

Countering Bias in the Classroom

Evidence of Bias in the Classroom

KEY FINDINGS:

- Bias exists in the classroom in multiple forms. Most typically, instructors may harbor unconscious biases about their students, and students may hold preconceived ideas about their own abilities.
 - These biases can significantly affect test scores and long-term academic development.
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[Thomas Dee, Seth Gershenson, "Unconscious bias in the classroom: Evidence and Opportunities." Stanford Center for Education Policy Analysis, 2017, pp 10-13.](#)

This report examines the evidence of, explanations for, and interventions to address unconscious bias (UB) in the classroom setting. The authors cite numerous studies centered on cognitive priming, implicit association tests, resume audit studies, and grading biases to demonstrate that UB in classrooms is a prevalent issue at all academic levels. They find that UB can affect student outcomes by changing how teachers advise and teach minority students, creating dramatic effects for students' long-term development.

[Yaylaci, Ş. & Beauvais, E. \(2017\). The Role of Social Group Membership on Classroom Participation. PS: Political Science & Politics, 50\(2\), 559-564. doi:10.1017/S104909651600319X.](#)

Many political science departments break large lectures down into smaller, weekly tutorial groups to foster active learning. We use an original dataset measuring self-reported participation and a number of important predictors (student gender, race, and language proficiency) collected from 700 undergraduate



students in 91 political science tutorials. We find that participation does vary across social groups, even when controlling for psychological and some contextual factors. Female students participate significantly less than males, racial minorities report speaking less frequently than white students, and students with lower English-proficiency (the language of instruction) also participate less. In light of these findings, we offer suggestions for instructors on how to motivate all students to find their voice in the classroom.

Understanding and Assessing Bias In The Classroom

KEY FINDINGS:

- Issues of bias in the classroom are often the result of ingrained beliefs, and relatively small changes in behavior can have significant positive effects on student participation.
- Willingness to confront personal biases is the key first step for instructors seeking to create a diverse and inclusive classroom environment.
- Assigned readings that represent a narrow set of views negatively affect classroom diversity by limiting the scope of discussions. Similarly, a non-inclusive classroom can manifest as a non-diverse syllabus.

[Evelyn Young. "Challenges to conceptualizing and actualizing culturally relevant pedagogy: how viable is the theory in classroom practice?" *Journal of Teacher Education*, 61\(3\), 2010.](#)

This paper explores what it means to employ 'culturally relevant pedagogy' which is defined as "pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes." The study focuses on a grassroots attempt to work collaboratively with a group of administrators and teachers at one urban school to define, implement, and assess culturally relevant pedagogy as a viable pedagogical tool. A qualitative approach that used the combined methods of action research and critical case study was employed for this study. Findings revealed deep structural issues related to teachers' cultural bias, the nature of racism in school settings, and the lack of support to adequately implement theories into practice.

[Boysen GA, Vogel DL., "Bias in the Classroom: Types, Frequencies, and Responses." *Teaching of Psychology*. 2009;36\(1\):12-17.](#)



A negative finding from this study is professors' frequent inability to assess the success of their responses to bias. About 40% of professors did not know if their response to bias was successful; furthermore, it is likely that a high percentage of professors simply intuited their success rather than actually measuring it in some objective fashion. Following up on responses to bias in the classroom is important considering bias's potential impact. Assessment of success could be very simple. For example, a few minutes at the end of class could be used to solicit anonymous feedback as a form of mid-semester evaluation, or the students involved could be contacted by email after class. Although no method of assessment is perfect, the simple act of following up on the event could further illustrate its importance to students.

[Keutzer, CS. "Midterm evaluation of teaching provides helpful feedback to instructors." *Teaching of Psychology*. 1993;20\(4\):238.](#)

Advantages of using student evaluation of teaching effectiveness at midterm are discussed. They include receiving information on micro-behaviors of teaching instead of global ratings, getting feedback that can be used immediately, and bypassing some of the controversies associated with end-of-course departmental evaluations. Procedures for constructing questionnaires for a particular teaching situation are described, as are tips for reporting the data to the class. In addition to giving the instructor useful, non-threatening feedback, midterm evaluations may favorably alter the attitudes of the students toward the instructor and the teaching process.

[Diament, S., Howat, A., & Lacombe, M. \(2018\). *Gender Representation in the American Politics Canon: An Analysis of Core Graduate Syllabi*. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 51\(3\), 635-640.](#)

Core graduate-level seminars, in many ways, establish the "canon" literature for scholars entering a discipline. At a basic level, the demographic characteristics of the authors whose work is assigned can have a major impact on the diversity (or lack of diversity) of viewpoints presented in these introductory courses. Using a unique dataset derived from a survey of core American Politics graduate seminars at highly-ranked universities, this project assesses the gender diversity of the authors whose research is currently taught—overall and within a comprehensive list of topics and subtopics. We also assess the "substantive representation" of women (and other underrepresented groups) within the American Politics canon by examining the frequency with which gender, racial, and other forms of identity politics are taught in these introductory courses. The analyses revealed substantial shortfalls in the representation of women, with disproportionately low female authorship of "canon" works, even by lax standards. As a simple first step toward rectifying these disparities, we echo Beaulieu et al.'s (2017) recommendation that instructors (of introductory as well as other courses) check their syllabi for inadvertent gender bias and, wherever possible, include works by female scholars on the topics of interest.



