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Librarians as Campus Partners: Supporting Culturally Responsive and Inclusive Curriculum

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Librarians as campus partners

Supporting culturally responsive and inclusive curriculum

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Diversity and inclusion initiatives are expanding on campuses across the United States. These initiatives can take many forms, such as the hiring and retention of diverse faculty, student recruitment, and a thoughtful examination of pedagogy and course curriculum. As a librarian, you may be aware of these efforts, but perhaps not as directly involved as disciplinary faculty, particularly in regards to course curriculum development and redesign. How librarians can participate and support this work on our campuses is not always clear; however, we found fertile opportunities for librarian involvement and leadership.

At Portland State University (PSU) diversity and inclusion has been supported via the establishment of a vibrant and engaged Office of Global Diversity and Inclusion, Presidential Diversity Awards, and a Diversity Mini-Grant Program. Additionally, in our most recent strategic plan, “Expand our commitment to equity” is one of the signature five goals, positioning diversity and inclusion even more centrally in the PSU culture.¹ One specific, but far-reaching, effort stemming from this goal is the purposeful creation or revision of curriculum in order to improve cultural responsiveness and inclusion both in the classroom and online courses.

Culturally responsive teaching is a method of incorporating a multiplicity of students’ cultures and lived experiences into their education, improving their classroom engagement, content relevancy, and fostering diverse perspectives. Geneva Gay is a pioneer in the area of culturally responsive teaching, and provides the following definition:

Culturally responsive teaching is defined as using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively. It is based on the assumption that when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students, they are more

personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily and thoroughly.²

Overall, higher education has been slower to adopt culturally responsive teaching than K–12 education, but awareness and efforts are growing, especially on campuses with diverse student populations.

As a first step, a group of PSU administrative leaders considered how an equity lens might permeate classrooms and curricula. They shared ideas with members of the faculty Undergraduate Curriculum Committee (UCC) and Graduate Council (GC), who are charged with curricular oversight of course changes and new course development at PSU. These discussions resulted in both the UCC and GC adopting additional requirements for culturally responsive and inclusive curriculum (CRIC) in the new course and revised program proposal forms.

The prompts on the forms are: “Identify how the course objectives, student learning outcomes and course content reflect a wide range of students and represent a broad diversity of voices,” and “Describe how the content, pedagogy and method of delivery is culturally responsive and reflects the diversity of voices and variety of learning styles of students.”

These new expectations are daunting for many faculty, as awareness of culturally responsive curriculum can vary greatly by disciplinary and departmental culture. Recognizing this, administrative leads from the Office of Academic Affairs contacted the library to see if we might be able to offer support. When the request was received by the Education librarian, and shared with the Social Work and Social Sciences librarian, our initial reactions were intense and contradictory. We were happy to be asked to participate in supporting the curriculum committees, but we were also fearful of being quickly out of our depth in this nuanced and sensitive area.

We knew, instinctively, that many of our colleagues on campus had been teaching and researching in the areas of culturally responsive and inclusive curricula for years, so we were by no means “content experts.” We were also keenly aware of our own positions of relative power and privilege in relation to the individuals in various diverse communities at PSU. However, we recognized the librarian skills we bring to many projects on campus: our ability to find relevant and seminal works in just about any area, our ability to organize information in usable ways, and our ability to teach others how to efficiently find relevant information independently going forward. Once we clearly defined and negotiated our commitment to the project, we set about finding and organizing relevant information.

Library Home - Research Guides & Tutorials - Culturally Responsive & Inclusive Curriculum Resources - Home

Culturally Responsive & Inclusive Curriculum Resources: Home

URL: <http://guides.library.pdx.edu/culturallyresponsivecurriculum>

Home | What is Culturally Responsive Curriculum? | Creating Culturally Responsive Curriculum | Discipline Specific Examples

Research Strategies for CRC | PSU Campus Resources

Welcome!

