students now, would benefit them in their future working practice. For example, breaking down barriers talking to other professions and encouraging better multidisciplinary working to support patients with their needs.

Once we graduate, interprofessional learning and working is going to be a reality for us. So yes, I think it does help in terms of understanding the roles of different of health care professionals and it facilitates us in terms of success in the future in terms of our role as nurses working as part of interdisciplinary teams. [Bob FG2]

I think at our level, with getting ready to properly go out professionally, and graduate, I feel like it just really highlights - there's so much focus on the importance of understanding the other people's roles that you're working alongside. And that collaborative approach and how important that is getting your patient back on their feet. [Freda FG2]

Students reported the videos made them reflect on their approach with patients, and in the future, they will be more aware of the importance of fully listening to patients, understanding their journey and increased appreciation of the complexity of patient health and social care.

Even though it was about falls, so there's more than just that aspect with a patient, but there's so

## Utilizing simulated patient videos *continued*

many different things that you need to consider when you're looking after a patient. [Freda FG1]

The learning experience allowed students to feel empowered that they could apply what they had practiced and learnt through their interaction with the videos into real life, making the learning experience a bridge between theory and clinical practice.

I learned from watching those scenarios, that if I were to encounter a person, um, in that situation, I would know how to deal with it, and would know what to do and how to take it further. [Bob FG1]

It really helps to stimulate how one would be pulling information together during MDT meeting. [Bob FG2]

Students also felt the IPL developed their confidence, knowledge, and communication skills, which they could utilise should they encounter similar patient situations in the future.

With Bob, it's seeing someone sitting on a bench who may appear lost and confused, and I have seen that, but never actually known how to approach it. But after seeing that it gave me kind of, gave me the confidence really to approach someone like that and then know what to do and how to deal with it. [Bob FG1]

Before the session, I do not know much about diabetics at all. but then in a space of three hours I think I can confidently, you know, give an overview of diabetes, a bit about insulin and you know the few things that we learn about medication. And it actually sticks in your mind. You know what exactly to do. [Hussain FG1]

All students suggested or agreed that they would welcome more of these IPL patient videos sessions.

I think it's really good, and I would be happy to do more of it, especially the interdisciplinary bit – I think that's been really useful. [Freda FG2]

### Discussion

This study has demonstrated both quantitatively and qualitatively the positive and immersive impact of patient videos in interprofessional learning. The pre and post JSE-HPS scores demonstrate a significant improvement in students' empathy, in particular the sub scales for patient compassion and perspective taking. Students' increased scores for RIPLS also demonstrated that students were significantly more prepared for interprofessional working, through awareness of their professional identity, improved understanding of professionals' roles and responsibilities, and the recognition of the importance of teamwork and collaboration. These validated quantitative measures support the effectiveness of this interprofessional learning with simulated patient videos in improving empathy and interprofessional attitudes. Instilling these values at an undergraduate level will positively contribute to future effective teamwork, communication and respect which will ultimately improve patient care.

Case-based learning has long been advocated within healthcare education, to facilitate student application of knowledge to authentic contexts and development of problem-solving skills (Choi & Lee, 2009). The addition of patient videos to case-based learning was found to increase the authenticity and interactivity. The narrative effect of telling the patient's story in our videos was shown to greatly assist student engagement, enjoyment, and rememberability of the clinical cases. The patient videos also helped support the development of soft skills such as active listening and observation skills. A similar study with pharmacy students found that video case-based learning helped them think like professionals, gain a better understanding of their role in patient care, and prepared them for real world clinical practice and problem solving (Rebitch et al., 2019). The use of patient videos was also shown to be an effective prompt to interprofessional discussions, knowledge sharing, teamwork, relationship building and integrated working. Lastly, when engaging with the focus groups, the majority of students across the groups linked their feedback to their experiences of IPL as a concept, despite there being no direct question asking them to do so. Their link to the concept of IPL overall was positive, which further adds to the current body of knowledge around the benefits of IPL.

## Utilizing simulated patient videos *continued*

The use of videos allowed a standardized and repeatable experience, which is resource-efficient, and mirrors clinical reality. Simulated videos are more affordable and accessible than arranging real patient interactions. A study utilizing simulated patient videos in a US nursing program, found that the “simulation videos brought course content to life without the stress of a real patient or the fear of making a mistake” and students reported an increased confidence in making patient care decisions (Sutherland et al., 2019). The delivery mode of the IPL experiences that students had was via the use of a virtual learning environment. This meant that some of the key challenges traditionally faced by IPL facilitators, such as space and resourcing (Shakhman et al., 2020), was not a significant issue on the education providers facilitating the sessions. However, within the student feedback there were a small number of students who cited that depending on the virtual ‘break out’ group they were in, some were more talkative and interacting from the start, whilst others took some time to ‘warm up’ or begin to explore the task at hand as a group.

The concept of the family within each interprofessional learning session was welcomed by students. This allows scaffolding, with improved skill development, empathy, and acknowledgement of the importance of interprofessional working progressing throughout the programs. This patient journey and continued narrative aims to encourage the students’ sense of belief, realism, and investment in these characters. The power of drama and film depicting patient stories seems to be in the way that it contributes to lifelong learning and prepares students for the professional role enabling the practice of skills in a safe environment (Cahill, 2013; Oh et al., 2012; Raga-Chardi et al., 2016).

### Conclusions and Recommendations

With the ever-growing importance on interprofessional working at all levels within health and social care provision, there is an onus on all HEIs to appropriately train and prepare students. The use of simulated IPL videos could be an important pedagogical tool for healthcare training. The ability to use authentic learning content with a strong emphasis on patient stories appears to engage students providing an opportunity for learning and application of knowledge and skills.

This study was undertaken within two UK HEIs, with only a small number of paired responses. A higher proportion of the paired responses were completed by pharmacy students, with nursing and paramedic, physiotherapy, and occupational therapy students less represented. Therefore, the quantitative data should be used with care and results cannot be generalized across the education sector. In order to gain more insights, future implementation and research could include other parts of healthcare programs, including modules which assist with development of clinical skills, self-confidence and ethical decision making. Additionally, the family could be expanded to include further clinical topics. Further research on the effectiveness of the use of the simulated patient videos in interprofessional health education is necessary to embed this pedagogy in curriculums for the future workforce.

Utilizing simulated patient videos *continued*

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Utilizing simulated patient videos *continued***Appendix 1: Student distribution in each IPL session**

	<b>Pharmacy students</b>	<b>Nursing</b>	<b>Paramedic</b>	<b>Physiotherapy</b>	<b>Occupational therapy</b>
Freda Falls – Feb 2020	135	55	8	59	31
Hussain Diabetes – October 2020	107	101	12		
Bob-Dementia – February 2021	103	120			
Freda Falls February 2021	104	64	31	65	70
Lottie Respiratory – March 2021	168	195			

**Appendix 2: Focus group details**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Patient video / IPL topic</b>	<b>Number of participants and program represented</b>	<b>Description in text</b>
February 2020	Freda / Falls	3 Pharmacy & Nursing	Freda FG 1
October 2020	Hussain / Diabetes AM	6 Pharmacy, nursing & paramedic	Hussain FG 1
October 2020	Hussain / Diabetes PM	9 Pharmacy, nursing & paramedic	Hussain FG 2
February 2021	Bob / Dementia AM	6 Pharmacy & Nursing	Bob FG 1
February 2021	Bob / Dementia PM	5 Pharmacy & Nursing	Bob FG2
February 2021	Freda / Falls AM	8 Pharmacy, Nursing, Occupational therapy, Physiotherapy, Paramedic	Freda FG 2
February 2021	Freda / Falls PM	8 Pharmacy, Nursing, Occupational therapy, Physiotherapy, Paramedic	Freda FG 3
March 2021	Lottie / Respiratory AM 1	4 Pharmacy & Nursing	Lottie FG 1
March 2021	Lottie / Respiratory AM 2	5 Pharmacy & Nursing	Lottie FG 2
March 2021	Lottie / Respiratory PM	3 Pharmacy & Nursing	Lottie FG 3

## Utilizing simulated patient videos *continued*

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### **Appendix 3: Focus group: semi-structured questions**

1. What did you learn from the actor video?
2. How did you feel watching the actor video?
3. How real/authentic did you find watching the actor video?
4. How did the authenticity affect your engagement?
5. How does the activity (watching actor video and group discussion) compare to other teaching methods on your course?
6. What were the advantages/limitations of the video compared to other teaching on your course?
7. Are there any other interactive session on your course that work well?
8. How could the activity (actor video and group discussion) be improved?
9. Was there anything you didn't like about the video?
10. How did the video and the workbook link together – were the questions challenging enough? Too broad/about right?
11. Would you like to repeat this type of activity for teaching in other parts of the course?

# TEACHING REPORT

## An Empirical Examination of Undergraduate Academic Dishonesty within the Context of Semantics, Environment, and Role

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### Abstract

The extent and persistence of academic dishonesty among college students is well-established in published research. This study confirms similarly extensive cheating at a small, Midwestern university using self-reported data collected by surveying students. The empirical analysis identifies evidence of dissonance relating to *semantics*, *environment*, and *role*. The three principle findings are: a distinction between the terms *cheating* and *unauthorized assistance*, reporting academic dishonesty more outside the classroom than in, and acknowledging more *providing* than *receiving* of unauthorized assistance. The results suggest that students experience competing codes of behavior informed by environment and role. Prescriptions consistent with these finding are presented.

### Keywords

Academic Dishonesty, Dissonance, Competing Codes of Behavior

The authors thank Ryan Rahrig for helpful comments and suggestions. We find it striking that over decades, survey after survey reveals widespread academic dishonesty. While we celebrate the honesty of reporting dishonest behavior, we must also question to what extent respondents are aware that they are confessing academic dishonesty. Academic dishonesty is not nearly so cut and dried an issue to conclude that all cheating is cheating, especially in the breadth of experiences of college students. Students confront formal and informal codes of behavior in the various areas of their collegiate experience. Those who subscribe to the adage that college is more than academics must acknowledge that students juggle numerous expectations of behavior across their many collegiate pursuits.

This study takes seriously the existence of competing codes of behavior confronting students. Honor codes and academic dishonesty policies clearly articulate academic dishonesty, but these guidelines fail to acknowledge the entire college student experience. Students must choose between the rules explicated in an academic dishonesty policy and the formal and informal social and cultural norms that pervade to campus life. This study does not defend academic dishonesty nor argue that academic dishonesty is an acceptable practice; rather the study presents evidence suggesting that administrators and faculty ought to recognize that academic dishonesty is not always and everywhere evidence of the absence of virtue in modern students or the moral decay of society. Instead, academic dishonesty may be symptomatic of

## Undergraduate Academic Dishonesty *continued*

broader collegiate experiences that necessarily introduce competing codes of behavior that, at times, challenge the traditional and potentially anachronistic definition of academic dishonesty. Albeit not as dramatic as the classic Kantian example of a moral dilemma that asks the moral agent to choose between lying and preventing a murder, college students face competing norms of behavior that emanate from friendship (roommates, dorm life), brother/sisterhood (fraternity, sorority), athletics (teammates) or collegiality (classmates). With an improved understanding of the challenges facing students, solutions can be designed and implemented to serve the institution, faculty, and students.

