

Anti-Racist Collaborations, Resources, and Support

Aligning Practice with Belief: Bringing Anti-Racist Information Literacy and Writing Instruction to an HSI Lutheran University

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This first-year writing (FYW) program is situated in the English department of a small faith-based private liberal arts university located in the largely homogeneous, politically conservative community of Thousand Oaks, California. The college that became California Lutheran University was founded in 1959 by the Evangelical Lutheran Church, one of three Lutheran bodies that merged in 1988 to create the socially progressive Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA). Reflective of the Christian values of the ELCA, the University's stated core values include a commitment to embrace people of all faiths, as well as "value diversity and inclusiveness, practice tolerance and acceptance, and treat one another with respect, civility, and compassion" ("Identity"). Its affiliation with a justice-minded denomination provides unique opportunities for advancing anti-racist ideals. Yet Cal Lutheran has discovered that the road to diversity, equity, and inclusion is "neither smooth nor straight" (Biasotti). At the curricular level, issues of race and racism have not been adequately addressed across the university's programs, missing opportunities for anti-racist education. It is within this movement toward incorporating anti-racism into the curriculum that the authors have collaborated to integrate critical information literacy (IL) in the first-year writing courses.

Cal Lutheran was designated a Hispanic-serving institution (HSI) in 2016, with growing numbers of BIPOC students wanting to see themselves reflected in their teachers and in the curriculum. In response to an accreditation recommendation in 2015, Cal Lutheran has sought to diversify its faculty. As of August, 2020, the faculty is 29% nonwhite, a 12% increase from 2015 (Biasotti). This change, as helpful as it may be, has not adequately addressed issues of race and racism on campus, especially from the BIPOC students' point of view. Cal Lutheran does not yet offer a culture where most students feel comfortable discussing race, especially with students outside their own racial affiliations. Alarming, nearly half of all BIPOC students responded in a survey that they have experienced feeling lonely, isolated, and excluded as a result of the campus racial climate

(National). Admittedly, students have lacked opportunities for honest conversations about race and racism in the classroom, and students of color have often found themselves subject to microaggressions and discrimination (Salguero). These tensions came to a breaking point in the Spring of 2020, with members of the Black Student Union, Sisters' Circle (a student affinity group for Black women), Latin American Student Organization, and other student groups organizing a school-wide walkout to protest the handling of two racially-charged incidents on campus (Breda).

Concurrent with this time of campus unrest, an external report recommended that Cal Lutheran faculty create more opportunities for cross-racial engagement in courses, so that students could develop the language and critical thinking skills necessary to engage in meaningful dialogue on race and racism (National). In order to address the gap between institutional and curricular goals for racial equity and inclusion, the authors revised the library's information literacy instruction and first-year writing instruction to incorporate anti-racist goals. These curricular revisions are driven by equity-minded and anti-racist goals to address institutionalized racism at the structural, not individual, level. We seek this change through culturally relevant and equity-driven instruction informed by critical pedagogy.

CENTERING BLACK LIVES IN THE FIRST-YEAR WRITING CURRICULUM

The WPA co-author of this essay, Jolivette, joined Cal Lutheran as a full-time faculty member in English in Fall 2019. In order to address institutionalized racism at the curricular level, the WPA sought to revise FYW instruction using an instructional framework that is more consistently and intentionally inclusive of first-generation college students, and particularly of Black and Latinx students. Immediately after George Floyd's murder by Minneapolis police officers, the WPA sought curricular revision guidance from the 2019 collection *Black Perspectives in Writing Program Administration*. She began to consider how she might take up Perryman-Clark and Craig's invitation to center Black lives, experiences, and voices in the curriculum in "the fight against oppressive and racist institutional practices" (24). This move would follow a culturally relevant instructional approach, which recognizes the intertwined components of setting high expectations for academic achievement, developing cultural competence, and cultivating socio-political consciousness for all students (Ladson-Billings 75). Applied to writing instruction, culturally relevant teaching invites students to "take on issues that reflect their cultural, social, and personal experiences" as legitimate content for academic writing (Winn and Johnson 22). The goal

was to center Black lives in the curriculum so that first-year writing courses would be a space for all students to investigate systemic racism.

The first curricular revision created consistent and assets-based learning outcomes for FYW. Previously, sections shared little in common except for a focus on error identification and grammar instruction in Standardized Edited American English (SEAE). Faculty needed guidance to recognize how the corrective emphasis on SEAE and the lack of transparent learning outcomes across sections failed to support all students equitably, and marginalized students from linguistically-diverse backgrounds. The WPA met with part-time and tenure-line faculty to draft learning outcomes, using more inclusive language. One new learning outcome emphasizes critical reading, stating that students will evaluate popular and scholarly source material for authority and relevance to their inquiry. This learning outcome calls for more coordinated, programmatic collaboration with campus librarians Yvonne and Meghan, also the co-authors of this essay, than had previously existed. Critical pedagogy-driven IL instruction and culturally relevant writing instruction provide students with the analytical tools to evaluate the authoritative power of sources. These teaching practices guided the authors' planning of IL-integrated FYW instruction for fall semester 2020.

The revised critical reading learning outcome aligned with another key curricular revision that semester: the shift to academic writing as rhetorical communication between specific publics and audiences, and within contextual situations and exigencies. This approach necessitates the wider recognition of journalists, artists, filmmakers, oral history interviewees, and other communicators outside of peer-reviewed scholarship as potential authoritative voices that FYW students may evaluate and reference in their writing, in support of their own inquiry. The framework for Black student success proposed by Perryman-Clark and Craig centers Black voices and experiences in the FYW curriculum, focusing on the perspectives of Black diasporic peoples as intellectual knowledge (107). Enacting this framework, the WPA selected Ta-Nehisi Coates' 2014 essay "The Case for Reparations" as the common text for all sections of the first semester FYW course. Originally published in *The Atlantic*, the essay is a popular source that can be considered a mentor text for teaching argumentative writing to a general audience: Coates builds his argument for reparations to descendants of U.S. slavery by providing multiple narratives of Black experience through historical research, interviews, and data. The multimedia, open-access online version provides an even deeper dive into systemic racism from multiple perspectives of community activists interviewed by Coates for the essay.

