

Decolonization at Brown
Watson Task Force
Self-Assessment Tool

Overview

Decolonization at Brown's Watson task force has created a self-assessment tool for faculty to implement best practices as they relate to epistemic diversity. This tool is intended for faculty as an aid to improve pedagogy and teaching, particularly when it comes to addressing structural silences created by colonialism and white supremacy.

This tool offers advice first on (1) **recognizing positionality** (how we as individuals approach the topic) and (2) **how to create syllabi to better reflect epistemic diversity**.

Please note that while this tool is designed for personal use, it is **not** a replacement to broader systematic analysis of syllabi across classes or within a department. For that broader goal, we recommend department chairs and faculty contact us directly at decolonizationatbrown@gmail.com and reach out to the Watson DIAP Committee for more specific resources.

Conceptual Framework

Non-western scholars and scholarship are well-studied in several disciplines, including Africana Studies and Indigenous Studies. Yet, these thinkers and works remain systematically excluded from a range of disciplines across the International and Public Affairs (IAPA) designation and academia broadly. This tool is intended to offer faculty one way to address this structural silence by reflecting on the idea of epistemic diversity.

Drawing from the work of **Professor Geri Augusto**, we define epistemic diversity as follows:

the systematic inclusion of different cultural worldviews, epistemologies, paradigms, and ways of thinking within curricula, syllabi, hiring, research, and knowledge production broadly, particularly those of communities that have been **actively marginalized as a result of structures of colonialism, white supremacy, and power**.

Through epistemic diversity, we aim to address colonialism in one aspect of knowledge production -- pedagogy -- by engaging faculty in reflecting on who and what is systematically present or absent within course material. Towards that goal, this tool calls on faculty and students to think not just about demographic diversity (**non-western/non-dominant scholars**), but also about what **prabhdeep kohl**, a graduate student in sociology, describes as the exclusion of non-western/non-dominant **scholarships**. In that sense, epistemic diversity can be understood as **the systematic inclusion of non-western/non-dominant scholars and scholarships**.

Self-Assessment Tool Breakdown

The Self-Assessment tool consists of a rubric with five focus areas: (1) **Positionality**; (2) **Cultural Engagement**; (3) **Interdisciplinary Engagement**; (4) **Addressing Marginalization**; (5) **Integration & Organization of Course Materials**. Each of these areas is addressed on a sliding scale, from Excellent (full engagement) to Progressing (little engagement with epistemic diversity). When using this tool, we recommend a reflective, critical, and honest assessment of each focus area. This is not meant to be an exercise to judge or quantitatively grade classes, but instead, to offer one way to think about our work in the context of broader demands for justice and equity in our teaching.

Explanation and Significance of Focus Areas

1. Positionality

Explanation of Significance:

Positionality signifies the importance of a teacher's understanding of their own identities and how those identities may influence their teaching, as well as how that may differ from the worldviews and identities of the students they are teaching. This recognition is critical to acknowledging power dynamics in knowledge production influenced by race, power, and colonialism, from knowledge transmission and publication to the classroom itself.

(Excellent) Articulates insights into own cultural paradigms, biases, and relationship to broader systems of power, with awareness of how broader structures (e.g. colonialism, white supremacy) have shaped concepts, disciplines, and ideas

(Progressing) Shows limited awareness of own cultural paradigms and biases (even those shared with other cultural group(s), e.g. uncomfortable with identifying possible cultural differences with others.)

2. Cultural Engagement

Explanation of Significance:

Cultural engagement highlights a dedication to epistemic diversity with the intention of challenging a dominant canon that has historically been exclusionary and deemed certain worldviews as lesser/not scholarly. Such a commitment therefore also signals an acceptance of differences within and across cultures, including in disciplines, theories, ideas, and practices.

(Excellent) Adapts and applies a deep understanding of multiple epistemologies, cultural experiences, and power structures while initiating meaningful interaction with other cultures to address significant global problems.

(Progressing) Describes the experiences of others historically or in contemporary contexts primarily through one cultural perspective, demonstrating some openness to varied cultures and worldviews.

3. Interdisciplinary Engagement

Explanation of Significance:

Interdisciplinary engagement signifies an understanding that no one discipline exists in isolation. Disciplines and the knowledge they produce are often connected in multiple ways, even as each discipline provides unique insights. We especially encourage interdisciplinary engagement given that certain

disciplines (e.g. Africana, Ethnic Studies, Indigenous Studies) are themselves born out of a broader failure to address questions of race, power, and colonialism in other fields.