This study examines the assertion that context matters when identifying and applying competing behavioral codes of conduct. In particular, the degree of academic dishonesty students admit to when asked directly will be compared to their admitted behavior (semantics). Semantics refers to the student distinction between “cheating” and “unauthorized assistance.” In addition, their levels of academic dishonesty will be evaluated when comparing activity inside and outside the classroom (environment) as well as providing and receiving unauthorized assistance on an assignment (role). For example, when outside of a classroom, the prevailing code of behavior may emphasize duty and obligation consistent with friendship, fraternity, sisterhood, team unity, or comradery. In the absence of the undeniable spatial cue of a classroom, competing behavioral codes of conduct (cheating/“helping”) may be identified and may prevail (environment). A student may perceive “providing” unauthorized assistance to a teammate as “helping” rather than “cheating” (role). Prior work in this area (groups, friendship, providing assistance, etc.) has been conducted by Haines et al. (1986), Davis et al. (1992), Chapman et al. (2004), and Gino et al. (2009). If correct, the popular application of cost-benefit calculation must be reconstituted to reflect greater cost associated with violation of behavioral codes prevailing over an academic dishonesty code of conduct and greater benefit resulting from conforming to alternative behavioral codes of conduct.

This study proceeds with review of relevant literature that establishes the research question. To test the research question, the methodology features a survey of undergraduate students. Survey results addressing

semantics, environment and role are presented and discussed. The empirical analysis provides quantitative evidence distinguishing various areas of interest in the academic dishonesty literature. Finally, based on the empirical findings and an understanding of the current state of academic dishonesty, proposals are shared to address concerns that administrators and faculty express in the published literature.

### Literature Review

Survey research documents the persistence of academic dishonesty (Baird, 1980; Drake, 1941; Goldsen et al., 1960; Graham et al., 1994; Hollinger & Lanza-Kaduce, 1996; Jendrek, 1989; Jordan, 2001; McCabe, 2005; McClough & Heinfeldt, 2021; Sierles et al., 1980; Slobogin, 2002). Despite studies revealing a rising proportion of students admitting to cheating over time, students may underreport academic dishonesty (Scheers & Dayton, 1987). McClough and Heinfeldt (2021) report that 94.2 percent of an undergraduate sample admits to cheating, unauthorized assistance or behaviors associated with academic dishonesty. The apparent persistence and increase of academic dishonesty have inspired a broad research agenda examining the phenomenon of academic dishonesty.

Academic dishonesty is difficult to define (Franklyn-Stokes & Newstead, 1995). Nonetheless, studies reveal evidence of shared understanding of the more obvious and serious behaviors of academic dishonesty over time (Barnett & Dalton, 1981; Graham et al., 1994; Wright & Kelly, 1974). In contrast, studies also reveal that students underestimate cheating due to difficulty identifying common behaviors as cheating (Gardner et al., 1988). Difficulty identifying cheating behavior may be contextual. In some situations, behavior may be identified as cheating, whereas in a different context the behavior may be viewed more virtuously (e.g., helping).

Taxonomies seek to organize various forms of academic dishonesty (Pavela, 1978; Whitley & Keith-Spiegel, 2002). Colnerud (2006) distinguishes conscious deception, self-deception and ignorant deception. While ignorant deception is self-evident, Ashworth and Bannister (1997) find that students can justify behavior when the official norms are unclear, which is suggestive of conscious deception, albeit motivated by

## Undergraduate Academic Dishonesty *continued*

lack of clarity. Colnerud and Rosander (2009) report three official Swedish categories of academic dishonesty: cheating, unauthorized collaboration, and plagiarism and fabrication. Burrus et al. (2007) assessed self-reports of cheating before and after exposure to a definition of academic dishonesty. Students reported cheating more after exposure to a definition. In sum, studies suggest that students may be unaware that some behaviors constitute academic dishonesty. For a government to establish a taxonomy specific to academic dishonesty, research seems warranted to examine how context contributes to the uncertainty of meaning specific to academic dishonesty.

While ignorance of academic dishonesty policy likely explains some portion of academic dishonesty, psychological factors influence behavior as well. From the Freudian perspective, cognitive dissonance occurs when the id and superego are in conflict. To resolve the conflict, the ego employs defense mechanisms (Freud & Baines, 1937). Common defense mechanisms include rationalization, denial, repression, projection, and reaction formation (Cramer, 2000). Rationalization ignores the true reasons for behavior. To rationalize one's behavior requires constructing excuses and incorrect explanations. Denial is a refusal to acknowledge what is clear to others. Repression assigns unpleasant feelings to the unconscious. Projection is assignment of one's unacceptable actions to another person. Reaction formation involves substituting opposite feelings for the unacceptable feelings (Barlow & Durand, 2001). The academic dishonesty literature is replete with applications of defense mechanisms (Bandura, 1990).

Festinger (1957) defines cognitive dissonance as the psychological discomfort experienced when actions violate attitudes, beliefs or values. Festinger (1962) posits two possibilities for reducing dissonance. First, individuals can reduce dissonance-causing actions to align actions with attitudes, beliefs or values. In the context of academic dishonesty, students engaging this possibility would cheat less. Second, individuals can change their attitudes, beliefs and values to align with their actions. In the context of academic dishonesty, students engaging this possibility would alter attitudes, beliefs and values to accommodate academic dishonesty. Given the self-reported levels of academic dishonesty, students have ignored the first in favor of the second possibility.

Studies have also explored the influence of peers and the establishment of norms that violate academic dishonesty policies and honor codes. Many studies conclude that students engage in academic dishonesty after observing the behavior of peers (Graham et al., 1994; Jordan, 2001; Kibler & Kibler, 1993; McCabe et al., 1999; Stevens & Stevens, 1987). Gino et al. (2009) find that group membership contributes to unethical behavior. Stephens et al. (2007) find that peer acceptance of cheating and peer cheating behavior are positively correlated with academic dishonesty in traditional and electronic environments. McCabe and Trevino (1997) report peer norms serve as the strongest predictors of academic dishonesty. The existing literature offers compelling evidence that peer behavior establishes norms that challenge academic dishonesty policies. Zhao et al. (2022) conducted a meta-analysis examining 38 studies published between 1941 and 2021. The analysis finds a peer cheating effect of intermediate size but finds that the peer effect is a global effect. Using country-level variables reveals that the effect varies across countries suggesting that culture matters. Of course, distinct cultures can exist within a university and influence student academic behavior. Stephens (2019) contrasts cheating and integrity cultures. Absent from these studies is an examination of the context that accommodates the peerage and the norms identified as essential determinants of acceptance of academically dishonest behavior. Peer relations among college students are contextual. There are classmates, teammates, roommates, club members, co-workers, and formal and informal social groups with distinct, although at times overlapping, norms of behavior. McGrath (2019) argues that academic dishonesty is a fertile topic to apply cognitive dissonance theory. She contends that cognitive dissonance can be applied to address academic dishonesty in academic settings.

A third thread of the existing literature examines perceptions of cheating. Fass (1990) finds that institutions treat equally the provider and the receiver of academic dishonesty. Students, however, contextualize academic dishonesty by distinguishing between helping others and receiving assistance. Haines et al. (1986) contend that to receive assistance is selfish, while to provide assistance is selfless. Houston (1986) finds a positive correlation between cheaters and the degree of acquaintance with the provider of assistance. Chapman et al. (2004) report that 75 percent of students are willing to cheat with a friend

## Undergraduate Academic Dishonesty *continued*

but only 45 percent will cheat with an acquaintance. Davis et al. (1992) report that 76-88 percent of students across 35 campuses were willing to help a friend. Similarly, Whitley and Kost (1999) reveal that students view providing more leniently than receiving assistance. Genereux and McLeod (1995) reveal that acts of helping were reported more commonly than acts of academic dishonesty to benefit oneself. Students also reported more positive attitudes toward abetting a cheater, which they perceived to be more acceptable. Stephens (2017) demonstrates that cognitive dissonance serves dishonest students in a practical manner by eliminating any sense of guilt associated with academic dishonesty.

Specific to defense mechanisms, a fourth thread of the scholarly literature addresses neutralizing behavior, which is positively correlated with cheating (Carpenter et al., 2006; Haines et al., 1986; McCabe & Trevino, 1993; Pulvers & Diekoff, 1999). Rettinger and Kramer (2009) conclude that neutralizing behavior enables rather than causes academic dishonesty. For example, Pulvers and Diekoff (1999) find that students rationalize cheating when asserting, "Everybody else is cheating." Similarly, Haines et al. (1986) find that assisting is easier to neutralize because it is viewed as selfless rather than as selfish. Again, absent from these studies is identification of the context that enables or mistakenly engenders the perception of universal acceptance. Students may assert that everyone is cheating, but it is blatantly not true that everyone is cheating all the time. Cheating may be contextual; this study evaluates that possibility.

### Research Question

Our review of the existing literature reveals that the pervasiveness of students' academic dishonesty is explained, in part, by their ignorance and lack of understanding of what constitutes academic dishonesty. In addition, evidence reveals that neutralizing attitudes enable academic dishonesty. Notably, students engage competing codes of conduct. For example, students may be aware that cheating violates a policy; however, helping, in general, is encouraged. As such, we expect students to engage academic dishonesty more when providing assistance than when receiving assistance because receiving assistance is overtly dishonest; whereas providing assistance is more easily reconciled (rationalized) as helping somebody. Similarly, we expect students to engage academic dishonesty more

outside the classroom than in class. Completing assignments such as quizzes and exams independently is firmly associated (spatially informed) with a classroom. Engaging in academic dishonesty is more difficult to rationalize or deny while in a classroom. In contrast, academic dishonesty outside the classroom may reflect competing values that are equally obvious given the environment. Dorms and libraries, for example, involve social interactions that influence decisions made in the particular space. This study examines how semantics (cheating and unauthorized assistance), environment (in class and outside class), and role (providing assistance and receiving assistance) influence student perceptions and behaviors.

### Methods

Data collection involved development and administration of a survey to undergraduate students enrolled in a small, private university located in the Midwest. Data collection was completed in less than three weeks to minimize any potential impact of external or internal influences that might contaminate the data. Coordination with multiple faculty members facilitated distribution of the survey in courses that enroll first year through fourth year students from the four undergraduate colleges. Review of the initial sample revealed underrepresentation of Juniors and Seniors and Pharmacy students. A second administration of the survey in the main library and in the lobbies of the pharmacy college resulted in a larger sample that reasonably resembles the student population. Two students declined to complete the survey resulting in an overall response rate of 99.27 percent. Administration of the survey resulted in a convenience sample of 275 returned surveys, which represents approximately 12 percent of the undergraduate population of the university. Table 1 presents descriptive statistics of the respondents who submitted surveys.

To encourage respondents to report honestly about dishonest behavior, survey development and administration emphasized anonymity. With the exception of two questions that ask respondents to reply with a specific numerical value and an optional open-ended question, the data collection instrument required respondents simply to circle a single letter in response to each question. Respondents received identical pencils to complete identical surveys. In addition to reminding

## Undergraduate Academic Dishonesty *continued*

respondents to avoid providing identifiable information, upon completion of the survey, respondents were instructed to insert the survey randomly among the completed surveys in a folder. It is believed that student understanding that the data collection process insured respondent anonymity encouraged truthful responses to questions pertaining to academic behavior.

In addition to questions pertaining to class year, college of enrollment, and gender, the survey asks two questions directly referring to cheating and four questions that refer to unauthorized assistance. Table 2 summarizes the responses to these questions.

