

ANTI-RACIST RESOLUTIONS FOR THE CLASSROOM

By Amy Leonard



ARE YOU LOOKING TO RESHAPE YOUR CLASSROOM OR TRY A NEW GRADING STRATEGY FOR THE NEXT SCHOOL YEAR?

During the 2022–23 school year, as the classroom environment started to achieve a level of normalcy, a number of faculty are re-examining their pedagogy and andragogy to create a more equitable classroom and incorporate the larger lessons learned from the pandemic. Incorporating a touch of humanity into their syllabi, grading, and classroom policies, as well as being “woke” enough to audit classes for racist and scarcity-based assignments and rubrics, are just a few examples.

To give a little background on why all faculty should make a new resolution to adopt some anti-racist pedagogy and andragogy into their classrooms in 2023, the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges asserted in *Decolonizing Your Syllabus*, an Anti-Racist Guide for Your College that “Academic institutions should all have a call to action to address racial inequities and to be accountable to meet the transformational change that society needs.” This sen-

timent is hammered home by the stark realities about which CalMatters higher education reporter Mikhail Zinshteyn wrote in an article titled “‘We’re not going to close the equity gaps’: Despite progress, California Community Colleges won’t reach Newsom’s aspirational goals.” That article, which Cal Matters published on Oct. 13, 2022, concluded that “The system [had] virtually no shot of reaching its most audacious academic goals of narrowing by 40% the graduation rate gap among its Black, Latino, and white students in five years. Nor [was] the system on track to narrow the graduation-rate gaps across regions, such as between the Bay Area and the poorer Inland Empire.” The quotation in the article’s headline is a statement by Pamela Haynes, president of the California Community Colleges Board of Governors.

Likewise, the Public Policy Institute of California found that “The pandemic increased challenges for low-income students and students of color, and many delayed their studies or dropped out of college.” With the dire news on the state of community college educational success for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People

of Color) students, determination of how to tackle the problem can seem overwhelming, but, fortunately, brave faculty already have begun adopting a few of the strategies that others may want to consider as they eye the 2023–24 year. These strategies fall under the umbrella of anti-racist pedagogy and provide suggestions for where to start and for reports on how it is working in their classrooms.

A simple place to start in our journey to create a more equitable space for your students is to decolonize our syllabus. According to Ishiyama et al., when syllabi contain a disciplinary tone in the language, students won’t seek an instructor for academic help (2002). Hence, the suggested start would be for faculty to revise their syllabi polices and language to see how punitive it sounds versus warm and welcoming.

Another few tips from the Academic Senate’s *Decolonizing Your Syllabus*...might be to ask ourselves:

- Does my syllabus contain links or information about housing insecurity help and food pantries?

- Do your course syllabus and Canvas site include positive messages and affirmations to further validate and provide a greater sense of belonging for BIPOC students in the course?
- Do the images and videos in the course showcase diversity and representation of the students?

This adjustment can have a lasting impact on our BIPOC students’ success and their ability to find our classes a more welcoming space.

Once we have tackled the syllabi, we can begin to look more deeply into the success rates and interrogate how our department and campus curriculum connect to the success of your BIPOC students. As the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges asserted, “Dismantling racist structures requires a review of the history that created those structures. It requires understanding the history of the construct of race as a culture, the white supremacy ideology, the centuries of laws intended to maintain positions of power for whites, and the ways in which the equity and diversity efforts

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