This guide is meant to help faculty at PSU find information and resources that will help them begin to create courses and curriculum that are more culturally responsive to and inclusive of our students. This guide is a response to the Curriculum Committees' new requirements in regards to culturally responsive courses and programs. As the new course and program proposal forms state:

"ELEVATING STUDENTS SUCCESS: As you develop the content, pedagogy and delivery method of your course, keep in mind how your course is culturally responsive, reflects a diversity of voice and accounts for a wide variety of learning styles."

- Review the new OAA course and program forms.

Click on the tabs above to find:

- One Basic Definition of Culturally Responsive Curriculum;
- Ways to Create Culturally Responsive Classes;
- Discipline Specific Examples;
- Research Strategies for Finding more CRIC Resources;
- And Support at PSU for Culturally Responsive Curriculum

Credits and Contacts

This guide was created by Bob Schroeder and Kim Pendell at the PSU library. Please contact Bob at schroedr@pdx.edu or Kim at kpendell@pdx.edu if you have any comments or ideas for additions for this guide.

Thanks to Steve Harmon and Scott Marshall from the Office of Academic Affairs who came up with the idea for this guide, and to Kerth O'Brien who gave feedback and suggested additional resources.

Screenshot of the Culturally Responsive & Inclusive Curriculum Resources homepage at <http://guides.library.pdx.edu/culturallyresponsivecurriculum> (<http://guides.library.pdx.edu/culturallyresponsivecurriculum>).

Development of the Culturally Responsive and Inclusive Curriculum Guide

We quickly determined that a LibGuide would be the best way to present and share information and resources.³ The guide was informed by two overarching principles. The first principle was practicality and usefulness, arising from a faculty member's immediate need to learn the basics of operationalizing cultural responsiveness in his or her new or revised classes in order to meaningfully address the prompts on the course proposal forms. The second principle was that our tone throughout the guide would reflect our own relationship to the topic of culturally responsive curriculum—that being one of humility and tentativeness as co-researchers in an area that can often lead to deep personal reflection and growth, as well as new, and sometimes painful, understanding of the relationship of education practices with politics and power structures.

One of the first challenges to developing the guide was the overall structure, as the guide needed to accomplish a number of outcomes: introduce the subject and clearly make connection to the curriculum proposal process, provide example strategies based on the literature, provide further resources for exploration, and teach faculty how to begin their own research into areas of cultural responsiveness and inclusion.

As librarians, we often operate with a certain amount of distance from the day-to-day realities of teaching a course. The guide in many ways reflected our own learning. For example, finding and highlighting a few strategies from the scholarly literature for creating culturally responsive teaching methods helped us make the otherwise abstract notion of “culturally responsive” teaching into a concrete and achievable practice.

The structure of the guide then reflected our own research journey through this topic, which seemed to be an organic way to organize it, as the faculty would be going through similar research journeys themselves. The guide pages are as follows:

- The homepage, aside from the table of contents, reiterates the very focused nature of the guide by invoking the new course proposal requirements around CRIC, and also the organic development of the guide by also inviting faculty to share new resources they find with the authors.
- “What is Culturally Responsive Curriculum” synthesizes the authors’ quick impressions of some of the CRIC themes taken from seminal works in the field and relevant subject encyclopedias.
- “Creating Culturally Responsive Curriculum” uses phrases of the new course proposal prompt as headings, grounding the content in what faculty are being asked to do. We were very conscious of keeping the guide focused and not allowing it to become pulled in so many ways as to diminish its utility for successful new course creation or with course revision.
- “Discipline Specific Examples” provides examples of CRIC in the three broad areas of academe: the Humanities, the Social Sciences, and STEM. The authors thought it would be good for faculty to be able to see useful examples from their own specific field, if possible, but also allied fields, since being a relatively new effort in higher education the faculty will likely need to adapt CRIC ideas from related disciplines.
- “PSU Campus Resources” lists the people, offices, and departments on campus we knew have the expertise and ability to help faculty with CRIC. We hope to add more faculty names as this initiative grows on campus.

Much of the literature on culturally responsive curriculum is from efforts in K–12 education, and most of the guides developed by education librarians reflect this. Digging for literature centered in higher education was time consuming, especially for discipline-specific examples. Looking for resources turned out to provide corollary benefits, as it made us more aware of the gaps in our collection, and it provided us with many good resources to be added.