A third battery of questions asks respondents to identify specific behaviors from a list of behaviors that may or may not be indicative of academic dishonesty. The survey features thirteen questions intended to explore student behavior. Included among the questions are three behaviors that are not obvious examples of academic dishonesty. These three questions are added to the survey to impose greater cognitive engagement by respondents when assessing each behavior. For all thirteen questions, the survey asked students to respond YES, if the behavior was engaged at least once, or NO, if the behavior was never engaged during their college experience (online, face-to-face, or hybrid). Table 3 summarizes the responses specific to student behaviors.

### Results

The three most affirmed behaviors were the three behaviors not commonly associated with academic dishonesty. For this analysis, these behaviors are not considered or coded as cheating. The most confirmed behavior (89.3 percent) is to seek clarification from an instructor. Faculty likely support and encourage this behavior. The second most affirmed behavior (84.1 percent) is to request review of an assignment by another person prior to submitting the assignment for a grade. There is a continuum of review by another to consider. For example, students are encouraged to use tutors and writing lab instructors while others may ask friends and roommates to review an assignment. The third most affirmed behavior (76.7 percent) is to discuss an assignment with another person. Again, a continuum exists. Students may discuss an interesting assignment, or classmates may engage in conversation in which one student benefits more than the other, yet work is

completed independently. Nefarious collaboration is possible; however, discussing assignments is not intrinsically academic dishonesty. Moreover, the survey includes questions regarding specific behaviors that distinguish discussion from overtly dishonest behaviors such as having another person complete an assignment, so affirmative responses suggest that discussion with another resides on the benign end of the continuum.

Respondents admitted to familiar behaviors associated with academic dishonesty notably less frequently than to the questions reported above. In descending order, respondents report: copying (60.9 percent), providing answers (60.3 percent), receiving (53.3 percent) and providing/sharing (50.4 percent) graded work, use of a test file (43.0 percent), plagiarize or failure to cite a source (25.4 percent), use of an unauthorized electronic device such as a phone or watch (18.8 percent), altering graded responses with intent to pursue additional credit (14.3 percent), submitting work completed by someone else (11.1 percent), and writing answers on arm, desk or some equivalent (10.7 percent). The observed disparity between the three most affirmed behaviors that are indicative of engaged students and the ten behaviors associated with academic dishonesty suggests that student behavior may be more virtuous overall than implied by studies that report the extent of academic dishonesty. Similar to cheating, the three most affirmed responses are indicative of effort to secure higher scores. It is notable that the more acceptable and productive behaviors are markedly more frequent.

Three survey questions refer to behavior that may not be viewed universally as academic dishonesty. Specifically, 43 percent of the sample acknowledges benefitting from access to a test file, while 50.4 percent provided graded work, and 53.3 percent received graded work. Providing and receiving graded work is a more intimate exchange than using a test file, which is often associated with a membership organization or some other form of group affiliation. Access to a test file and sharing graded material violate the most basic fairness principle. Simply stated, access to graded material is not available to all students. Unless the instructor provides graded work to all students, only those with access to graded work derive an advantage over students without similar access.

## Undergraduate Academic Dishonesty *continued*

Responses to an open-ended survey question offer support for this normative position and illustrate examples of defense mechanisms. One verbatim response reads, "...getting old exams is a way for me to study not an *intentional* way of cheating" (emphasis added). This student assuages the moral conflict through rationalization. Access to old exams facilitates test preparation, however there is an acknowledgement that this form of test preparation qualifies as a type of cheating. The student neutralizes the conflict by associating the use of old exams as studying rather than as test preparation. Another student seeks reassurance when asking, "Is it really wrong to provide others with old course work...? It's passed back for a reason?" The authors do not challenge the premise that graded work is returned to students for a reason; however, we disagree with the conclusion that the purpose is to share the graded work to the benefit of selective students. The rationalized unambiguous neutrality of this behavior is not as ambiguous as this student strains to portray given yet another verbatim confession, "...passing down old exams/quizzes is the most prominent form of academic dishonesty as it is a very easy way to be discrete about it." In response, the authors note that virtue seldom requires discretion. With these comments, it appears that students recognize that these three behaviors qualify as academic dishonesty.

### Analyses and Interpretation

The survey comprises three distinct batteries of questions examining academic dishonesty. Aggregated variables are created from each battery of questions as separate measures of academic dishonesty. Responses to the three batteries differed. While many students admitted to cheating when asked directly, the proportion of affirmative responses to unauthorized assistance is larger. When students are asked to identify behaviors associated with academic dishonesty the proportion of students engaging in academic dishonesty increases yet again. Table 4 summarizes these differences. *Cheat* (75.3 percent) combines respondents that acknowledge *cheating* in class or outside class when asked directly. The proportion (75.3 percent) of respondents that acknowledge *academic dishonesty* when asked directly about cheating is comparable to other published results (Baird, 1980; Davis et al., 1992; McCabe, 2005; Slobogin, 2002;). *Unauthorized Assistance* (82.9 percent)

combines respondents that acknowledge receiving or providing unauthorized assistance. *Behaviors* (89.3 percent) reflects the proportion of respondents that admit to at least one of the ten recognized behaviors of academic dishonesty. The most broadly defined aggregate measure of academic dishonesty, *Cheat All*, reflects the proportion ( $259/275 = 94.2$  percent) of respondents that acknowledged academic dishonesty with an affirmative response to any question indicative of cheating that is included among the three batteries of questions. This study does not utilize *Cheat All* in the empirical analysis, but the aggregate measure offers perspective to the extensive admission of academic dishonesty. In short, students admit to cheating in one category (actions) but not in another (when asked directly). However, and more importantly, this study examines the possibility that context (semantics, environment, and role) may matter.

The constructed aggregate variables range from 75.3 to 89.3 percent of respondents conceding to academic dishonesty directly or indirectly by admitting to behavior widely recognized as academic dishonesty. Table 5 reveals that the three aggregate measures are positively correlated with all three correlations between .41 and .45. They are statistically significant at the 1 percent level of significance. The empirical component of this study is motivated by the observed differences between the three aggregate measures. The empirical analysis examines the differences in the aggregate measures and component questions of the three batteries of questions.

The survey responses represent matched pairs reported as proportions. The question of interest is whether the proportions differ. Following Agresti (2007), this study reports 95% Wald confidence intervals for each comparison. A confidence interval that does not include zero indicates that the proportions very likely differ.

Survey questions distinguish cheating and unauthorized assistance (semantics), in and outside a classroom (environment), and providing and receiving (role). Wald confidence intervals are calculated to assess the probability that the proportion of respondents answering these questions differ. Table 6 summarizes the calculations of Wald confidence intervals. To preview the results that follow, the findings of this study are highly suggestive that respondents do not interpret the terms *cheat* and *unauthorized assistance*

## Undergraduate Academic Dishonesty *continued*

equivalently when presented as part of a survey that clearly addresses academic dishonesty. Specific results are discussed presently.

Two comparisons isolate use of distinct terms, semantics. When comparing the proportion of respondents admitting to cheating in class (.27) and the proportion admitting to (receiving or providing) unauthorized assistance in class (.43), the confidence interval around the difference of sample proportion (-.16) reveals that the probability of a “yes” response was 0.10502 to 0.22225 lower to admit to cheating in class than unauthorized assistance in class. The 95% confidence interval does not include zero, indicating that it is very likely that the proportions differ. Similarly, when comparing the proportion of respondents admitting to cheating outside class (.75) and the proportion admitting to (receiving or providing) unauthorized assistance outside class (.81), the confidence interval around the difference of sample proportion (-.06) reveals that the probability of a “yes” response was 0.11823 to 0.01268 lower for cheat outside class than unauthorized assistance outside class. Again, the 95% confidence interval does not include zero, indicating that it is very likely that the proportions differ. These findings are consistent with the expectation that respondents will report cheating less than academic dishonesty.

Environment, in or outside class, is expected to influence academic dishonesty. Previous studies suggest that expectations of detection outside class may be perceived as lower, so students may be more inclined to engage academic dishonesty outside of the classroom (Genereux & McLeod, 1995; Gerdeman, 2000; McCabe & Trevino, 1996). The survey asks respondents whether they have cheated in or outside class. Similarly, the survey asks respondents about unauthorized assistance in and outside class. We calculate 95% Wald confidence intervals to assess the probability that the proportion of respondents affirming cheating in and outside class and unauthorized assistance in and outside class differ.

The results presented in Table 6 reveal that Environment, in or outside class, matters when students respond to questions specifically referencing cheating. Two comparisons isolate Environment, in and outside class. When comparing the proportion of respondents admitting to cheating in class (.27) and the proportion

admitting to cheating outside class (.75), the confidence interval around the difference of sample proportion (.48) reveals that the probability of a “yes” response was 0.419255 to 0.540745 higher for cheat outside class than cheat in class. The 95% confidence interval does not include zero, indicating that it is very likely that the proportions differ. Similarly, when comparing the proportion admitting to unauthorized assistance in class (.43) and the proportion admitting unauthorized assistance outside class (.81), the confidence interval around the difference of sample proportion (-.38) reveals the probability of a “yes” response was 0.4435 to 0.32013 lower for unauthorized assistance in class than unauthorized assistance outside class. Similar findings occur when analyzing providing and receiving unauthorized assistance in and outside class. These findings support the expectation that students acknowledge academic dishonesty more outside the classroom than in it. These findings are presented in Table 6.

Academic dishonesty is not always a solitary pursuit. On occasion, confederates may engage academic dishonesty. If so, schemes may involve collaborators receiving assistance from accomplices providing assistance. The role, receiving assistance or providing assistance, may matter if students do not view providing and receiving assistance equally in terms of academic dishonesty. Studies find that helping a friend is a common reason for cheating (Chapman et al., 2004; Franklyn-Stokes & Newstead, 1995; Genereux & McLeod, 1995; Rettinger & Kramer, 2009). Rettinger and Kramer (2009) explicitly distinguish between “giving and receiving illicit information” (p. 296) to find that the role influences academic dishonesty. The survey developed for the present study asks respondents whether they received (N=182) or provided (N=214) unauthorized assistance. Table 6 presents 95% Wald confidence intervals comparing responses specific to the respondent’s Role when acknowledging unauthorized assistance.

The survey asks four questions specific to receiving and providing unauthorized assistance in or outside class. Two aggregate variables are constructed to reflect receiving and providing unauthorized assistance regardless of environment (in or outside class). When comparing the proportion of respondents admitting to receiving unauthorized assistance (.66) and the proportion

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admitting to providing unauthorized assistance (.78), the confidence interval around the difference of sample proportion (-.12) reveals that the probability of a “yes” response was 0.16983 to 0.0629 lower for unauthorized assistance received than unauthorized assistance provided. In this instance, the 95% confidence interval does not include zero, indicating that the proportions very likely differ. Similar findings result when comparing providing to receiving unauthorized assistance in and outside class. These findings support the expectation that students report providing unauthorized assistance more than receiving it overall, in the classroom, and outside the classroom. These findings are presented in Table 6.

These results support the contention that providing unauthorized assistance, regardless of environment, may be justified under an alternative behavioral code that elevates cooperation, assistance, and generosity. In contrast, receiving unauthorized assistance may be more difficult to dismiss as academic dishonesty because the individual is acutely aware of benefitting from another. These findings support the expectation that students acknowledge providing unauthorized assistance (N=214) more than receiving it (N=182).

