

Decolonize Your Management Syllabus: A Roundtable Discussion About First Steps

ABSTRACT

Decolonization of the academy has received considerable attention in the recent past. While this process will likely take some significant time to accomplish, we suggest that instructors take the first steps in this process by working to decolonize their syllabi. We invite attendees to evaluate the level of diversity currently present in their course materials and identify new diverse material to include in future courses. We hope to engage in lively discussion about the difficulties of decolonizing syllabi and brainstorm solutions to those issues. We hope this session provides attendees the motivation to continue decolonizing their courses after the session.

Keywords: diversity, course syllabi, decolonial

Introduction. Recent calls for educators to decolonize their syllabi have been increasing and noteworthy (Mintz, 2021); however, there have been few concrete instructions provided on how to accomplish this process. Our roundtable session proposes to help instructors take the first step in decolonizing their syllabi by assessing how diverse their current syllabi is (e.g., how many different voices are being “heard” in course readings and other materials), learning about some resources they can use to find diverse content, and actually finding at least one diverse material (e.g., reading, case study, etc.) that can be incorporated into their next course offering. We intend for attendees to leave the session with a better understanding of how to quickly assess how much diverse content they already use in their courses as well as walk away with some resources they can use to continue to further decolonize their syllabus. The target audience would be instructors who already agree that decolonizing syllabi is an important step in higher education and that want to have some collective discussion about resources and steps to take to do so.

Theoretical Foundation/Teaching Implications. Census results from October 2020 indicate that 38.7% of college students identify as minorities (having grown from 32.2% ten years prior to that; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010; 2020). Meanwhile, a large majority of college content has been and still is created by individuals who identify as White/Caucasian and male. On the one hand, because the White male population has had so much access to the opportunity for advanced education and the ability to conduct consequential research, their contributions to any given field are valuable, even if only coming from one point of view. On the other hand, particularly in the field of Management, it is critical for the college population to hear from a variety of perspectives to be able to learn how to effectively interact with and utilize an increasingly diverse workforce (McKinsey & Company, 2020). This is one of many reasons why calls to decolonize syllabi have become more prominent in the past five to ten years.

The concept of decolonizing a syllabus may seem overwhelming to some who are unsure of how to begin doing so or where to look for those kinds of resources. At this time, we have been unable to find any peer-reviewed articles in the field of Management that are specifically geared toward decolonizing syllabi. In the *Harvard Business Review*, a publication that is at least geared toward business majors, Bruce et al. (2020) discuss how academia is lagging in its antiracist efforts and provide some suggestions of ways in which to work to address this gap. Some of their recommended strategies for moving forward on this point include not treating DEI as a separate, elective class, but instead infusing DEI into all business classes. They also highlight the importance of focusing on anti-racism content in academia in order to develop students who will bring anti-racist efforts into the workplace upon graduation. While this may seem like a daunting challenge to revamp syllabi to ensure a greater variety of voices and perspectives are conveyed in the content, we suggest taking Lang's (2016) small changes perspective and starting with the addition of even just a few more diverse materials in a course. Implementing small changes (at minimum) to the syllabi for each iteration of the course would get the instructor on the right path towards decolonizing the course more broadly (e.g., using inclusive language, varied pedagogical approaches, varied activities, etc.).

One example of a particularly well-done academic publication focused on decolonizing syllabi comes from the field of psychology. Fuentes et al. (2021) provided some concrete steps that instructors can take to infuse more diversity, equity, and inclusion in their syllabus. The authors highlight eight aspects of the syllabus for instructors to consider as they redevelop it and they even include some examples of verbiage that could be used to signal the priority of respect for diversity to the students before even meeting the instructor. While we will not have time to

go through the article in its entirety during the roundtable session, we would certainly recommend those interested to use it as a helpful tool for editing their syllabi for inclusiveness.

We feel it is important to note, also, that we are not proposing to enable attendees to fully decolonize their syllabus (i.e., doing more than simply including one or two readings from non-white or non-Western authors) or their whole course during this session. Instead, we hope that this discussion will allow instructors to feel more confident in taking some first steps to begin decolonizing their syllabi and hopefully provide them some motivation that it not only can and should be done, but that there is a community of instructors working toward the same goal.

Session Description. We want attendees to have the opportunity to review their own syllabi in terms of its diversity as well as have some time to brainstorm with other faculty about what resources they can access to find more diverse content. While we will provide some options for where to locate diverse content, we'd like to allow the group to assist in coming up with additional options.

The 60-minute session is planned to run as follows:

- 5 minutes* Brief introductions of facilitators and attendees.
- 10 minutes* Facilitators present brief overview of online syllabus assessment tool that determines how many of the course materials are written by women or people of color (syllabusdiversity.org). We will present one or two sample syllabi that have already been assessed by the online tool and will discuss how the online tool works and what the results look like.
- 10 minutes* Large group discussion of primary struggles and thinking about some resources instructors might use to find diverse content (e.g., readings, case studies, etc.).

20 minutes Attendees spend this time looking for at least one piece of diverse content they could incorporate into their courses and/or use the syllabus assessment tool on their own syllabi. They may work in small groups or do this individually.

10 minutes Large group discussion of what attendees found in that last 20 minutes. Sample prompts for the discussion include: How difficult was finding that content? How did you conduct your search? In what ways could you adapt your search to find more diverse content? What are some actionable next steps attendees can take as they continue working on decolonizing their syllabi?

5 minutes Conclude the session with last questions/comments and directions on where attendees can access a combination of resources found online.

It would be useful if the room we are in either has large tables or moveable desks and a projection system.

This work has not been presented at MOBTS or any other conference before and is not currently under review anywhere.

References

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