A Black author was selected in response to prevailing anti-Black violence that pinnacled in Floyd's murder. In the aftermath of global protests, during the national public health crisis of COVID-19 that disproportionately impacted Black and Brown communities, and during the divisive US. presidential election, discussions of systemic racism saturated public discourse. Coates' essay and the sources that Meghan curated in the related library reading guide invite FYW students to read Black experiences and voices, to investigate systemic racism in their own lives and communities, and to write about how these ideas are meaningful to them.

SHIFT TO CRITICAL PEDAGOGY IN LIBRARY INSTRUCTION

Information Literacy at Cal Lutheran is a required student outcome for traditional undergraduate (TUG) courses, though there has never been a systematic program to ensure that library instruction is equitably distributed. To ensure equitable IL instruction across the TUG curriculum, Yvonne and Meghan sought to collaborate with the English Department to embed critical IL in all first-year writing courses. This would require a transformation not only of what IL looked like for writing faculty, but also of the role of librarians working with the English Department.

Critical pedagogy is well-established in IL instruction, representing "a natural growth in understanding literacy as a contested social construction, rather than as a naturally occurring phenomenon" (Elmborg ix). Critical IL allows learners to identify power structures and privilege within the sources they consult. Librarians at Cal Lutheran have traditionally been called into classes in an ad-hoc manner, most often to teach students the mechanics of identifying an information need, finding information, and avoiding plagiarism. Meghan and Yvonne's first priority, then, was to counter this dated narrative. Rather than delineating the content of an instruction session according to outmoded standards, faculty were asked to collaborate with the librarian, reviewing the class syllabus and assignment rubric together to determine the appropriate timing and content for the IL session. This collaboration with individual faculty allowed librarians to create learning outcomes, and scaffold instruction for IL sessions in the FYW courses.

This preliminary work toward developing IL equity provided insight into how some faculty understood authority. As is common in literary studies, faculty often esteem peer-review as the only legitimate source of authority. Consequently, they generally expected librarians to refer students to published scholars alone, framing all other sources as being less valuable. This approach is absent a critical evaluation of the peer-review process and the voices it historically excludes. Excluding these other sources dis-

counts the authority that stems from marginalized communities, and ultimately limits students' ability to see themselves as having authority (Beilin). Despite this challenge, the librarians remained on course to incorporate critical IL by providing students with sample topics, search strategies, and activities that required them to engage and evaluate a diversity of authorial voices. This critical IL tack provoked not only the students, but the faculty into a transformative dialogue with information sources.

In the summer of 2020, Yvonne and Meghan worked with the WPA to embed critical IL within the learning management system of all FYW courses. This approach was intentionally chosen to provide equitable coverage of critical IL concepts across all FYW sections. Embedding critical IL modules would allow for multiple points of access for students and ensure the content could be revisited later in the semester. It also ensured that the same content would be covered across all sections in the same manner. The modules were created using a combination of locally-created content (such as videos and quizzes) and content sourced from Credo Learning Tools. First semester FYW students would encounter how authority can be evaluated across a variety of sources and formats. Second semester students would build on those concepts as they learned about research being a project of inquiry, and searching a process of strategic exploration. Pre-tests and post-tests would be used to assess student learning. In addition to the embedded modules, Meghan developed a reading list to complement the common reading. Demonstrating that peer-reviewed sources are not the only authoritative sources of information, Meghan chose a collection of primary, popular, news, and scholarly sources that expanded the themes of redlining and the Great Migration discussed within Coates' essay. The list represented a shift toward incorporating diverse voices, and centering the Black experience as a legitimate source of knowledge.

COMMITTING TO ANTI-RACIST TEACHING AND CULTURAL CHANGE

Anti-racist work is ongoing; changing deeply-embedded structures of institutionalized racism takes time and commitment. This is true when revising the more tacit vestiges of White supremacy in higher education that privilege Eurocentric authors and knowledge. Critical pedagogy approaches to information literacy and writing instruction provide faculty and students with the tools to decenter Whiteness in the curriculum, toward more ethical and compassionate cross-racial dialogue in academic and public discourse. During these initial steps, we learned that institutional change is more likely to happen when there is a programmatic approach between campus units, such as between the library and the English department. To recog-

nize this collaboration and the efforts of our students, faculty, and librarians, a spring celebration of first-year writing and research was planned, during which student authors of exemplary essays on Coates' "The Case for Reparations" and related library guide sources were honored. The authors hope that the annual celebration will provide another space for the campus community to engage in cross-racial dialogue about writing and research.

The benefit of being a Lutheran university includes access to those social justice values of the ELCA that provide direction for anti-racist work. While reflective of the Lutheran faith, these values are also supportive of a diversified, secularized student population, faculty, and staff that are not predominantly Lutheran. As an HSI, the university seeks to support Latinx students and all students as a campus "where all individuals feel valued and empowered to live their purpose, where we can exercise enhanced cultural dexterity and a commitment to social justice, equity and inclusion" ("Hispanic-Serving Initiatives"). The collaborative efforts of the authors to implement anti-racist education into the first-year writing program is supportive of the university's goal to truly serve—and not just enroll—students of color.

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