The survey presents behaviors for students to consider. Ten of the thirteen behaviors are clear acts of academic dishonesty; the remaining three are not. Interestingly, these three behaviors were the most frequently identified by respondents. Accordingly, 95% Wald confidence intervals were calculated for each of the ten behaviors associated with academic dishonesty paired with these three behaviors. Table 6 reports the findings. Not a single confidence interval includes zero indicating that the proportions very likely differ. This finding supports the inclusion of the three behaviors often recognized as acceptable behaviors and demonstrates heightened student engagement with the survey. Moreover, these findings suggest that the sample distinguishes generally accepted behaviors from the academically dishonest behaviors.

### Discussion

This study uses survey data revealing that more than 94 percent of respondents admit to cheating, unauthorized assistance, or a behavior clearly associated with academic dishonesty. Consistent with previous surveys, three-quarters of the sample admitted to

cheating when asked directly. This study provides empirical evidence of systematic differences in student perceptions of academic dishonesty specific to Semantics (cheating and unauthorized assistance); Environment (in class and outside class); and Role (provide and receive). The empirical results offer further insight into the academic dishonesty phenomenon. Similar to many previous studies, the present study does not assess the frequency, magnitude, nor the material impact of academic dishonesty. In addition to the opportunities for future research presented throughout the Results section, subsequent research specific to an estimation of the magnitude and impact of academic dishonesty is needed to contextualize the significance and meaning of academic dishonesty.

This study finds that students admit to academic dishonesty outside the classroom more than in the classroom. Undoubtedly, students assign a lower likelihood of detection outside the classroom than in the classroom. Students’ verbatim responses to an open-ended question support this suggestion. However, it is also reasonable to suggest that conflicting academic, social, and cultural norms are more likely to collide outside class and that alternative codes of behavior are elevated and considered outside class. Intuitively, one can imagine that taking an exam in class triggers an elevation of academic norms and the corresponding academic code of behavior above competing social or cultural norms and the corresponding alternative codes of behavior that exist outside a class. Accordingly, one might anticipate that cheating might be more common in courses that feature take-home exams, in part, because students are not present in an environment that establishes the dominance of academic norms over social and cultural norms and the corresponding code of academic behavior.

The empirical findings support the existing evidence that students view receiving and providing unauthorized assistance differently. It may be that receiving assistance is more difficult to acknowledge than providing assistance is difficult to admit on an anonymous survey; however, given previous research, this possibility seems unlikely given the willingness to confess to academic dishonesty more generally. Alternatively, students may acknowledge behavior widely recognized as academic dishonesty yet perceive the behavior positively as altruistic, friendly,

## Undergraduate Academic Dishonesty *continued*

and helpful – behaviors that most institutions celebrate. This alternative possibility is evidence of cognitive dissonance associated with competing social norms and practices. The empirical results demonstrate that the role of the individual matters in the perception of academic dishonesty. Providing unauthorized assistance may *not* necessarily be viewed as cheating if it is rationalized to represent positive behavior. The survey invited respondents to share thoughts or comments. The verbatim responses to the open-ended question support the expectation that students distinguish receiving from providing assistance. Moreover, the verbatim responses offer qualitative evidence supporting the assertion that students face competing codes of behavior. Verbatim responses are presented below with minimal editing for clarity:

- People like to help others out.
- Helping my friends.
- We are in this together so no one should fail.
- This campus has a very "open" environment based on mutual trust and desire to help one another. It may not always be the moral thing.
- Trying to help fellow classmates/under classmen by giving resources.

### Implications and Prescriptions

Embracing the notion that research ought to have practical application, we present prescriptions specific to reducing academic dishonesty. If one chooses to ignore the nuance and subtlety of academic dishonesty addressed by this study, one might act on the finding that students participate in academic dishonesty more outside the classroom. Accordingly, the results suggest that faculty and institutions sincerely concerned with academic dishonesty ought to reduce the proportion of graded assignments and assessments completed outside class in favor of graded assessments completed in class. For disciplines and classes for which work completed outside the classroom is an essential component of the learning experience, the prescription can be modified to reduce the overall weight of assessments completed outside class to reduce the expected benefit motivating

academic dishonesty. This prescription violates the common recommendation to reduce the stress and pressure students experience having to complete a number of heavily weighted exams. As with any choice, a trade-off exists, but it is unreasonable to conclude that the pressure to receive high grades is allayed by reducing or limiting heavily weighted exams. Indeed, the proverbial unintended consequence may result when students engage in more academic dishonesty given the opportunity outside class, a response we are inclined to identify as a substitution effect. In the absence of institutional commitment to reducing academic dishonesty, a collective action problem likely undermines the effort of individual faculty who must monitor, enforce, and prosecute academic dishonesty to alter the cost benefit calculation that seemingly encourages academic dishonesty with impunity.

For those who recognize the nuance and subtlety of academic dishonesty, institutional policy initiatives are likely inappropriate, with the exception of an exceptionally well-considered honor code that embraces the existence of competing behavioral codes of conduct that are situationally determined. The alternative may be to harness the positive behaviors associated with competing codes of behavior to encourage collegial learning environments, while simultaneously leveraging the spatial cues in class to maintain the integrity of assessment. In practice, faculty will permit collaboration outside class, but closely monitor in class assessments. Instructional faculty members will have to assign an appropriate weight to graded assignments completed in and outside class. The determining criteria may be a simple algebraic relation expressing the extent that a faculty member, department, school, college, or university is willing to inflate student grades based on graded work completed collaboratively.

If reducing academic dishonesty is desired, verbatim responses to an open-ended question on the survey offer qualitative evidence supporting the prescription to bring assessment into a monitored classroom environment. Student verbatim responses are presented below without editing; however parenthetical comments are added:

- If homework is ungraded, would be less likely to copy any answers for a higher score

## Undergraduate Academic Dishonesty *continued*

- It is a hard thing to prevent but with diligent watching you can prevent it
- Students only find the need to cheat when they are lazy or the professor does not teach very well
- Most online exams/classes I've taken rarely restrict using external resources to help with assignments or tests. (Are open note exams a concession to the online environment?)
- All assignments should be in class to decrease academic dishonesty
- Everyone wants an edge so long as they don't get caught. Work smarter not harder pal.
- This also depends on the teacher/course. Easy if you think you can get away with it.
- Even though I replied yes to many things, the assistance received on exams was very slim
- Most if not all yes responses pertain to homework assignments
- It is easier to cheat on online quizzes than it is on paper quizzes. Provide more paper and less online.
- It's easy to do and available everywhere
- Anything that is "out of class" (arrow pointing up) the chance of cheating. In class work people rarely cheat. old exams + materials give me a better understanding + help me learn

Student verbatim comments to an open-ended question indicate that academic dishonesty outside the classroom occurs because it can. Moreover, the student verbatim comments reveal that academic dishonesty is, in part, contextual and that environment matters. Outside classrooms, the expected benefits overwhelm the risk-adjusted expected costs of detection and enforcement. This study offers nuance to the cost-benefit explanation, namely competing norms are more likely to collide outside classrooms. Although, beyond the scope of

this study, applying these findings to distance learning suggests that academic dishonesty can be expected to worsen in the environment. Further research is needed to explore this possibility.

The survey results confirm that academic dishonesty is pervasive for this sample. As such, efforts to reduce academic dishonesty require careful attention. Cialdini (1981) distinguishes descriptive from injunctive norms. Descriptive norms reflect what most people do. Injunctive norms represent what most people approve or disapprove. Injunctive norms address what should be done rather than what is done. When seeking to reduce academic dishonesty, the message must convey an injunctive norm such as, "do not cheat" or "cheating is unacceptable." However, the message will be less effective if accompanied by a descriptive norm that signals to students that cheating is commonplace and thus acceptable behavior. For example, a campaign to reduce academic dishonesty will be less effective if the "don't cheat" message reveals that 94% of students report cheating. In this instance, Cialdini might predict that cheating will increase as more students feel comfortable cheating and cheating more often. In contrast, a message that challenges the pervasiveness of academic dishonesty reinforces the injunctive norm. For example, the message, "Friends don't make friends cheat; don't cheat" assails the receiver of unauthorized assistance and empowers students to resist invitations to provide unauthorized assistance and challenges the perception that cheating is helping. When combined with a more proactive approach to educating students regarding what is and is not academic dishonesty, the opportunity to reduce academic dishonesty emerges.

### Conclusions

With 75.3 percent of the sample directly admitting to cheating, this study confirms the prevalence of academic dishonesty but offers no guidance regarding the frequency or intensity of dishonest behavior. With 82.9 percent of the sample admitting to unauthorized assistance and 89.3 percent identifying a commonly recognized behavior of academic dishonesty, the survey results reveal a disconnection suggestive of dissonance specific to cheating, unauthorized assistance and behaviors widely recognized as academic dishonesty.

## Undergraduate Academic Dishonesty *continued*

The survey results are consistent with previously published research. Key findings from the empirical analysis reveal that dissonance exists between different terms for academic dishonesty, the environment in which academic dishonesty transpires, and the role of the respondent. When the results are considered in concert, a narrative emerges that suggests that understanding academic dishonesty requires extending the cost-benefit analysis to reflect the various costs and benefits incurred by students when not explicitly in an academic setting. While instrumental considerations are involved, the emerging narrative suggests that the interaction of the semantics, environment, and role inform a hierarchy of codes of conduct that govern the relative influence of competing codes of conduct that ultimately determine behavior. Adoption of the narrative permits a richer understanding of academic dishonesty that serves the academic and social purposes of administrators, faculty, and students. While ignorance of the law is not a viable defense in the court system, addressing mitigating circumstances is permitted. It seems that an appreciation of the nuance and subtlety of academic dishonesty would inform enlightened policy, practice and overall well-being.

If colleges and universities have sincere interest in reducing academic dishonesty, faculty and administrators must acknowledge that providing assistance differs from receiving assistance, and they must recognize that graded assignments completed outside the classroom are frequently completed by or with the assistance of others. While collaboration serves as a powerful vehicle leveraging knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) to achieve a shared objective, until KSAs are possessed, the communitarian orientation underlying well-intentioned academic dishonesty adversely affects students who forego or are denied learning opportunities however well-meaning the intentions of friends, faculty and higher education administrations may be. Ignoring, momentarily, the frequently cited social consequences of academic dishonesty, the greater tragedy is that the immediate benefits of academic dishonesty portend enduring harm for graduates who failed to acquire essential KSAs for success. More insidiously, academic dishonesty denies graduates satisfaction and confidence derived from independent learning. If higher education professes to instill a foundation to pursue lifetime learning, then ignoring academic dishonesty undermines the institutional mission and diminishes students rather than enriching them.

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Undergraduate Academic Dishonesty *continued***Table 1: Descriptive Statistics**

Characteristic	Valid Responses	Frequency	Proportion (%)*
Class	267		
Freshman		76	28.5
Sophomore		67	25.1
Junior		79	29.6
Senior		45	16.9
College	268		
Arts & Science		59	22.0
Business		104	38.8
Engineering		44	16.4
Pharmacy		61	22.8
Gender	267		
Male		140	52.4
Female		127	47.6

\* Percentages may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding.