(Excellent) Evaluates concepts, theories, and assumptions through scholarship from multiple disciplines, particularly engaging those that challenge and contest dominant scholarship

(Progressing) Approaches scholarship solely through one discipline, presenting only one authoritative methodology/mode of analysis and avoiding contesting or critical scholarship from other disciplines

4. Addressing Marginalization

Explanation of Significance:

Centering marginalized voices within disciplines encourages a reckoning with a discipline's historical marginalization in order to understand which perspectives and experiences have been/are silenced and to interrogate those silences. Additionally, this serves to engage with the real consequences of how certain topics are discussed and applied.

(Excellent) Explicitly centers and values marginalized voices and perspectives with intentional interrogation of what power relations have led to the silencing of those perspectives within a discipline and/or scholarship on a particular topic.

(Progressing) Provides insights mostly from dominant perspectives within the discipline and/or from scholarship on the topic, without attention to voices that have been historically silenced.

5. Integration & Organization of Course Materials

Explanation of Significance: Epistemic diversity depends not only on the presence of non-dominant scholars and scholarship, but also on how that content is organized and presented. It is necessary to integrate and consistently engage with non-dominant scholarship, to not reinforce the supremacy or authority of dominant scholarship as the primary/only means to understand topics and ideas.

(Excellent) Non-dominant scholars and scholarship are consistently integrated into course themes and materials across weeks, in order to challenge, contest, and expand understandings of the topic through analysis of race, power, and colonialism

(Progressing) Non-dominant scholars and scholarship are barely, if at all, included in course themes and materials.

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Focus Area	Excellent	Well-Done	Satisfactory	Progressing
Positionality	Articulates insights into own cultural paradigms, biases, and relationship to broader systems of power, with awareness of how broader structures have shaped concepts and ideas (e.g. colonialism, white supremacy)	Recognizes different perspectives about own cultural paradigms and biases (e.g. not looking for sameness; comfortable with complexities of new perspectives)	Identifies own cultural rules and biases while maintaining a strong preference for rules and assumptions shared with own cultural group and also seeking the same in others.	Shows limited awareness of own cultural paradigms and biases (even those shared with other cultural group(s)) (e.g. uncomfortable with identifying possible cultural differences with others.)
Cultural Engagement	Adapts and applies a deep understanding of two or more epistemologies, experiences, and power structures OR creates meaningful space for students to engage, discuss, and share epistemologies and experiences to address local/global inequities.	Analyzes substantial connections and departures between the worldviews, power structures, and experiences of multiple cultures historically or in contemporary contexts, incorporating respectful interactions with other cultures.	Explains and connects two or more cultures historically or in contemporary contexts with some recognition of power structures, demonstrating respectful interaction with varied cultures and worldviews.	Describes the experiences of others historically or in contemporary contexts primarily through one cultural perspective, demonstrating some openness to varied cultures and worldviews.
Interdisciplinary Engagement	Evaluates concepts, theories, and assumptions through scholarship from multiple disciplines, particularly engaging those that challenge and contest dominant scholarship	Engages critical scholarship from multiple disciplines, in order to expand knowledge on specific topics, ideas, or questions, while limitedly challenging disciplinary assumptions	References scholarship from other disciplines selectively, primarily to develop and support an existing foundation of disciplinary knowledge	Approaches scholarship solely through one discipline, presenting only one authoritative method/mode of analysis and avoiding contesting or critical scholarship from other disciplines
Addressing Marginalization	Explicitly centers and values marginalizes voices with intentional interrogation of what power relations have led to the silencing of those perspectives within a discipline and/or scholarship on a particular topic.	Recognizes the intellectual value of giving space to perspectives that have been excluded from the discipline and/or work on a topic and makes efforts to use scholarship from these voices.	Identifies briefly non-dominant perspectives within the discipline and/or scholarship on a topic but with limited interrogation into the power dynamics of exclusion, almost as an afterthought.	Provides insights mostly from dominant perspectives within the discipline and/or from scholarship on the topic, without attention to voices that have been historically silenced.

Integration & Organization of Course Materials	<p>Non-dominant scholars and scholarship are consistently integrated into course themes and materials across weeks, often building upon one another, to challenge, contest, and expand understandings of the topic through analysis of race, power, and colonialism.</p>	<p>Integrates non-dominant scholars and scholarship into course themes and materials across weeks to expand or critique a foundation composed primarily of dominant scholars and scholarship.</p>	<p>Non-dominant scholars and scholarship are presented minimally, in a siloed and segregated manner (e.g. one week), with little room to build upon and engage course materials across weeks.</p>	<p>Non-dominant scholars and scholarship are barely, if at all, included in course themes and materials.</p>
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