

**Anti-racist pedagogy in practice:
Sifting through racist constructs of truth
in course and assignment design
(16 minutes)**

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Thank you for tuning in. My name is Anna Habib, I'm the Associate Director of Composition for Multilingual Students, in the English department. I am presenting on behalf of a collaborative team of colleagues, including James Savage and Liz Paul from the English department Composition program, and David Lemmons and Ashley Blinstrub from the Libraries. The purpose of this presentation is to provide one example of how to operationalize or enact antiracist frameworks in our classrooms. This presentation will walk you through a partnership between the Composition instructors on this team and the Librarians in the design of a First Year Composition course for Multilingual Writers. These students come from a range of proficiency backgrounds from international students who are operating in English as an additional language, to second generation immigrant students who are fluent in English, to monolingual English speakers who are fluent in other dialects of English; for example, Black English.

This presentation will ...

1. Outline the institutional and field-specific calls for antiracist courses and teaching practices
2. Introduce library-composition program initiative to build a section of FYC that centers an antiracist approach
3. Provide an overview of the course design to showcase antiracist efforts
 - a. Course content/theme
 - b. Assignment design
 - c. Skill development

d. Assessment practices

As many of you at Mason know, the President's office has convened an Antiracism and inclusive excellence taskforce " to ensure that Mason creates an inclusive and equitable campus environment in which every member of the community, without exception, is valued, supported, and experiences a sense of belonging."

Several subcommittees have been formed to work on this effort across the institution. This course is inspired by the focus of the curriculum and pedagogy subcommittee "that is charged with recommending, helping to develop, and/or expanding current curriculum that prepares students to understand and address systemic racism and also to learn about and appreciate the diverse scholars and voices that contribute to the academy."

The President's ARIE taskforce is vital at Mason, given its growing diversity. While we likely all know about Mason's racial, cultural and ethnic diversity, we did want to point out how this diversity is reflected in the linguistic demographic profile of our student body. Over 40% of our student body are students-of color and our students come from 130 nations, speak 80 languages, and the Speech Accents Archives in the Linguistics Department has collected and archived about 1500 accents.

In fact, a study in 2018 conducted by the Provost-appointed Multilingual Taskforce, found that 40% of students enrolled in the ENGH 101, which fulfilled the Mason Core for the first written communication course, indicated that they grew up in multilingual homes. And, over 60% enrolled in the upper-division written communication Mason core course, ENGH 302, indicated the same.

Given Mason's demographic profile, namely our linguistic diversity, our team of course developers felt that the ENGH 100 course, which meets the Mason Core requirement for written communication I, could be an ideal place to take up the call for antiracist curricular work. We worked together this summer to design a curriculum for ENGH 100 that we are only piloting in two sections of the course.

To begin this work, we turned to our fields' calls for racial/social justice. Composition studies has had a long history of position statements that affirm "Students' rights to their own languages" ...

Meaning, "Affirming students right to their own patterns and varieties of language--the dialects of their nurture or whatever dialects in which they find their own identity and style." On the screen here, you can see two excerpts from the original position statement put forward by Composition's professional organization in 1974 and the most recent one that came out in 2020, "This ain't another statement! This is a demand for black Linguistic justice!" We invite you to pause the video long enough to read these statements which will provide more context for the

curricular objectives of the class we are about to walk you through.

While the composition team grounded our efforts in our field's calls for what's become known as "linguistic justice," the librarians on the team turned to the scholarship on critical information literacy, which interrogates information systems in which we all operate. The Association of College and Research Libraries' Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education reinforces critical information literacy and calls librarians to intentionally help students grapple with the notion that authority in information is both constructed and contextual. In fact, Mason University Libraries' Student Learning Assessment Plan is based on both of these two concepts and is a guide for the University Libraries' information literacy instruction, which infused the design of this ENGH 100 course.

As the composition and library team conceptualized this curriculum, we came to see that we shared the aspiration for a critical pedagogy that developed students "critical language awareness" and critical information/media literacy. Our collective aim was to help our students understand that both language and information are socially constructed and our hope was that students would begin to question longstanding "truths" about notions of "correctness" in language and notions of "authority" in the oversaturated--often dangerous-- information, or misinformation, landscapes they are navigating.

In the words of University of Washington faculty, Carl Bergstrom and Jevin West, we decided we wanted to help our students *cultivate the art of skepticism in a data-driven world*.

To do this, as we developed the course, we thought about the tenets of critical pedagogy (anti racist pedagogy or liberatory pedagogy) as infused across the four domains of curricular design: course content/theme, assignment design, skill development and assessment practices.

First, we focused on the course theme, which we articulate as "Multiliteracies in the age of misinformation." We want our students to gain a foundational understanding of the socially-constructed nature of language and information and to recognize how we are all consciously or unconsciously implicated in standard ideologies and landscapes of misinformation.

Students read several foundational texts that grapple with various aspects of our course theme, the titles of which you can see on the screen.

Students are asked to take up these themes in a sequences of scaffolded assignments that move them from understanding the problem/issue as it pertains to the Mason community, to researching solutions and presenting these solutions in a White Paper to one of the ARIE taskforce subcommittees or another relevant committee on campus. They conclude by translating their research for a public audience through a Tiktok or youtube video.

