

DECOLONIZING THE CURRICULUM (DTC)

1. RATIONALE

Stockton University is a predominantly white school (PWS), and this fact engenders a number of issues – primarily, as the recent Climate Survey of faculty and staff has shown, many faculty and staff of color feel isolated and unheard. There is little reason to think that the students of color feel differently – being in a minority, whether ethnic, racial, religious, or sexual/affective by definition comes with fewer opportunities to see themselves represented or acknowledged in the majority’s view. That is, unless the majority makes a concerted effort to decenter its own perspective in the institutional culture, and embraces true inclusion. DTC taskforce proposes to develop a mechanism for such majority decentering and minority inclusion along with strategies to encourage the University to embrace this approach across disciplines. Curriculum is the very foundation of the University, and we believe that the systemic change should start with serious effort to both decenter Western and white perspectives across curriculum in favor of inclusion of non-Western and non-white perspectives, experiences, and modes of knowledge.

2. WHY DECOLONIZING?

We believe that all students deserve to see themselves represented in the curriculum; currently however only white students see themselves represented in every single course that they take. At worst, non-white and non-Western representations are ignored – scientists, writers, and artists of color are often not mentioned at all. In somewhat better cases, they may be acknowledged and one or two token examples may be offered to the students. Such tokenism is pervasive in many initiatives that center on “diversity” as well – for example, hosting an event or a guest lecturer focusing on non-Western cultural practices acknowledges the existence of other cultures while positioning them as inherently “other”. The implication of such events and the language that surrounds them often tends to focus on the educational aspect of these exchanges – implicit assumption being that such experiences would benefit white students by exposing them to the exotic “other”, thus keeping the focus on white experiences as central. An example of true inclusion thus would be a course or an event in which a multitude of perspectives and experiences is included – a class in American Literature, for example, that has a variety of readings from non-white and diaspora writers along with the standard selection of white writers.

3. WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

We hope to develop a variety of examples on how to move from IGNORING or OTHERING of non-white and non-Western perspectives to INCLUSION. We recognize that the modes of true INCLUSION will differ across disciplines and that it will be easier to achieve in some cases than the others (a class on 19th Century Russian Literature, for example, is unlikely to have more than one author of African descent.) We also recognize that faculty members will differ in their

perceptions of both urgency and necessity of decentering their own whiteness in favor of making their students of color feel like they are seen, heard, recognized and respected by those who teach them. A skim of the recent faculty email discussion of the Stockton's bust, for example, shows that the feelings of the living and breathing students of color on that matter never featured as prominently as the legacy of the dead white man, and the discussion focused on the particulars of Stockton's legacy rather than on the reasons the students objected to the bust's presence in the library.

Thus we will likely need to develop a variety of approaches and resources. We will start with the SENCER model courses, which focus on teaching science via issues of social importance as a way of attracting underrepresented groups. (There are courses that teach Chemistry starting with radioactive isotopes and the effects of radioactive exposure on humans living next to nuclear dump sites, many of which are located next to, and affect Native American communities.)

Along with the resources and seminars and information sessions on HOW to incorporate underrepresented voices and views into our courses we will also need to develop ways of convincing faculty that this is a worthwhile undertaking. Changing minds is always more challenging than simply offering the resources to those who are already willing to engage, but the effort will have to be made if we are to move forward in freeing our curriculum from the narrow and singular Eurocentric view.