

“To be antiracist is a radical choice in the face of history, requiring a radical reorientation of our consciousness.” (Ibram X. Kendi)

"No one is born racist or antiracist; these result from the choices we make. Being antiracist results from a conscious decision to make frequent, consistent, equitable choices daily. These choices require ongoing self-awareness and self-reflection as we move through life. In the absence of making antiracist choices, we (un)consciously uphold aspects of white supremacy, white-dominant culture, and unequal institutions and society. Being racist or antiracist is not about who you are; it is about what you do." Quote from the National Museum of African American History and Culture

Addressing anti-racism in teaching is a long-term and never-ending process requiring reflexivity, self-education, countless iterations and revisions along the teaching/learning journey. Instructors thus need to continually interrogate and challenge systemic racism and the ways in which it operates in pedagogy. Both instructors and students enter the classroom with beliefs, values and identities that shape teaching strategies and content as well as the learning experience. The syllabus can be a good starting point for instructors to reflect on their vision of Political Studies and the decisions they make when teaching.

Developing/revising your syllabus is a continuous process and a great opportunity to form or refine a reflection on the impact of choices made by instructors when teaching. Some questions that could be helpful to prompt such reflection are the following:

- Why do I select specific content? What assumptions have I made about knowledge producers and supports? What worldviews and political stances are conveyed by the content I selected?
- Do I encourage and present alternative perspectives in my course materials? How much space is dedicated to the various perspectives presented? When are they introduced in the term? What material am I using to do so?
- What assumptions have I made about the learners in my class?
- Are these the best teaching strategies for this course and my students?
- Do I use examples and texts throughout that are representative of the diversity of perspectives in my field and of my students’ lived experiences?
- Are there alternative or better ways to evaluate student work than I currently use?
- What values and pedagogies do I instill in the course?
- Am I seeking resources and tools to better understand and answer these questions¹?

Regarding Race, Racialization, Anti-Racism and other Resistance Strategies, you could ask yourself these questions:

- Am I considering how to have conversations addressing the “political economy of knowledge” and “epistemologies of ignorance” so as to raise awareness and foster reflexivity²?

¹ See the Sept 2020 Anti-racism resources compiled for TA training.

² To explore how different forms of ignorance are linked to race and (re)produced and the role they play in sustaining racism see *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance* edited by Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana (2007); for a conversation on the ways in which epistemologies of ignorance intervene in the production of historical

- Am I reflecting on the visibility, or lack thereof, of race in the historiography of our discipline, in the constitution of global governance systems, in what is considered the canon in terms of political thought³?
- Am I considering the ways in which race - as a historically and socially constructed assemblage of ideas - and racialization travel across contexts (social, economic, geographic) and shape the social and political phenomena and lived experiences in the present?
- Am I reflecting on race, racialization and resistances in conversation with general questions/perspective addressed in our courses?
- Am I reflecting on ways to promote antiracist-decolonial-social justice approaches and sensibilities in interpersonal, institutional practices, teaching and learning environments and designs?
- What are the resources and tools I need or have sought in order to do so⁴?

Regarding BIPOC representation:

In order to take a closer look at who is represented on syllabi, the following questions can be asked:

- Are BIPOC authors located in the Global North⁵ contributing to “traditional or mainstream” debates/perspectives (in my discipline – in other disciplines) represented on syllabi?
- Are BIPOC authors located in the Global North contributing critical perspectives and perspectives centering BIPOC experiences on traditional debates represented on syllabi?
- BIPOC authors located the Global North contributing critical perspectives by deconstructing and reimagining knowledge production represented on syllabi?
- Are authors from the Global South contributing to “traditional or mainstream” debates/perspectives represented on syllabi?
- Are authors from the Global South contributing critical perspectives by deconstructing and reimagining knowledge production represented on syllabi?
- Am I seeking resources and tools to improve BIPOC representation on my syllabus?

Note – Instructors can consider the same set of questions when trying to create a syllabus that accounts for intersectionality. (For example, is the BIPOC representation in the course also representative of diverse BIPOC identities and experiences?)

narratives read Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s (2015) *Silencing the Past Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, Beacon Press.

³ To begin a reflection on the central role of race and colonialism in international affairs and global governance [see this analysis](https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/07/03/why-is-mainstream-international-relations-ir-blind-to-racism-colonialism/) . <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/07/03/why-is-mainstream-international-relations-ir-blind-to-racism-colonialism/>

⁴ See the Sept 2020 Anti-racism resources compiled for TA training.

⁵ Acknowledging both the diversity of existing experiences/perspectives to be considered and the constant recentering of whiteness in knowledge production, this tool aims to explore ways to critically interrogates the concept of representation and focuses on racialized identities, the geographic/political locations of knowledge producers as well as on marginalized/critical perspectives within the discipline in lieu of binaries such as Western/Non-Western or White/Non-White.