**Table 2: “Cheat” & “Unauthorized Assistance”  
Frequency**

	Valid Responses	Frequency	Proportion (%)
Cheat			
In Class	275	73	26.6
Outside Class	275	205	74.5
Received Unauthorized Assistance			
In Class	275	65	23.6
Outside Class	275	169	61.5
Provided Unauthorized Assistance			
In Class	275	103	37.5
Outside Class	275	207	75.3

Undergraduate Academic Dishonesty *continued***Table 3: Summary of Student Behaviors**

	<b>Valid Responses</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Proportion (%)</b>
Sought Clarification	271	242	89.3
Discussed Assignment	270	207	76.7
Reviewed by Other	271	228	84.1
Copied	271	165	60.9
Plagiarized	272	69	25.4
Completed by Other	271	30	11.1
Provided Answers	272	164	60.3
Test File	272	117	43.0
Wrote Answers on "Arm"	272	29	10.7
Provided Graded Work	272	137	50.4
Received Graded Work	272	145	53.3
Electronics	272	51	18.8
Altered Graded Response	272	39	14.3

**Table 4: Aggregate Measures of Academic Dishonesty Frequencies (Proportion Responding YES)**

	<b>Valid Responses</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Proportion (%)</b>
Cheat	275	207	75.3
Unauthorized Assistance	275	228	82.9
In Class (Prov. or Rec.)	275	118	42.9
Out Class (Prov. or Rec.)	275	223	81.1
Provided (In or Out)	275	214	77.8
Received (In or Out)	275	182	66.2
Behaviors	272	243	89.3

Undergraduate Academic Dishonesty *continued***Table 5; Correlation of Aggregate Measures of Academic Dishonesty**

	Cheat	Unauthorized Assistance	Student Behaviors
<b>Cheat</b>			
Pearson Correlation	1	.434**	.411**
Sig (2-tailed)		<.001	<.001
N	275	275	272
<b>Unauthorized Assistance</b>			
Pearson Correlation		1	.448**
Sig (2-tailed)			<.001
N		275	272
<b>Student Behaviors</b>			
Pearson Correlation			1
Sig (2-tailed)			
N			272

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

**Table 6: Mean Proportions with Confidence Intervals**

Aggregate Measures	Row Variable	Marginal Proportion	Column Variable	Marginal Proportion	Difference of Sample Proportion	95% Confidence Interval
	Cheat	.75	Unauthorized Assistance	.83	-.08	(-.12746, -.02527)
	Cheat	.75	Behaviors	.89	-.14	(-.18894, -.09047)
	Behaviors	.89	Unauthorized Assistance	.83	.06	(.019302, .105698)
<b>Semantics</b>						
	Cheat (in)	.27	Unauthorized Assistance (in)	.43	-.16	(-.10502, -.22225)
	Cheat (out)	.75	Unauthorized Assistance (out)	.81	-.06	(-.11823, -.01268)
<b>Environment</b>						
	Cheat (out)	.75	Cheat (in)	.27	.48	(.419255, .540745)
	Unauthorized Assistance (in)	.43	Unauthorized Assistance (out)	.81	-.38	(-.4435, -.32013)
	Unauthorized Assistance Receive (out)	.62	Unauthorized Assistance Receive (in)	.24	.38	(.310316, .446048)
	Unauthorized Assistance Provide (out)	.75	Unauthorized Assistance Provide (in)	.38	.37	(.314966, .441398)

Undergraduate Academic Dishonesty *continued*

<b>Role</b>						
Unauthorized Assistance Receive	.66	Unauthorized Assistance Provide	.78	-.12	(-.16983, -.0629)	
Unauthorized Assistance Provide (in)	.38	Unauthorized Assistance Receive (in)	.24	.14	(.081724, .19464)	
Unauthorized Assistance Provide (out)	.75	Unauthorized Assistance Receive (out)	.62	.13	(.080831, .195533)	
<b>Behaviors</b>						
Clarification	.89	Copied	.61	.28	(.219034, .351336)	
Clarification	.89	Plagiarized	.25	.64	(.580577, .703555)	
Clarification	.89	Other Completed	.11	.78	(.72908, .833883)	
Clarification	.89	Provided Answers	.60	.29	(.230156, .35287)	
Clarification	.89	Test File	.43	.46	(.398888, .531001)	
Clarification	.89	Wrote on Arm or Desk	.11	.78	(.734031, .837924)	
Clarification	.89	Provided Graded Work	.50	.39	(.325435, .456852)	
Clarification	.89	Received Graded Work	.53	.36	(.296708, .426539)	
Clarification	.89	Electronic Device	.19	.70	(.650641, .766334)	
Clarification	.89	Altered Graded Response	.14	.75	(.696455, .8017)	
Discussed	.77	Copied	.61	.16	(.082245, .222588)	
Discussed	.77	Plagiarized	.25	.52	(.443896, .585733)	
Discussed	.77	Other Completed	.11	.66	(.595937, .720048)	
Discussed	.77	Provided Answers	.60	.17	(.094256, .239078)	
Discussed	.77	Test File	.43	.34	(.254478, .412189)	
Discussed	.77	Wrote on Arm or Desk	.10	.67	(.598716, .72721)	
Discussed	.77	Provided Graded Work	.50	.27	(.188816, .33711)	
Discussed	.77	Received Graded Work	.54	.23	(.157123, .302136)	
Discussed	.77	Electronic Device	.19	.58	(.512096, .64346)	
Discussed	.77	Altered Graded Response	.14	.63	(.55916, .685285)	
Reviewed	.84	Copied	.61	.23	(.160853, .298406)	
Reviewed	.84	Plagiarized	.26	.58	(.523784, .649648)	

Undergraduate Academic Dishonesty *continued*

Reviewed	.84	Other Completed	.11	.73	(.671891, .787368)
Reviewed	.84	Provided An- swers	.61	.23	(.167212, .305112)
Reviewed	.84	Test File	.43	.41	(.338902, .480286)
Reviewed	.84	Wrote on Arm or Desk	.11	.73	(.674296, .794339)
Reviewed	.84	Provided Graded Work	.50	.34	(.271342, .407625)
Reviewed	.84	Received Graded Work	.53	.31	(.239113, .380813)
Reviewed	.84	Electronic Device	.19	.65	(.592025, .714248)
Reviewed	.84	Altered Graded Response	.14	.70	(.639925, .754909)

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## ESSAYS

# Toward the Co-Construction of Assessment: Equity, Language Ideology and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy at the Community College

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## Abstract

Many institutional assessment frameworks endorse the Standard Language Myth (de Cuba & Slocum, 2020). Yet, linguistic research has established that “no variety of a language is inherently better in terms of its logic, its systematic structure, or its ability to express creative and complex thought,” (Reaser et al. 2017, p. 3). In this reflective essay, I examine how I encountered an educational structure of assessment that constructed obstacles to culturally sustaining instruction and describe how I tried to co-construct a new framework with students. Paris and Alim (2017) argue that culturally sustaining practices (CSP) must be a part of a shifting culture of power that challenges White middle-class linguistic, literate and cultural skills and ways of being. I wanted to decenter the Standard Language Myth, co-construct a process with students that might challenge hegemonic knowledge production, and make space for multiple ways of being. I found a tendency among educators to see the rubric as a neutral or objective tool. I realized that it would become necessary to break the mold of what a rubric meant to share this power with students. It is impossible to recognize and implement culturally sustaining pedagogies without engaged dialogue with the people who experience and practice culture in their own lives. This includes our peers in our structured assessment environments. Our assessment strategies must be radial; they must include student’s lived experiences and varied ways of expression throughout the entire educational process.

## Key terms.

Equity, Assessment, Rubrics, Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies, High-Impact-Practices, Learning Communities, Threshold Concepts, Community Colleges.

## Knowledge Production

I was sitting at my computer organizing my course for the upcoming semester when I received an email about an institution-wide assessment plan. A department representative had been chosen as the assessor and they had solicited assessment rubrics specific to written and verbal communication for specified courses. I groaned aloud as I realized that the course I had been assigned coincided with this college-wide liberal arts self-study, and that I had to assess the learning outcome of “supporting conclusions with evidence.”

Over the next two months, many emails were exchanged in what at times felt like a virtual pinball game. At first, the resistance from many of my colleagues was focused on the timing of the assessment. Many felt that this was not the right time to conduct an assessment and joked there might never be a good time. Others shared that they did not use rubrics, so they did not know how they could be helpful. A few mentioned that they were not grading students in the traditional sense, so they could not suddenly develop a new practice. The assessor persisted and shared examples of rubrics and repeated the plea for us to develop a common rubric. There were numerous exchanges over several more weeks and there was a lot of discussion about what type of rubric would be best for this sort of assessment. Ultimately, the assessor provided a single rubric to review which emphasized standard American English usage. The institutional assessment environment that I was operating in perpetuated a myth that there was only one right way to speak and write English.

The context for developing a common assessment was, in this case, an example of latent language ideology

## Equity, Language Ideology and Culture *continued*

because it endorsed the Standard Language Myth as described by Lippi-Green (2012). This is the belief that there exists one proper form of English that is superior to all other varieties of English, and that any deviance from the standard form represents a linguistic deficit, or a lesser form of the language (de Cuba and Slocum, 2020). There is no scientific basis for this erroneous belief. An abundance of linguistic research has established that “no variety of a language is inherently better in terms of its logic, its systematic structure, or its ability to express creative and complex thought,” (Reaser et al. 2017, p. 3).

I began with a broad inquiry: How does an educational structure of assessment construct obstacles to culturally sustaining instruction and what can be done about it? By structure, I mean the interpretive context of the situation including the unequal power relationships over time. In this case, the power of the administrators influenced the assessor who in turn attempted to influence the faculty. There are also ongoing unequal power relations among the faculty based on rank, experience, and influence. The structure also includes: the set of positions that each of us actually put forward in any given moment, the possible actions each of us can take at any given time in the assessment process, the possible outcomes as each of us tries to influence the process, the amount of information available and the type presented, as well as the costs and benefits for chosen actions and those not taken (Ostrom, 1986).

I am mostly focused on the widespread use of the Standard Language Myth, as a vehicle for assessment, and as a form of domination in these structures. The imposition of metrics from above in the grading process is an example of an inherently unequal structure. The costs for resisting this structure are high; resistance involves additional work, confrontation at meetings, and the possibility of future costs from the assessor, colleagues, and administrators. The benefits for going along with the assessor include limited work, appearing to be supportive of the assessment process, and getting back to things that are more important to the faculty member. This structure creates a context where any resistance to the Standard Language Myth will be seen as rebellion against the process.

The implementation of the common assessment rubric in my experience both explicitly referenced the

Standard Language Myth and implied that the educator holds a special privilege of knowing the proper usage of English. Together, this assessment structure encourages the faculty to police student errors. This is problematic to anyone interested in equitable teaching and learning. The common-sense nature of this ideology is particularly relevant to operationalizing equity across programs. Inequitable assessment practices will yield inequitable teaching practices. As I went through the assessment process, I first attempted to deconstruct the inequitable assessment structure and then tried to reconstruct a more equitable assessment practice. I wanted to see whether my own individual experience with culturally responsive instruction might be influential in my resistance to the Standard Language Myth promoted within my assessment group.

### **Framework: Culturally Responsive Teaching, Sustaining Practices, and BlackCrit**

I have written about culturally responsive teaching (CRT) as it relates to the implementation of technology (Leggett, 2016), community-based projects (Leggett, Wen & Chatman, 2018), and critical media literacy (Leggett & King-Reilly, 2020). In each of those pieces, I have tried to provide a roadmap for the implementation of CRT as a pragmatic shift toward more equitable and inclusive learning environments. I used experimental methods to analyze the impact of CRT in response to emerging problems. I believe that in each pragmatic implementation there were also theoretical insights that were developed that can expand our understanding of the co-production of knowledge.