[Sumner, J. \(2018\). The Gender Balance Assessment Tool \(GBAT\): A Web-Based Tool for Estimating Gender Balance in Syllabi and Bibliographies. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 51\(2\), 396-400. doi:10.1017/S1049096517002074.](#) ^d

This article introduces a web-based tool that scholars can use to assess the gender balance of their syllabi and bibliographies. The citation gap in political science is described briefly as well as why under-citing women relative to men is a problem that should be addressed by the field. The Gender Balance Assessment Tool (GBAT) is presented as a way to make assessing gender balance easier with the aim of remedying the gender gap. This is followed by an outline that explains in nontechnical terms how the tool identifies author names and then predicts their gender to produce a single document-level percentage of women authors. Finally, best practices for diversity in syllabi and bibliographies are discussed, and various public sources that can be used to find scholarly work by women, as well as scholars of color, are listed.

Benefits of Addressing Bias

KEY FINDINGS:

- Intentional efforts to expand classroom and campus inclusivity can result in greater student engagement in these environments.
- Increased student engagement often results in a range of benefits, including better academic performance and an increased willingness to engage with new ideas.

[Hehir, T., Grindal, T., Freeman, B., Lamoreau, R. Borquaye, Y., Burke, S., “A Summary of the Evidence on Inclusive Education,” Abt Associates, 2016, pp 7-9](#)

Inclusive education can provide a range of academic and social benefits for students with disabilities, such as higher achievement in language and mathematics, improved rates of high school graduation, and more positive relationships with non-disabled students. Nevertheless, many parents and teachers have concerns that the inclusion of students with disabilities might come at the expense of their non-disabled classmates. They may worry that the modifications or accommodations that students with disabilities require in inclusive classrooms will impede the learning of nondisabled students (Peltier, 1997). Despite these concerns, research has demonstrated that, for the most part, including students with disabilities in regular education classes does not harm non-disabled students and may even confer some academic and social benefits.



[Luo, J., Jamieson-Drake, D., “Examining the Educational Benefits of Interacting with International Students,” *Journal of International Students*, 2013, 3\(2\), pp 87-88](#)

Through the analysis of alumni survey data from three graduating cohorts, this study examined the influence of interaction with international students on domestic students’ college outcomes and explored factors that helped to promote international interaction on college campuses. The findings indicate that in comparison to non-interactive domestic students, highly interactive domestic students reported significantly higher levels of development in a wide range of areas across the three cohorts. Also, the findings suggest that active engagement in college activities, such as coursework outside the major, contact with faculty outside class, ethnic or cultural clubs or organizations, and visiting speakers, was likely to promote interaction across cultures.

[Women in Science & Engineering Leadership Institute, “Benefits and Challenges of Diversity in Academic Settings.” 2010, pp 5-6](#)

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[Carnes M, Devine PG, Isaac C, et al., “Promoting Institutional Change Through Bias Literacy,” *J Divers High Educ*. 2012;5\(2\):63–77.](#)

Approaching implicit bias as a remediable habit, we present the theoretical basis and conceptual model underpinning an educational intervention to promote bias literacy among university faculty as a step toward institutional transformation regarding gender equity. We describe the development and implementation of a Bias Literacy Workshop in detail so others can replicate or adapt it to their setting.

Implementing Anti-Bias Strategies

KEY FINDINGS:



- Instructors' responses to both concerns of bias and interstudent conflict can significantly shape student perceptions of the importance of diversity in their classroom.
- The extent to which instructors seriously address diversity and inclusion issues is important. Simply mentioning these issues does not have the same effect as consistently and seriously engaging with them.
- Sustained dedication to eliminating bias is key to creating effective anti-bias initiatives, whereas infrequent or localized efforts are less likely to change existing actions and perceptions.

[Guy Boyesen, "Teachers' Response to Bias in the Classroom: How Response Type and Situational Factors Affect Student Perceptions," *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 42\(2\), 2011.](#)

Three studies examined students' perceptions of teacher responses to bias in the classroom. Study 1 experimentally manipulated the level of bias expressed and the teacher's response. Students perceived responding to bias as more effective than ignoring bias. Study 2 demonstrated that students perceive differences in the intensity of common responses to bias. Study 3 manipulated if bias occurred publicly or privately and if the target of bias was present or not, and students evaluated teacher responses of differing intensity for their effectiveness in achieving specific goals. The results provide evidence for the efficacy of matching responses to specific goals.