We believe that the assignment sequence is generalizable and can be replicated in other writing

intensive courses across the curriculum by asking students to identify and define a social/racial problem as it intersects or surfaces in the field, to explore how that problem affects their personal or community's lives, and then to conduct research on how to mitigate this social/racial problem within the field or industry that they present or imagine presenting to an audience of authentic stakeholders and non-scholars alike. This allows students to understand and address systemic racism from a discipline-specific lens and position.

Our third effort toward antiracist instruction is through cultivating "the art of skepticism" in our students' analysis of language and information. As a writing-research course with learning outcomes designed to build students' literacy skills-- in terms of reading and writing--as well as their information literacy skills, we target these two skills through critical language awareness exercises and critical information/media literacy activities.

We teach critical language awareness through what we call "language noticing" activities. Language noticing enables students to observe the language *moves* writers make in different writing situations and, in turn, to think critically about the language moves they use as they write their own texts. This framework develops students' linguistic skills by helping to demystify language moves in published texts so that novice writers can replicate these moves if that serves them and their strategic goals. We couple that language skill development with metacognitive reflective exercises asking them to think about how the language-of-prestige operates within academic texts and how the standardization of academic English naturally excludes populations of English speakers who aren't fluent in or choose not to use the language of prestige. Ultimately, we hope that our students have the tools and awareness they need to make strategic choices about which "English" is appropriate for their audience/genre and/or whether they want to challenging the dominant approach

From the research skill development angle, we view source evaluation as one of the key places to integrate principles from critical information literacy. To incorporate ideas of social justice, we encourage our students to think more broadly than "scholarly is good, popular is bad" in doing their research. Instead, we use a method called SIFT, developed by Mike Caulfield, to teach students how to evaluate a broad range of sources. This set of steps asks students to Stop, Investigate the source using Google, Find better coverage, and Trace claims, quotes, and media back to the original source. This is a quick set of steps, 4 moves that each take about 60 seconds, to help students evaluate information from many sources and investigate their claims.

We also wanted to spend time in this course helping students understand the role bias plays in their searches and how it can affect the information they find. As students move through the course, we ask them to think about their own biases as they enter the search process: for example, we ask them to think about their emotions surrounding their research topic or identify any preconceived notions they have about their topic. We also have students looking through their results to ensure that they don't all agree with each other: as search algorithms become more sophisticated, they get continually better at returning us things we agree with rather than

things that disagree with each other.

Additionally, we encourage students to ensure representation of key communities in their work: what communities are being affected by what you're researching? What stakeholders might be interested? We have many resources, including the Finding Diverse Voices LibGuide listed at the end of this presentation, available to help students find sources from those with a variety of identities.

Finally, in this course, we are piloting labor-based contract grading which is put forth by Asao Inoue, writing studies scholar and author of "Antiracist writing assessment ecologies: Teaching for a socially just future"

In his words, he argues that

"One way to change your classroom's writing assessment practices to a more explicitly antiracist one, one that can do more social justice work, is to get rid of grades, and the standards that go with them, by using a labor-based grading contract system. This approach:

- **Reduces dramatically unequal racialized power dynamics** in the way locally diverse students' writing is judged by teachers. These power dynamics move through a dominant, white, middle class discourse that is informed by a white racial *habitus*.
- **Opens the class to more than one dominant set of language standards**, which creates conditions to use other ways of languaging to critique dominant standards, while still understanding them.
- **Eliminates standards-based grades** on writing (or grades based on comparisons to a dominant White Discourse) by replacing them with labor-based grading, which also provides conditions for students to exercise more fully their rights to their own languages in the classroom. "

We hope that this presentation gave you some ideas for how you might infuse your course with antiracist principles. We want to acknowledge that this type of work is continuous and that antiracist working isn't about "doing" but about "being"... We are just offering some of the ways that we've been thinking about how to be antiracist teachers. As you consider your own courses, we hope this set of questions will help you brainstorm small or big ways to infuse antiracist principles in your own courses across the curriculum: read questions

1. If you don't have a theme to your course, can you create a theme that raises students' awareness around systemic racism? (even if not social studies course, can still work; engineering, for example, can make course research theme around climate action)
2. Are you allowing students to use their own Englishes or to brainstorm drafts in their own languages or to use non-English sources in their research process?

3. How are you teaching research? Consider using SIFT! Caulfield's modules establishing SIFT are linked on our Resources slide.
4. When you ask students to collect academic articles, can you ask them to notice the bias in the experiment design and data set? Here's a resource.
5. Can you assign more texts by scholars-of-color? To start, you could try using our Finding Diverse Voices LibGuide linked on the Resources slide.
6. How are you assessing writing? Do you mark students off? Can you remove that from your rubric? You can still mark what you perceive as "errors" and ask them to revise to get the practice, but don't take points off. Can you use a labor based contract grading method?

Here is a very small selection of materials that you might find interesting if you're considering exploring this approach in your own class.

Feel free to reach out to us if you have any questions about the work we've done or how our pilot is going! We'd love to answer any questions or think through your own ideas.