This co-production of knowledge is important to work up against the more pernicious production of hegemonic knowledge centered on the educator as gatekeeper or master. Hegemonic knowledge production is that which sustains irreconcilable division of particularistic experience against general collective truths and abstractions constructed to contain those experiences (Ewick & Silbey, 1998). In this case, the educator as gatekeeper is taken to be a common-sense rule: it is the job of the educator to assimilate students into White middle class standard of speaking and writing English.

CRT decenters the power of two sources of hegemonic knowledge production: the educator as knowledge-

## Equity, Language Ideology and Culture *continued*

holder and the more mysterious knowledge produced by objective, undefined sources held out to be authoritative. However, Paris and Alim (2017) argue that CRT does not do enough to explicitly support the goals of maintenance and social critique. Instead, culturally sustaining practices (CSP) must be a part of a shifting culture of power that challenges White middle-class linguistic, literate, and cultural skills, and other ways of being. Simply put, CSP decenters hegemonic knowledge production, but it also makes room for multiethnic knowledge co-construction.

Hegemonic knowledge production is also related to a persistently stubborn historical problem in education: the policing of students. Many times, this policing targets students of color through affective behavior including attendance policies, dress codes, and other ways of being in the classroom. This policing can also take on a linguistic component particularly when it advances the needs, self-interests, and racial privileges of whites (Baker-Bell, 2020).

It is likely that these policing practices are not intentional nor driven by ill motives. Rather, they are the legacy of most educators' own experiences as well as common practices and routines across a department or institution. For example, most of us have experienced an educator or family member who was quick to correct our speech or point out a flaw. Critical feedback is not necessarily harmful; however, when coupled with historical systemic inequities and situational unequal power relations, educators should proceed cautiously and with some reflection. It is too easy to move into a mindset whereby we identify deficits in students who engage in behaviors, including academic, that are different from our own. Assessment practices need to move beyond policing, decenter hegemonic knowledge production, and make room for multiethnic perspectives.

Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995a, 1995b) presented strategies whereby educators could move away from a deficit mindset to that of recognizing and empowering difference. Theoretically, this educational framework would allow for an environment where “students can achieve academically...demonstrate cultural competence...and who can both understand and critique the existing social order” (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, p. 474). Part of the ability to critique the existing social order requires educators to facilitate an environment

where dominant language is critically analyzed among intersections of unequal power relationships. The educator must construct assessment practices with students that are then measured against this ideal to be considered truly equitable.

Paris (2012) argued CRT should ask if a critical stance toward and critical action against unequal power relations is resulting from our research and practice. This inquiry has provided a turn in CRT toward methods that are culturally sustaining practices (CSP): that which conceptualizes teaching and learning that seeks to perpetuate and foster linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of schooling for positive social transformation (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014, 2017). Thus, it becomes important for educators, especially those of us who were educated under and benefitted from a white-dominant system, to reflect upon our assessment practices. As a white male with educational privilege, I needed to construct an equitable assessment process that would work to sustain multiple ways of knowing and would actively resist a mythical standard while also acknowledging my relative powerlessness to my colleagues, assessor, and administrators.

Over the course of my nearly twenty years of educational work, I have engaged in many difficult conversations with other educators. In the last several years of thinking and talking about linguistic justice, I am often reminded that this can be a necessarily confrontational process. Repeatedly, educators insisted that the Standard Language Myth was non-negotiable, and was necessary to prepare students for what those educators perceive to be the real world. Social scientists have long observed the effect a dominant group can maintain over the minds of the majority as being common sense, natural, and necessary even when those socially constructed ideals harm significant parts of the larger population and may even be absorbed by those most marginalized and disempowered (Foucault, 1980; Freire & Macedo, 1987). It should not be surprising then that social theory describing hegemonic behavior is empirically observed in our day-to-day assessment routines. I believe that those of us who are most likely to be biased toward mainstream cultural standards must confront this reality and work toward altering those habits.

## Equity, Language Ideology and Culture *continued*

I think it is important to acknowledge that this is not a neutral endeavor; it is necessarily a political project. In a society built upon anti-black racism and rooted in slavery, it is necessary to oppose white mainstream English with Black critical theory (Dumas & Ross, 2016). Baker-Bell (2020, p. 19) explained, “in relation to Black Language, BlackCrit helps to show how linguistic violence, persecution, dehumanization, and marginalization that Black Language-speakers experience in schools and in everyday life are informed by anti-Blackness.” The dialectic of resistance and the legacy of domination are theoretically necessary to construct a sufficient condition of equitable change.

What is more, resistance must be structured by the equitable educator as a purposeful activity. As educators, we can construct a space, with our students, that both values their ways of existing in the world and that resists dominance through persistent forms such as assessment practices that unfairly police students for being different. bell hooks (1994), explained that the power of black speech is not simply an act of resistance, but it also forges a space for alternative cultural production and alternative epistemologies - different ways of thinking and knowing crucial to creating a counter-hegemonic worldview.

I have used two different ways of applying BlackCrit to assessment rubrics in my practice. The first involved confronting the language of the rubric itself; in what ways does the language we are using police or demean different ways of being in the world? The second involved deconstructing the process of assessment using the rubric as a mechanism for dialogue; in what ways can assessment practices be shared and what responsibilities do educators need to consider when providing critical feedback? Both methods must involve a preliminary stance toward self-reflection, but it also must include a secondary step of inviting students into a dialogue around that reflective process.

In the sections that follow, I examine how culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogies might use rubrics to shift the focus away from the rubric as a panacea. This shift will require one to think outside the box when it comes to rubrics. I invite readers to follow me as I discuss the construction of the rubrics and to decenter the focus on the rubric itself. I think this is important because I am concerned about the competing contexts that structure

the construction of rubrics. I aim to bring attention to what these contexts tell us about the use of rubrics and how that discourse might unknowingly replicate conversations rooted in Standard English as a dominant source of knowledge production even when we believe we are attending to Blackcrit and CSP.

### **Rubrics As A Common Assessment Practice: My Journey**

I think it is helpful to provide a reflection of my journey as I approached assessment and rubrics critically. As part of two IRB-approved studies (2019-0743KCC and 2002-0052KCC), I have been examining how students engaged with concepts in my discipline, law and society, within a specialized educational program, criminal justice. I am also a member of a college-wide diversity, equity and inclusion team examining common educational practices at our institution. In particular, I am charged with examining cultural bias in the production of syllabi at our institution as well as teaching practices that stem from the syllabus including course materials, assignments, late work policies, and assessment.

I am not a linguist nor a composition instructor. However, I am interested in how legal language impacts the students I work with and how they make sense of it. I also want to encourage my students to use their own voice and to express their everyday understanding of legality. I have participated in a faculty interest group that has worked on linguistic justice for the past three years to better understand these differences.

I think is also important to acknowledge that we operate in political spaces and that the common language used in institutional, program and departmental assessment practices can influence how we think about our work and how we engage in the assessment process as institutional behavior. As illustrated in the introduction, assessment projects can influence not only how we think about our own practices but can also subtly influence how we approach the project itself, whether in the form of compliance, resistance, or avoidance. Systems influence our behaviors and routines have been found to alter our perceptions in most organizational contexts; thus, how we speak can change how we work (Kegan & Lahey, 2001). Given the fact that the larger organizational structure is likely to promote the Standard Language Myth, a dedicated community of practitioners would

## Equity, Language Ideology and Culture *continued*

need to effectively work to resist or influence the larger structure to promote equitable change at a larger scale.

With that in mind, I began with an examination of the purposes of assessment rubrics. I have placed the rubrics I constructed in the appendix to allow you to review them, assess them for yourself, and to compare those referenced throughout this essay. However, I want to intentionally de-center the rubrics as objects or representational artefacts. The rubric itself is not the goal of this article. I invite you to explore the process of constructing a rubric with students as CSP instead.

A typical definition of assessment generally focuses on a systematic process to determine educational goals. As educators we tend to think of assessment in two general ways. The first approach measures students as they engage with the course concepts, assignments, and activities. In this way we are trying to measure what the student is learning and where they may be struggling. The second builds from the first in that it seeks to generalize what is going on more broadly in the course: what is working, what is not, what changes might be made. I think it is also important to acknowledge that it can be difficult to develop a rigorous assessment process while also managing the course.

Some have argued that we too often use assessment to describe merely a set of tests to measure student learning regardless of the actual outcome (Dirksen, 2011). In other words, we tend to over-value the assessment tool and lose sight of the assessment goal. The use of formative assessments, those that use information to improve instructional methods and learning strategies, are seen as ways to move past the unexamined routine of content delivery and quick tests. There are many methods of conducting formative assessments: from casual observation to verbal communication and creative expression including drawings, poetry, and performance. How assessments are conducted tend to be contingent on the training, experience, and the prerogative of the individual instructor. These practices can vary widely within a single department, discipline, or even course sections taught by many different instructors.

Common approaches to course level or discipline and department-wide assessment tend to include a variety of tools, including the rubric. The term rubric is widely

used yet not often clearly defined (Cooper & Gargan, 2011). Rubrics can be thought of most commonly today as a set of rules, categories, or guidelines that are used to evaluate learning or performance.

The strength of the rubric can be defended by its usefulness for the instructor to think carefully and critically about specific outcomes, expectations, and the steps of an assignment or task; it can also provide a roadmap for students as a less mystical criteria for success. A rubric can also facilitate learning if students are encouraged to submit multiple drafts or revise work using feedback around the use of the rubric. Holistic rubrics are used for a single element broken down into levels of achievement. For example, a thesis statement at the low end might be unoriginal or poorly constructed whereas at the high end it is clear, complex, original and represents the exemplar. Analytic rubrics involve two dimensions where multiple criteria can be assessed along a developmental line. For example, critical thinking and grammar can be broken down into adequate, competent, good, and excellent. These rubrics invite students to imagine their learning along a trajectory of development.

### Looking at the Rubrics with a Critical Eye

Rubrics are not inherently inequitable. If one were to simply begin constructing an empty table in their word processor, and then pause, they would be struck by the nearly endless possibilities regarding what to place inside the boxes. Sometimes rubrics are provided to individual faculty members or departmental committees by administrative staff. From my experience, educators more often borrowed a rubric from another colleague, an educational conference, or a professional organization. We may do so without much critical reflection especially as it relates to the Standard Language Myth. Our department assessor provided a rubric that promoted the Standard Language Myth explicitly. The rubric included the following language: *Essay is well organized and argument is well supported and developed; Essay shows command of Academic English.*

Most of us in the assessment meeting initially rejected the adoption of this rubric for our own classes. We had several conversations in the assessment meetings about equity, so we were discouraged that multiple ways of knowing were completely absent from this approach. However, most educators insisted on keeping the

## Equity, Language Ideology and Culture *continued*

language of academic, standard, or college-level writing explicitly in the rubric. These arguments were framed as needing to have a standard but failed to consider who constructs such standards or whether the standard was ever clearly defined. The conversation deviated into a debate between subjectivity and objectivity and ended with a call for additional rubrics to compare. We each agreed to provide additional examples and try to work on a common rubric during the next meeting. I decided to look for external examples that might lessen the tension between entrenched faculty members.