[Mica Pollock, Sherry Deckman, Meredith Mira, Carla Shalaby, " "But what can I do?" : Three necessary tensions in teaching teachers about race," *Journal of Teacher Education*, 61\(3\), 2010.](#)

A core question of teacher education--"What can I do?"--plagues courses on race in particular ways. Teachers struggle for "concrete" applications of "theoretical" ideas about race, question the potential for "everyday" activity to dismantle inequality "structures" and wrestle with the need for both professional and personal development on racial issues. This article discusses how these three core tensions surfaced in one race-oriented teacher education course and how teachers that demonstrate commitment to addressing these issues have the most potential for creating positive learning environments for their students.

Sue Williamson, Meraiah Foley, "Unconscious Bias Training: The 'Silver Bullet' for Gender Equity," *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 77(3), pg 355-259, 2018. DOI: 10.1111/1467-8500.12313

Western Governments concerned about the lack of gender equity in their workforces are increasingly seeking to address the negative effects of unconscious biases on employment decisions to counter the effects of hidden prejudices. Although unconscious bias has received limited attention in the human



resource literature, social psychology literature has identified inadequacies with this practice, including that such training may entrench and normalize unconscious biases. We argue that the popularity of unconscious bias training invites agencies to view this practice as a 'silver bullet' to achieve gender equity, but that its effectiveness is likely to be limited unless accompanied by sustained interventions to address discrimination. Such additional measures may include setting hiring goals for minority groups, asking managers to catalogue changes in their behavior after unconscious bias training, or soliciting suggestions to improve the workspace from people undergoing training.

Joseph Mazer, "Teachers, students, and ideological bias in the college classroom," *Communication Education*, 67(2), 2018. DOI: 10.1080/03634523.2018.1428761

This essay examines the role of students' cognitive development as it influences issues of freedom of speech and ideological bias in the classroom. Although countering this type of bias directly is difficult given the range of expression allowed and encouraged in university classrooms, professors can foster constructive, argumentative communication while mitigating the effects of destructive, verbally aggressive communication methods.

[Marloes Hendrickx, Tim Mainhard, Henrike Boor-Klip, Antonius Cillessen, Mieke Brekelmans, "Social Dynamics in the classroom: Teacher support and conflict and the peer ecology," *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 53, 2016.](#)

This article explores the way in which teacher behavior impacts social relations between peers, finding that teachers who strive to create a more equitable environment implicitly create more harmonious relationships between students. This allows for a more comfortable learning environment for all and provides a more stable environment for marginalized students to engage in class discussion.

[Garcia, Ricardo L., "Countering Classroom Discrimination." *Theory Into Practice*, 23\(2\), 104-109, 1984.](#)

This article examines classroom discrimination, analyzing why it exists, and providing approaches to counter it. Countering bias techniques includes self-examination of the professor regarding personal attitudes and beliefs about minorities, holding minority students to the same standards as majority students, and identifying and examining the biases held by students.

[Karen Matsumoto-Grah, "Diversity in the Classroom: A Checklist." *Common Bonds: Anti-Bias Teaching in a Diverse Society* by Deborah A. Byrnes and Gary Kiger, Association for Childhood Education International, 2005, 105-108.](#)



This collection of essays seeks to prepare educational theorists and practitioners to accept diversity as a fundamental element in all educational decision making. Themes running throughout the collection include the reality of cultural diversity in all segments of American culture and the relationship between theory, research, and practice. Another important theme is the teacher's ability to create an environment in which differences are recognized and accepted, while simultaneously providing students with a common set of norms and values that bind students together. Chapter 7, in particular, provides a straightforward checklist for educators to use in countering bias in their classroom.

[Pamela Steinke, Peggy Fitch, "Minimizing Bias When Assessing Student Work." *Research & Practice in Assessment*, 12, 2017.](#)

The authors discuss three different theoretical frameworks that can be applied when assessing student work for cognitive skills such as critical thinking and problem solving. Each of the frameworks highlights the importance of underlying response structure, rather than specific perspective expressed, in evaluating the quality of the response. The authors provide examples of how focusing on the structure of the response within each framework will help those assessing student work to minimize bias in their scoring and discuss how recent developments in higher education necessitate more work in this area.

[Sarah Kavanagh, "Practicing Resistance: Teacher Responses to Intergroup Aggression in the Classroom," *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 51\(2\), 2018. DOI: 10.1080/10665684.2018.1509748](#)

Focusing specifically on sexual and gender identity, this study investigates how teachers responded to students who overtly expressed anger, contempt, or disgust towards LGBTQ people. Data was collected on three teachers' classroom practices, revealing that the most common responses to aggression are enforcing rules, offering information, and facilitating negotiation. The study goes on to suggest that each approach reflects different assumptions about how students unlearn their biases towards other people.

[Mike Noon, "Pointless Diversity Training: Unconscious Bias, New Racism and Agency," *Work, Employment and Society*, 32\(1\), pg 198-209, 2017.](#)

Knowing about bias does not automatically result in changes in behaviour by managers and employees. Even if 'unconscious bias training' has the theoretical potential to change behaviour, it will depend on the type of racism: symbolic/modern/colour-blind, aversive or blatant. This article takes the view that unconscious bias training is ultimately futile, although it does acknowledge that informed, sustained efforts may inspire different results.

