

Crafting a Social Justice Syllabus



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Overview of recorded conversation

The syllabus can be an effective tool for inclusive pedagogy practices if it:

- Provides *expectations*, clarifies *goals*, sets the *tone* for the classroom
- Communicates *your values* regarding equity and inclusion
- Is offered as an *invitation* to deep learning in community
- Sets high expectations inside of a *relationship framework*
- Is created *communally* with student input
- Has transparent explanations about *content choice* and *accessibility* to the content
- Can be altered throughout the semester as a *living document*, so that students can *co-create content and structure* for the course
- Invites students to *connect* with the professor in *multiple ways*

Source: :

<https://www.colorado.edu/center/teaching-learning/2020/12/09/writing-inclusive-syllabus-conversation>

Agenda



- Define social justice for our context
- Reflect on our values regarding social justice in our teaching
- Discuss how a syllabus is a tool to convey values and create a learning environment centering equity and justice
- Utilize a tool to review current syllabus practices
- Consider social justice pedagogical practices using our syllabus

Defining Social Justice for our Context

“Social justice in education refers to a commitment to challenging social, cultural, and economic inequalities imposed on individuals arising from any differential distribution of power, resources, and privilege.”

- Social justice includes a vision of society in which **the distribution of resources is equitable** and all members are **physically and psychologically safe and secure**.
- Some experts define teaching for social justice as having beliefs with an emphasis on **ethical values, care, and respect**
- Everyone in a just society will be able to develop and **exercise their intellectual, social, emotional, and expressive capacities**.
- In a just society, everyone affected by a decision will **have a part in making the decision**.

Source: Lee, Y.A. *What Does Teaching for Social Justice Mean to Teacher Candidates?*

Reflection and pair-share

Please reflect individually for a few minutes about these two questions. Then, you will have a short discussion in pairs.

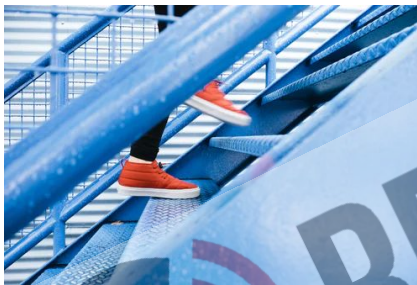
~ ***Why do you want to demonstrate social justice in your teaching practice?***

~ ***How do you, or how could you, communicate your values regarding social justice using your syllabus?***



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“A First Step in Doing Social Justice Pedagogy”



“A syllabus that signals belongingness, growth mindset, communal goals, clear and positive expectations, and success-orientation assists in setting a welcoming tone that leads to greater student achievement and engagement.”

“The instructor has an ethical duty to prepare a classroom experience that through both the content and pedagogical strategies focuses on student success.”

Source: The Social Justice Syllabus Design Tool: A First Step in Doing Social Justice Pedagogy

Table 1 *Integrative social justice pedagogy framework themes that underlie the SJSJT.*

Syllabus Best Practices	Stereotype Threat Interventions	Social Justice Pedagogy Principles
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provides clear expectations ● Provides expectations of success ● Reduces jargon ● Appeals to and motivates students ● Includes communal language ● Is learning-focused ● Promotes a growth mindset ● Is personal and less legalistic ● Points out professional and personal relevance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Eliminates stereotype-triggering language ● Promotes a growth mindset ● Ties learning to values (i.e., values affirmation activities) ● Promotes belongingness/inclusivity ● Includes stereotype threat education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Emphasizes high expectations ● Highlights social inequities ● Models a democratic and inclusive approach ● Uses an intersectional approach to the investigation of problems ● Includes self-reflective questions ● Directly discusses power/privilege disparities