One of those rubrics was the Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education (VALUE) rubrics that articulate fundamental criteria for each learning outcome, with performance descriptors demonstrating progressively more sophisticated levels of attainment. The American Association of Colleges & Universities developed the rubrics for institutional-level use in evaluating and discussing student learning and have been used in a variety of disciplines (Rauschert et al., 2011). I had successfully used these rubrics in civic engagement, critical thinking, and global learning for institutional assessments in the past so I wondered how I might be able to integrate a VALUE rubric with my students that aligned with our institutional goal of measuring the ability to use evidence to support an argument.

The VALUE written communication rubric (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2009) directs attention to usage and meaning. Theoretically, this approach should encourage faculty to engage with students in a process that guides each student into a more nuanced approach to creative and complex expression over the term of the course. Students might begin drafting statements that draws upon language that sometimes impedes meaning because of errors in usage. Through multiple drafts and feedback, the student should then be able to reduce conceptual mistakes and clarify intended meaning using language that the VALUE rubric describes as graceful and skillful. This approach certainly moves away from strictly using a rubric to catch student errors in the final product, but it fails to take advantage of the power of collaboration with students in the process. It also leaves the terms graceful and skillful open to interpretation.

At the next assessment meeting faculty were showing signs of frustration and disinterest. Many had never used a rubric before and very few had participated in assessment at the institutional level. Only two of us had offered rubrics and most were now resisting the entire assessment assignment. The entrenched faculty represented two sides. The majority expressed conviction that educators had a responsibility to ensure that students wrote proper English. The minority argued that students should be able to express their own opinions without critical feedback at all. The assessor insisted on using the rubric that stressed the Standard Language Myth.

I wondered whether these two poles might be mediated. It was clear that a transition away from faculty-directed rubric design focused on errors to a more collaborative approach with students needed to include equality of linguistic diversity. My colleagues needed to see that linguistic difference was a reality, not a choice, between home or street language, and the college classroom. They also needed to be able to recognize the unequal power relationships among faculty and student; students should be empowered to engage in a dialogue with faculty about the multiplicity of linguistic options. The code-meshing approach to composition is centered around such a commitment by allowing students to write in their native language variety (Young et al., 2018).

This approach is differentiated from so-called code-switching in two major ways. First, code-meshing does not retreat from teaching about the myth of standard English; instead, it recognizes the importance of both standard and undervalued varieties in contexts beyond the classroom (Young et al., 2018). Second, through contrastive analysis, in conjunction with semantics and rhetoric (Young et al., 2018) that involves a construction of language, including multiple sources, and considers multiple audiences in a way that blends or meshes rather than translates or switches. This re-framing helps to shift the attention to the political power of usage among unequal groups by de-centering the power of error in sentence construction. In this framing, what is considered proper or appropriate cannot be limited to that of the instructor or assessor only. Students must be consulted, and educators must learn a larger contextual network for language usage. This contextual network would necessarily need to incorporate multiple ways of sharing information through language.

## Equity, Language Ideology and Culture *continued*

Athon (2019) argued that collaborative assessment practices at the classroom level - rubrics, in particular - may help to avoid unfairly penalizing those students whose home dialects most diverge from standard academic English. Equitable uses of rubrics focus on the process of writing and collaborating with students from diverse backgrounds. In addition, the co-construction of rubrics that center on critical questions about the relations between language, race and power can help facilitate dialogue within the institution that resists the Standard Language Myth. I tried to mediate the two poles by inviting students to critically engage with the rubric. This process also required that I actively listen and respond with a rubric that better aligned with their own definitions of success.

### **Breaking the Rubric as a Static, Objective, or Panacea**

Rubrics, like any other socially constructed tool, are not inherently inequitable but the language used in the rubric might be inequitable. A common inequitable practice among educators using a rubric is the use of prescriptive rules including grammar or standard academic English (de Cuba and Slocum, 2020). In many instances the instructor explicitly referred to a standard in the rubric itself. Sometimes the phrasing states college-level, academic, mainstream, correct, or appropriate language or usage. Other times the standard is presented in negative form meaning that the educator lowered grades or scores that they attributed as errors without the student being aware. Thus, the choice of language in the rubric itself, while conscious or not, represents a deficit approach—what students lack in comparison to an imagined norm—instead of capturing different ways of knowing.

I am not suggesting that rubrics should not be instructive or provide critical feedback. I am suggesting that rubrics are not a panacea. Simply articulating to students that they may speak in their own voice or use African American English, for example, does not itself constitute a challenge to hegemonic knowledge production.

For example, Hankerson (2022) used a rubric from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Writing Assessment to measure whether writing instruction for African American Language speaking

students would be more productive if it used critical language assessment as a lens for problematizing and challenging White, monolingual, middle-class language norms permeating U.S. writing curricula. Hankerson found evidence that it did; however, the rubric was used by three college writing instructors to analyze students' writing ability before and after the instruction. The rubric used a rating score of competent as the highest rating and limited as the lowest. This is no doubt a useful tool for instructors within the discipline, but no evidence was given that suggested that the power of assessment was shared or co-constructed with students. In one student exit interview from the article there is evidence of a lack of clarity, "I was not sure what it was going to be about but it seemed interesting." While I think the study provided a valuable approach to instruction for African American Language speaking students, I do not believe it is evidence of an assessment model that dismantles patterns and forms of systemic inequities.

This was not self-evident in my own journey either. As I searched for rubrics that were more inclusive and responsive to the students, I mostly found a tendency to see the rubric as a neutral or objective tool. I realized that it would become necessary to break the mold of what a rubric meant to share this power with students. From my review of the literature and from practical experience, rubrics seem to be constructed either in isolation or through a departmental or disciplinarian professional development exercise. While these are valuable, there is room for improvement. It would be better if rubrics were co-constructed with students and with other educators to respond to learning in practice.

I opted for a visual aid (Rubric 1.1 provided in the Appendix) that served as a starting point in the collaborative process. I tried to respond to the conceptual challenges students were evidencing in the first drafts of a low-stakes writing assignment. I had to become comfortable with the idea of breaking the rubric and letting a more fluid, interactive process emerge. This approach deviated from usage error but also did not explicitly focus on either standard language ideology or code-meshing. Instead, I wanted a visual that would help guide students through the process of communicating their ideas about the course threshold concepts.

## Equity, Language Ideology and Culture *continued*

At the first meeting, students were eager to discuss how to move from the first stage to the second. I had not anticipated this level of engagement. I thought that students would focus on the final stage. I assumed they would want to know how to get an A and move on. Instead, they were curious about how they might develop over the rest of the semester and were curious as to whether this would make them better students. For example, TM<sup>1</sup> shared that “this way of grading doesn’t punish me for being a non-native speaker.”

Dialogue around the rubric was organized over email, one-on-one interactions with students, and small group writing workshops over Zoom to address their collective questions. I also included a Google form at the end of the process to record their remaining questions and reflections about the process. The original assignment required students to write about an issue they were most concerned about, explain partisan positions on the issue, and to predict which solution was most likely. When we reached the second stage of development, where we talked about what an over-generalization was, students disclosed how much they disliked the assignment. I think that was a critical and transformative moment for me as I scrambled to respond to this collective resistance.

Most students expressed being uncomfortable with the form of the writing assignment: it seemed too informal as a hypothetical letter to their future self. I had intended that this assignment would be low-stakes and familiar to them as if in the form of a diary entry. I had hoped that this approach would deepen self-awareness. However, students did not make these connections overall. They argued this is not how they typically write anymore and instead they use memes and other forms of expression common to social media. Students shared over email that they thought because the assignment was in letter format that they did not need to write it like a typical college paper. The students suggested we transition from the conceptual rubric to something more formal. I would not have been able to respond to students in this way if I had simply adopted the departmental rubric.

I reached out to a colleague who teaches linguistics at another community college whom I had met through a professional development working group on linguistic justice. She offered a rubric that seemed to address our

desire to incorporate student preference for language variety and a visual guide for writing improvement through drafting. This rubric included language that indicated grammar, vocabulary and language choice were appropriate to the audience and occasion and that errors do not interfere with comprehension.

I shared this rubric with students, and they struggled to read it at first. They were not sure how the columns and rows related. One student commented favorably about the references to use evidence in a logical way. “This is like my speech class,” the student said and compared their speech to the writing assignment. The other students started to make comparisons to high school and other classes they were taking. We talked about how to read a rubric and the students suggested I make a rubric that was more closely related to the work in our class.

I decided on an amended rubric approach constructed with students (Rubric 1.2 provided in the Appendix). I shared a draft of the amended rubric with students several weeks before their final writing assignments were due. This rubric built upon the previous sessions with students to focus on research-based solutions to political problems. We discussed grammar and usage challenges. Many students were English language learners and were very worried that they would be graded harshly even though they felt they understood the concepts. Other students expressed enthusiasm that this class would be focused on how well they researched instead of whether they were a perfect writer. Together, we constructed this rubric that alleviated their fears and embraced their communication goals. We spent nearly an hour over two meetings to negotiate the final language of this rubric.

### **Toward an Equitable Framework for Rubric Co-Construction**

In this article, I have tried to demonstrate how dialogue with students can be effective in constructing a process whereby language diversity is respected and that de-centers the final writing product as the tantamount object for assessment. Throughout my assessment rubric journey, I wanted to decenter the Standard Language Myth, co-construct a process with students that might challenge hegemonic knowledge production, and make space for multiethnic ways of being. I also wanted to be able to take a critical stance as a practitioner and

<sup>1</sup> Names of students have been changed to protect their identities.

## Equity, Language Ideology and Culture *continued*

to theorize how critical action might be pragmatically implemented within my own institution while acknowledging the levels of unequal power relations. In this section, I analyze how this process affected the students and to what extent that helped me with my goals.

One student, BB, shared this in the final exam reflection:

“I will always remember all of the help and how patient all of you guys were for my first semester of college in which I was nervous for. I learned a lot from this class because I’m not really into politics but this class made me do very deep research and it helped me understand a lot about politics.”

BB and other students expressed relief that they got to focus on core concepts of the course while learning how to develop their writing skills at the same time. Another student, ZM, confirmed the value of an experiential process of learning: “I will remember conversating with some of the professors which helped me and the lessons I learned some were quite interesting.” These two students, in a stage of development, were able to identify the process of college level expectations, learn new concepts and produce facts, and express themselves in familiar ways. Many of them shared that this kind of meta-cognitive experience was new for them.

I am aware that there are some educators who might be uncomfortable with the language usage in the quotations above. My goal throughout this project has been to mediate between the strict adherents to the Standard Language Myth and those that argue for dismantling it altogether. My intention is to provide a path away from policing students, particular those students who come from experiences that do not neatly conform to white, mainstream cultural ideas. I believe this will be necessarily messy and imperfect.

Composition scholar Asao B. Inoue (2017) argued that one key component of antiracist pedagogy is considering the ways in which traditional assessment practices promote racist ideologies because they are based in monocultural and monolingual norms. Inoue urges us to reconsider what counts as error in writing

assessment so that we might make space for students’ diverse linguistic abilities, thereby embracing more antiracist and culturally aware perspectives. Without this approach students like ZM and BB are likely to perceive an educational environment as one where they don’t belong.