Reception of guide and additional involvement

As a result of creating the *Culturally Responsive and Inclusive Curriculum Resources* guide, we were invited to meet with the UCC during the fall term. The committee members were beginning to assess cultural responsiveness as criteria for course and program approval, both in the context of pedagogical method and resources. How to actually implement this type of assessment within the curriculum committees was an open question at the time, and some members were reasonably uncomfortable doing so. The guide was received as a valuable starting point for committee members to learn the basics about the topic and find more in-depth resources and strategies. Faculty appreciated concrete examples of CRIC implementation in the classroom.

Additionally, the PSU Office of Academic Innovation (OAI) invited the authors to participate in a formal series of meetings arranged by their faculty-in-residence for inclusive curriculum and pedagogy. In these meetings, we were careful again not to position ourselves as experts on CRIC, but as librarians able to support the effort and as fellow faculty who were co-exploring this new curricular area. In our first meeting with the group we posed two open ended questions:

What are you looking for, in terms of resources, that would make your curriculum more culturally responsive?

What would you like to know about pedagogies or instructional techniques that help to make a classroom more culturally responsive?

Each member of the group, about 15 faculty members, wrote each of their requests on 3x5 cards, with no limit to the number. We discussed some of their questions during our meeting in order to disambiguate them. We took their cards and promised to come back to them in a month with two kinds of information: some potential resources that might help answer their questions and general search strategies they and their colleagues in the group might use to find similar resources.

As promised, after a month we returned with a list of potentially useful articles in response to specific questions, and more broadly, suggested databases, useful keywords and subject headings, and search strategies for finding more relevant materials on their own. These tips were later incorporated in a new page on our guide called "Research Strategies for CRIC," so that other users of the guide would benefit from them. Participating with the faculty over the course of the term helped to further our understanding of CRIC work on campus and will benefit our ongoing work on the guide.

Results and recommendations

By working on this project we made valuable connections with, and contributions to, faculty improving the educational experience of our students. For example, the director of the Child, Youth, and Family Studies program, a participant in the meetings in the OAI, is moving forward with his faculty members on an overhaul of course readings across their curriculum, with the goal that no more than 50% of readings are authored by the dominant U.S. culture. The Bachelors of Social Work program is considering a similar effort. Our involvement and dedication to this work raised our profile on campus as active participants in pedagogy and the university's commitment to student success. Public recognition of our guide in spaces such as faculty senate reinforced campus faculty awareness of our expertise as librarians.

This work benefited us both professionally and personally. We learned alongside of teaching faculty about their ideas and concerns around the call for culturally responsive curricula, and

learned from faculty on campus already experienced in this area. In return, we brought back to the library suggestions for new materials and resources, as well as reinforced the need for us to purchase from a diversity of authors and publishers across all disciplines. We also gained insight on how to effectively engage with similar initiatives in the future. We were amazed at the gratitude of the faculty for our help in this project, all the time relying on traditional librarian strengths of locating, organizing, and finding information. We realized that the reason the faculty seemed so appreciative is that they were in the exact position their own students are in each term—they were faced with a topic they knew little about, and they had a rather high-stakes deadline looming. Because they were researching outside of their areas of content expertise, we were able to support them in straightforward and meaningful ways.

For others seeking to collaborate on your own campuses, we suggest that you approach the topic with humility, and be prepared to learn alongside your colleagues. Understand the particular, unique role you are in as a librarian, and use those strengths to help your campus or its path to greater inclusiveness.

CRIC opens the door to potentially uncomfortable, but meaningful, conversations about power structures in the classroom and in the university more broadly. Be willing to listen and to learn from others on campus, including those who are in other unique roles, such as disability services and student groups. Expect any outcomes generated during such a collaboration, such as a guide, to be organic and iterative. Be ready to keep learning.

Notes

1. Portland State University, “Let Knowledge Serve the City: Strategic Plan 2016-20,” Portland State University, accessed June 26th, 2017,

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2. Geneva Gay, “Preparing for Culturally Responsive Teaching,” *Journal of Teacher Education*, 53 no. 2 (2002): 106
3. _____
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