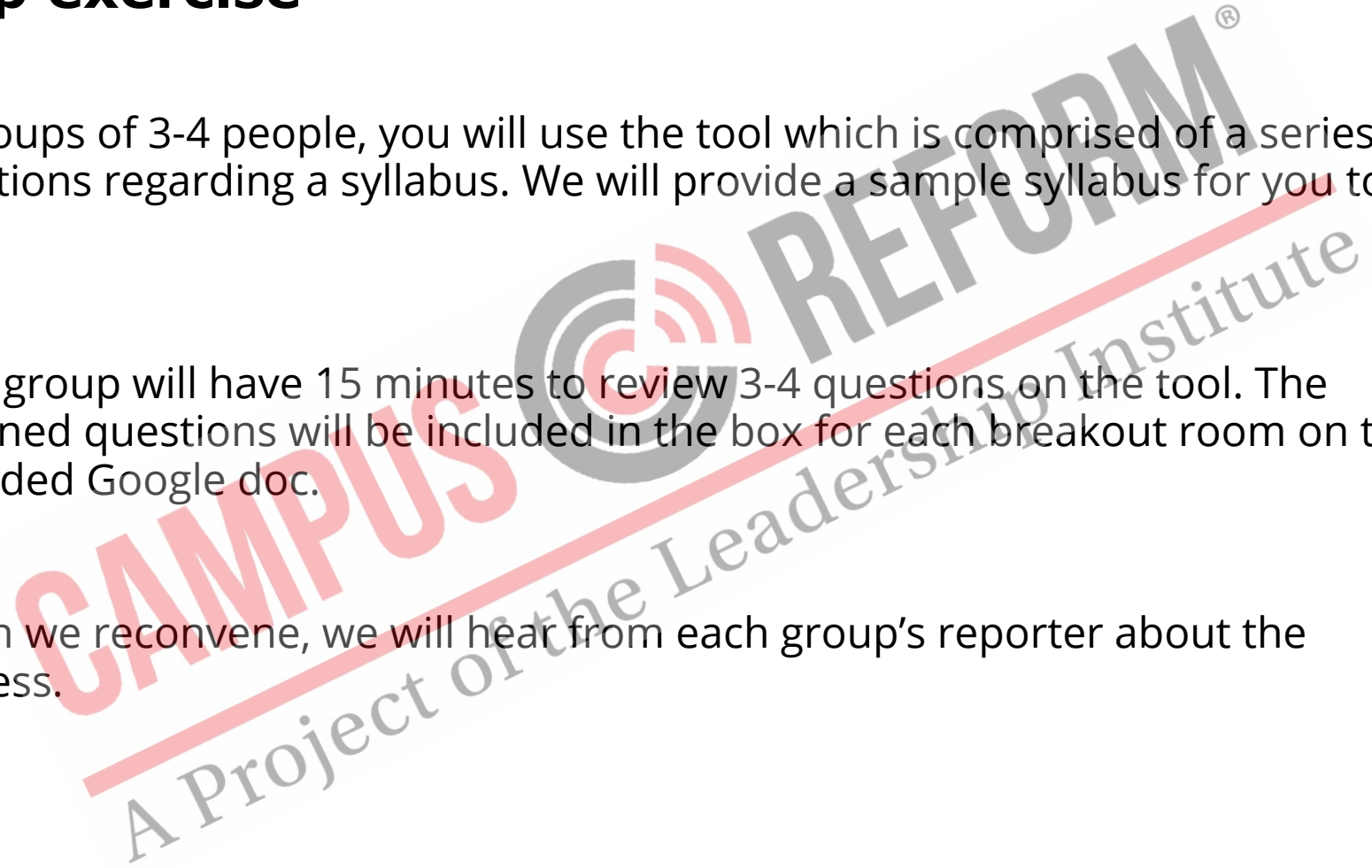
Source: Taylor, et. al., *The Social Justice Syllabus Design Tool: A First Step in Doing Social Justice Pedagogy*

Group exercise

In groups of 3-4 people, you will use the tool which is comprised of a series of questions regarding a syllabus. We will provide a sample syllabus for you to use!