Relatedly, Linguist Suresh Canagarajah (2003) called for composition classes to abandon the notion of a single, standard language in favor of helping students develop competency in various codes and discourses. Like Inoue, Canagarajah advocated for expanded notions of what counts as valid and valuable language within the classroom, a call that supports both antiracist pedagogy and CSP. Additionally, scholars involved in antiracist work such as Rasha Diab, Thomas Ferrel, Neil Simpkins and Beth Godbee (2016) urged us to value personal, first-hand narratives by people of color as legitimate sources of knowledge, a move that aligns with CSP’s emphasis on students’ lived experiences. This means that the writing students do in college are likely to first represent their own lived experience. This should be captured in the learning process and in assessment strategies.

CSP provide flexible tools to address both content and practice toward more equitable outcomes. However, assessment efforts commonly transcend the single classroom and thus can be stubbornly anti-equity at the institutional level. Educators who collaborate in a learning community find themselves at a crossroads resulting in a paradox. At the course level, assessments can be constructed for linguistic justice. At the program or institutional level, assessments might contradict or devalue this effort. Learning communities need to enable a way out of this contradiction.

In this case, I was able to share my assessment journey with two other educators in a learning community. Learning communities involve two or more educators who share a cohort of students and intentionally design assignments and activities for those students. Learning communities have been found to be a high-impact practice. High-impact practices (HIPs) are those that value active, engaged, and collaborative forms of learning for students where students devote considerable time and effort to purposeful tasks and

## Equity, Language Ideology and Culture *continued*

where they repeatedly interact with each other, faculty, and staff about substantive measures, diversifying their experiences with feedback from multiple sources across time and space (Kuh, 2008). Studies have shown more equitable outcomes among Hispanic and black students in greater gains in first-year GPAs, retention, and well-being (Brownell & Swaner, 2010). While there is evidence that HIPS are effective, they are not automatic. Learning communities must be carefully structured to provide engagement and support for students of color with a mindset dedicated to equitable practice.

Learning communities also have the potential to confront the domination of standard English ideology but these must intentionally promote difference and empower individual voices beyond the individual classroom experience. Without intentionality, marginalized students will end up being miseducated about language if they aren't taught that all human languages and language varieties have inherent grammatical patterns and are systematic and rule-governed, (Smitherman, 2017).

The learning community provided the space for three educators from different disciplines and with different learning outcomes to share assessment practices. It was helpful that each of us were familiar with CSP. However, there was still a gap in our disciplinary knowledge that affected what concepts we wanted to focus on. Threshold concepts provide a pathway that places greater emphasis on the demonstration of learning core concepts than that of grammatical or linguistic differences more commonly found in traditional verbal and oral communication assessment rubrics. Theoretically, core concepts can be deconstructed to allow for multiple ways of being and speaking to demonstrate the requisite knowledge. The focus on threshold hold concepts therefore can be a kind of back door to promoting linguistic justice. Assessment rubrics can be designed to focus on the development of core concepts and encourage students to use their own voice.

Within the context of the individual course, Meyer and Land's (2003) notion of the threshold concept is defined as akin to a portal, opening up a new and previously inaccessible way of thinking about something that represents a transformed way of understanding,

or interpreting or viewing something without which the learner cannot progress. There are many candidates for threshold knowledge in particular disciplines. For example, a sociology class can focus on the sociological imagination (Mills, 1959). Or an economics class can focus on opportunity costs (Stone, 2015). This approach might be helpful to educators who are nervous about deviating from certain core elements of their syllabus or discipline. In CSP, teachers would use aspects of students' cultures in an asset-based approach as opposed to deficit-based to make the course material relevant to them, and increase their skill acquisition, engagement, and learning outcomes (Ladson-Billings, 1995a).

Where the learning community provided space, threshold concepts provided content. The rubrics were generated to help students better understand what we hoped they would do in our classrooms - not solely to grade a final written product. This statement must be accompanied by some nuance. Inevitably, students must turn in a final assignment and the rubric will no doubt play some role in the grading process. However, as we were constructing the rubrics and assignments, we began to identify blind spots in our practices that became much more visible when we engaged in dialogue with students. These blind spots are much more indicative of student learning and should be a central focus of departmental and institutional assessment projects. These would have remained hidden if I adopted the departmental rubric.

My own views of language ideology and grading were also challenged throughout this process. I began with a critical analysis of the language used in the rubrics but began to shift to a broader view of how the rubrics might be used. As I struggled with the constraints of the Standard Language Myth in my department and college-wide assessment, I began to feel liberated in the active co-construction of more equitable assessment tools with my colleagues and students. Rubrics are more useful as fluid, adaptive teaching tools and as equitable guides. Fluidity and adaptiveness are also elements of CSP.

Most students expressed relief and interest in the rubric. I believe the rubric itself functioned as a landmark for many students who were unsure of what college writing really involved. The rubric construction process was also

## Equity, Language Ideology and Culture *continued*

transparent, and they could see that their three educators were collaborating to provide the best possible experience with them. This was a noticeably absent condition of the larger assessment drive by the college. Student voices were simply not included at all.

I think it is important to address a stubborn reality. CRT and HIPS provide much needed environmental change for immigrants and students of color, but these changes are often new and uncomfortable for white students. Resistance to conceptual change was greatest for student FS and he evidenced discomfort moving away from the Standard Language Myth model of grading early in the semester. After a workshop where we discussed the differences from their high school experiences and the expectations they were learning about at college, FS shared,

“I feel like I’m missing out on information. Like there are gaps where certain information connects. I would rather be graded on what I already know and can make right answers on a test.”

This approach also came up in a small group workshop between FS and ZN, both learners who have benefited from the Standard Language Myth and other forms of white privilege. In the first draft, ZN struggled with following the instructions, did not apply course content, and interpreted evidence as something that would support his qualitative opinion—meaning he could not imagine a scenario in which his opinion needed to be qualified—as simply a second, confirmation. ZN and FS reinforced each other in discussion that they should only need to find something from social media that “backs them up,” and that more critical or reflective thought was unnecessary. This attitude visibly upset other students because their non-white working-class points of view were not being treated seriously or equitably.

The opinion confirmation-seeking among majority populations is also consistent with political science findings about social media information networks (Leggett & King-Reilly, 2020). For ZN to develop the kind of writing and evidence-based learning process prescribed by the institution, ZN would need to engage with a critical process of analyzing information and the patterns of relational power as well as the mechanisms that collect, organize, and distribute information. Even though ZN and FS were uncomfortable with a different process of grading, they ultimately benefitted from a rubric

that focused on multiple ways of expressing knowledge.

Over time our collective responsive approach had a noticeable effect on ZN as he began to be confronted by alternative ways of knowing and as more diverse students began to feel more comfortable sharing their opinions. FS, however, struggled with why he should have to engage with a more critical process but admitted he was more open-minded than before. I believe the focus on diversity and theories of language and power were necessary as a kind of meta-threshold concept before FS could engage with the course material. ZN and FS were the only students who shared that they did not need to work while attending college and did not know anyone affected by the pandemic. ZN however began to see the need for alternative points of view when he interviewed his mother, a retired schoolteacher, for an assignment. In conclusion, I believe language diversity was concrete for most students and became more concrete for ZN but remained a mere abstraction for FS.

I also think it is important to refine our analysis of equitable pedagogies that focus on common practices. Paris (2012) argued that educators must re-articulate the goals of culturally responsive practices. These practices must create spaces that considers each learner as a valuable member of the whole. They must evoke cultural sustaining pedagogies that support the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities and that provide access to dominant cultural competence (Paris, 2012). No matter the cultural background, it is impossible to recognize and implement culturally sustaining pedagogies without engaged dialogue with the people who experience and practice culture in their own lives. Engaged dialogue is important not only with students but with our peers as well. In this sense, moving toward equity in higher education, would require both a critical examination of the inequity within structural - historical relations and a new ability to co-construct an equitable learning environment with students across differences.

### Conclusion

While one focus for equity has been on learning materials this cannot be the only effort. Certainly, it is important. For example, Brandle (2018) found that of the political science open educational resource (OER) materials she reviewed, none of them directly focused on equitable or culturally responsive pedagogies directly. OER had been held out as an equitable intervention

## Equity, Language Ideology and Culture *continued*

largely because of the reduced cost and supposed increase in access. As the pandemic has made more visible, access and cost are not fully eliminated through the introduction of OER. Standard language ideology is also dominant in our most common educational materials (de Cuba & Slocum, 2020). Materials must be considered within the larger context of assessment however to result in a practical shift of practices. Our assessment strategies must be radial; they must include student's lived experiences and varied ways of expression throughout the entire educational process.

It is not enough to document inequity in our materials, assessment practices, and pedagogies in our own disciplines. We must co-construct new approaches responsively with students across differences. Learning communities provide a cohesive structure for this kind of transformation. Language is one of the most entrenched forms of supremacy and institutional racism. It is often hard to uncover as it operates within routines deep in the makeup of our institutions and disciplines. Surely, beginning with dialogue about concepts borne of supremacist institutionalism is a pragmatic and effective framework for material change. One of the most common concepts of domination is the Standard Language Myth and is evident in our shared assessment practices.

The combination of CSP, learning communities as HIPs, and threshold concepts provide an equitable framework for analyzing assessment rubrics. This analysis is rooted in the desire to transition away from the Standard Language Myth. I argue this is where we should boldly focus our attention and construct practical strategies that can be replicated and scaled. Part of the ability to critique the existing social order requires educators to facilitate an environment where dominant language is critically analyzed among intersections of unequal power relationships. The educator must construct assessment practices with students that are then measured against this ideal to be considered truly equitable.

My journey was not a straight line. To decenter hegemonic knowledge production, I needed to break the rubric and re-construct it with students. I had to engage with other educators to construct assessments that focused on the process of equity instead of a final product. I also had to acknowledge the limitations of a cultural shift. So long as the unequal social relations persisted in our differentiated roles across the college, equitable assessment remains a political project. The Standard Language Myth is deeply rooted. Changing language in rubrics cannot be a final step. We must boldly discuss how assessment can be liberated from policing students and how we can co-construct knowledge with students.

## Equity, Language Ideology and Culture *continued*

### Appendix

Rubric 1.1 Preliminary rubric presented to students as thought bubbles in a video and through Zoom meetings.

Needs Revision	Working it Out	Getting There	You Got it
Did not follow instruction. Could not identify a social problem. Resisted data collection. Took a Counter-Productive Approach.	Included too many problems. Tended to over-generalize. Paper was disorganized. Provided a platitude for a solution.	Blamed individual motives. Provided anecdotes as examples. Tended toward monologue or a speech. Unaware of social structures.	Stated a problem clearly. Referenced reliable data. Organized the paper logically. Included a logical conclusion and addressed counter-factual arguments.

Rubric 1.2. Final grading assessment tool co-constructed with students.

D	C	B	A
Did not frame the issue in the format required.	Stated too many unrelated social problems or was too broad in definition.	Stated the social problem with a personal opinion about motives of other actors.	Clearly stated the social problem within the correct political context.
Did not provide evidence.	Overgeneralized based on opinions without research.	Generalized based on personal experience and cited to unreliable sources.	Provided related evidence and indicated reliable sources.
Did not organize the writing.	Provided too many reasons in a disorganized manner or did not match reasons with solutions.	Used evidence to support their opinion only and did not organize evidence to include alternative points of view.	Clearly organized the evidence logically.
Did not present any solutions or saw the problem as impossible to change.	Presented a solution that was not based in the real world or did not match the social problem presented.	Drew a conclusion that over-simplified the political process or shifted the responsibility to one person or social group.	Drew a logical conclusion with insight, included practical solutions, and provided evidence the solution might work.

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