Some basic considerations regarding the syllabus as a tool for socialization:

- Does the syllabus set the environment for co-constructing learning — for example, for considering what input students might be able to have in shaping the syllabus?
- Does the syllabus convey my expectations of how students will work toward anti-racist approaches to the course material as well as what they can expect of me?
- The syllabus can set the tone and contribute to create an accountable teaching and learning space. Have I included opportunities for students and instructors to discuss and build consensus on what is (un)acceptable, and to have a clear sense of ways to deal micro and macro-aggressions?
- Have I considered the inclusion addition of a land acknowledgment, an equity statement or an accountable space statement, netiquette guidelines, and rules regarding online dynamics? These can signal to students that these are things that the instructor, the department, and the University take seriously⁶. How do I ensure that I will hold discussions with students to foster conversations about equity and a consensus on rules to abide by so as to co-construct an accountable teaching-learning environment in the (virtual) classroom?

Additional questions (beyond the syllabus):

- How will I handle differences of positionality in the classroom⁷?
- Have I read the departmental Policy on Diversity and Inclusion in Teaching?
- Have I taken steps to ensure, to inform students about consideration for:
 - accessibility and accommodations, where needed,
 - use of preferred gender pronouns, gender-inclusive language, content warning and class climate (see equity statement and netiquette).

⁶ For resources and examples see the Sept 2020 Anti-racism resources compiled for TA training; the departmental policy in Diversity and Inclusion in Teaching policy (2019); and [guidelines for communicating online](https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/teaching-resources/teaching-tips/teaching-tips-learning-activities/student-guidelines-communicating-online-professional) - <https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/teaching-resources/teaching-tips/teaching-tips-learning-activities/student-guidelines-communicating-online-professional> as well as [guidelines for classroom discussion agreements](https://www.brown.edu/sheridan/sites/sheridan/files/docs/sample-guidelines-classroom-discussion-agreements.pdf) - <https://www.brown.edu/sheridan/sites/sheridan/files/docs/sample-guidelines-classroom-discussion-agreements.pdf>

⁷ See the Sept 2020 Anti-racism resources compiled for TA training and find [definitions of microaggressions here](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/microaggressions-in-everyday-life/201011/microaggressions-more-just-race) - <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/microaggressions-in-everyday-life/201011/microaggressions-more-just-race>; on [microaggressions and micro-affirmations](https://www.brown.edu/sheridan/microaggressions-and-micro-affirmations-0) – <https://www.brown.edu/sheridan/microaggressions-and-micro-affirmations-0>; [strategies to respond to biased or offensive content](https://dianegoodman.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/RespondingToBiasedOrOffensiveCommentsexcerptarticle.pdf) - <https://dianegoodman.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/RespondingToBiasedOrOffensiveCommentsexcerptarticle.pdf>

Summary of effective practices and questions to ask yourself when designing your course⁸:

1. Have I integrated anti-racist commitments to my course design: content, learning objectives and outcomes, assignments, teaching and learning styles and environment?
2. Have I made goals and objectives explicit (learning objectives and outcomes, connected to an assessment plan, specific expectations for each assignment and rubrics)?

Learning objectives are the intended purposes of a particular course, which generally identify the knowledge, skills, and capacities that all students in a class should achieve. Clear and well-designed course goals are one of the most important strategies for effective teaching (Hattie, 2011), and therefore, it follows that anti-racist syllabi would incorporate one or more objectives to foster equitable outcomes. For example, learning goals that help students interrogate their own biases or the biases of a discipline can support an anti-racist classroom.

Ex - After successful completion of the course students should be able to:
Engage in critical thinking to evaluate assumptions that underlie race and racism;
Critically engage with race as a central organizing feature of world politics (these objectives are very broad and can be refined depending on the course and subfield).

3. Do I provide diverse ways for students to demonstrate their learning?

Anti-racist approaches to assessment include:
Self-location exercises and activities exploring positionality;
Using more frequent assignments with less weight (e.g., multiple graded drafts of a paper, practice problems, reading guide), an approach that has been found to reduce opportunity gaps (Eddy & Hogan, 2014);
Increasing transparency of assignments by clarifying the purpose, steps to complete the task, and criteria for success;
Employing contract grading systems, allowing for students input over the amount (and often type) of work they plan to complete, which corresponds with a certain grade.

4. Do I ensure that a diversity of perspectives are thoughtfully represented on each topic throughout the course?
5. Have I built into the course calendar times for feedback and discussions on how this feedback will be integrated?

⁸Examples used in this section were drawn from Brown university’s Harriet W. Sheridan Center for Teaching and Learning - <https://www.brown.edu/sheridan/teaching-learning-resources/inclusive-teaching/effective-teaching-anti-racist-teaching>