Each group will have 15 minutes to review 3-4 questions on the tool. The assigned questions will be included in the box for each breakout room on the provided Google doc.

When we reconvene, we will hear from each group's reporter about the process.



Review Your Syllabus with a Social Justice Lens

Utilize the Social Justice Syllabus Design tool to review your current syllabus and design efforts.

1. Identify three questions that you will deeply explore with your syllabus.
2. Who could be your accountability partner(s) for this work in your department or unit?
3. Look back at what you wrote earlier about your values regarding social justice. Does this work with your syllabus reflect your values and intentions?

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One example

Becca's SASC Chemistry course:

I asked this Canvas ungraded survey question regarding the syllabus during the first week of class:

"The professors and IAs would like to help you increase your confidence in being successful in this class. What can we do, if anything?"



Students taking a General Chemistry course in the Student Academic Success Center; www.colorado.edu/SASC

Answers from students: (and what I learned!)

- Provide daily reminders of office hours (*encourage them to ask for help*)
- Be transparent about class policies and expectations (*provide more structure*)
- Be accessible and help us learn, during and after class times (*positive relationships*)
- Be prepared for lecture (*work as much as we do!*)
- Have a pace of learning so that students can fully understand the topic (*decolonize time*)
- Make real world connections to the chemistry we are learning (*bring in their values*)
- Be patient and supportive when being asked for help with a difficult problem (*mindset*)
- Be patient when your learning styles are different from ours (*positive relationships*)
- Actively and regularly check our learning to help ensure our success on exams (*frequent low-stakes assessments*)
- Check in that everyone is on the same page (*provide structure for community*)
- Push us to learn and succeed (*keep high expectations!*)

Questions & Comments

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Additional Resources

1. [Social Justice in Education: The Role Educational Leaders Play](#)
2. [Applying Social Justice Principles in Social Work with Children | OLLU \(olluusa.edu\)](#)
3. [3 Simple Ways to Incorporate Social Justice into Your Counseling Practice – Counselor Ashlei](#)
4. [Eight Ways Teachers Can Advocate for Social Justice \(middleweb.com\)](#)
5. [Five Ways to Advocate for Justice in Education | Learning for Justice](#)
6. [Managing Your Classroom for Equity and Social Justice | by Joe Brooks | Community Works Journal: Digital Magazine for Educators | Medium](#)
7. [social_justice_syllabus_design_tool.pdf \(csulb.edu\)](#)
8. [Microsoft Word - Social Justice Pedagogy Syllabus Evaluation Tool.docx \(sfsu.edu\)](#)
9. [How can I use my syllabus as a tool for inclusion? - Center for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching \(tufts.edu\)](#)
10. [CREATING AN INCLUSIVE SYLLABUS | Center for Teaching Excellence \(ku.edu\)](#)
11. [Inclusive Syllabus - Center for Teaching & Learning Excellence - The University of Utah](#)

Additional Resources

Gannon, K. (2018, September 12). How to Create a Syllabus. Retrieved November 12, 2019, from The Chronicle of Higher Education website: <https://www.chronicle.com/interactives/advice-syllabus>

Goldrick-Rab, S. (2017, August 7). Basic Needs Security and the Syllabus. Retrieved August 8, 2017, from Sara Goldrick-Rab website: <https://medium.com/@saragoldrickrab/basic-needs-security-and-the-syllabus-d24cc7afe8c9>

Heidebrink-Bruno, A. (2014). Syllabus as Manifesto: A Critical Approach to Classroom Culture. Hybrid Pedagogy. Retrieved from <http://hybridpedagogy.org/syllabus-manifesto-critical-approach-classroom-culture/>

Heidebrink-Bruno, A. (2015). Envisioning the Radical Syllabus: A Critical Approach to Classroom Culture, Part 2 | Hybrid Pedagogy. Hybrid Pedagogy. Retrieved from <http://hybridpedagogy.org/envisioning-radical-syllabus/>