Diversify the Curriculum

Perspectives, methods, and questions to get started

Michelle Grue
University of California, Santa Barbara
Education, Writing Studies, and Creative Writing
e-mail: mgrue@ucsb.edu  Twitter: @mnpgrue
Overview

The call for diversifying academic curriculum has been sounding on both sides of the Atlantic and scholars are heeding it. Yet, the reality remains that the majority of faculty members in both the United States and United Kingdom are white and trained in traditional, Western academic canons.
Overview

For academics who want to diversify the curriculum, determining how to actually do so can be challenging. Michelle Grue will explain the perspectives, questions, and methods that framed a collaborative research project on which she and her colleagues examined the degree requirements and course offerings in the top-50 Ph.D. granting sociology departments in the US. She will also briefly summarise and discuss the findings. With these frameworks and methods in hand, attendees should be equipped to begin a similar examination of their own program’s course offerings, canon, and beyond.
Perspectives

- Key words scholars use when talking about this work:
  - Diversify curriculum
  - Decolonize curriculum
  - Culturally aware/sensitive/humble pedagogy

- Individual academics, department leadership, and university administrators need to decide which, if any of these, they actually want to achieve, as this will strongly influence the types of changes made and maintained at a university.
As Mayrl and Mauksch (1987) noted in their analysis of the first American Sociological Association (ASA)’s assessment of graduate programs, PhD programs were consistently similar in their course offerings, most of which did not cover race or gender. Our research team wanted to know if, in the three decades since, that structural inequity remained true.
Research question

- Among top-ranked PhD granting sociology departments, to what extent do programs offer their graduate students training in race and gender?
What do we mean by training?

- Graduate programs train their students, academically prepare them for their field of study. This usually includes theory, methods, content, practice researching, writing, presenting, teaching, and publishing according to their field’s expectations.
- Training in race and gender = academic preparation in race & gender
- Academic preparation in race and gender =
  - Content knowledge related to race or gender (scholars and topics)
  - Theoretical and methodological frames and practices related to race and gender (feminist, critical race, decolonial, etc.)
  - Pedagogical knowledge of best practices for teaching underrepresented minority students, feminist pedagogy, etc.
  - Cultural sensitivity/humility training
What do we mean by exploratory?

The research team intends this project simply as a way to begin the process of creating a useful tool for assessing graduate programs - in this case sociology - and how they prepare their students to teach and research race and gender.

We already have plans to extend the project by:
- performing interviews at case study schools
- Checking student evaluations and syllabi of said courses

Other plans:
- extending into different disciplines
- extending into other countries
Data Sources

- The US News Report “Best Graduate Sociology Programs list, which while described as a top 50 list, actually included 57 colleges and universities.

- Information collected included: course descriptions, degree requirements, schedules of courses offered over time, and comprehensive exam concentration areas.

- The team divided those 57 institutions amongst themselves. Of the 57, 54 either had enough information listed on their websites or responded to our inquiries to share the information that was usually included online.

- Rationale: potential students applying to graduate schools use information available on universities’ websites to make application decisions.
Methodological Overview

Data sources organized into spreadsheet

Coded, via color system, according to difficulty in students choosing to be trained in race and gender, respectively.

These codes consistently matched, with only 2 misses, which were resolved by the PI.

Indicators for adequately training students in race or gender:
- Courses offered in past 2 yrs
- # & frequency of courses
- If courses were required or elective
- Courses offered in or out of department
- If listed comp/qual exam areas or topics included race or gender

FINDINGS
## Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Green Light</td>
<td>8/54, 14.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellow Light</td>
<td>24/54, 44.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Light</td>
<td>12/54, 22.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Green Light</td>
<td>10/54, 18.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellow Light</td>
<td>38/54, 70.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Light</td>
<td>6/54, 11.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Green light departments

| Race: One Northeastern university is a representative example of a “green light” school primarily for offering an Africana Specialization option, which provides both coursework and structural support for studying race. | Gender: A public uni in the Pacific Northwest is a representative example of a “green light” school. The primary factors: a) the descriptions of two required theory courses include feminist theory and b) multiple options in the pool of required seminars are explicitly about gender. |
Race and gender: A university in the Southeast is representative example of a “yellow light” school by offering several course offerings in race or gender, yet they are all electives, and only 6 course hours are allotted for taking elective courses. Thus, the most they could take are two courses, which many students may split by taking one on race and the other on gender.
## Red light departments

| Race: A public Midwestern university is a representative example of a “red light” school. The primary aspect that contributed to this designation was: no courses on race were offered in the 2013/14 school year, the most recent year available on their departmental website. | Gender: Another public Midwestern university is a representative example of a “red light” school, in the gender category, for similar reasons. It has not offered courses on gender (or race) since at least the 2015/16 school year, which is the farthest back the website displays. |
Study conclusions

- Overall, there is a lack of plentiful and varying courses on race and gender
  - We speculate that there need to be more faculty both able and willing to teach these courses
  - Further, both department and university leaders need to prioritize providing these courses, including rewarding doing so via tenure/promotion credit
- Caution: these findings do not guarantee the quality of student experiences in these programs
Data sources:
- US News Report “Best Graduate Sociology Programs” list, which, while described as a top 50 list, actually included 57 colleges and universities. The team divided those 57 institutions amongst themselves. Of the 57, 54 had enough information listed on their websites to perform the analysis.
- Information collected included: course descriptions, degree requirements, schedules of courses offered over time, and comprehensive exam concentration areas.
Methods: A Closer Look

Study indicators for adequately training students in race or gender:

- Courses offered in past 2 yrs
- # & frequency of courses
- If courses were required or elective
- Courses offered in or out of department
- If listed comp/qual exam areas or topics included race or gender
Coding based on indicators

Programs were coded with a green light if they evidenced a strong score on multiple factors. For example, a school might not offer a comprehensive or qualifying exam area on race, but if it offered 2+ courses on race every semester and those courses were actually taught by the department, as opposed to an interdisciplinary emphasis, then a school could still receive a green rating for race.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>G</th>
<th>H</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>iformation available line if not, how received</td>
<td>doctoral course requirements</td>
<td>mandatory courses</td>
<td>elective courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>theory: SOC 204, SOC 208 methods; SOC 202, 203, and 209 Sociology Research Design SOC 295 Teaching Practicum SOC 305 Students must complete 6 elective courses, which may be chosen from those 100-level courses designated as Conference Courses in Courses of Instruction: 200, 300, 400, and 500-level courses, unless otherwise noted. Students are not required to take two credits of workshops. Courses from other departments may be used as electives.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>statistics courses</td>
<td>Classical and Contemporary Sociological Theory (2 total)</td>
<td>Techniques and Methods of Social Science (1 total)</td>
<td>Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOC 200 (proseminar)</td>
<td></td>
<td>SOC 217A, B, C (method 1, B, (lecture); SOC 273 (methods); SOC 280A (2 subfield courses), 3; SOC 280B (2 courses can be from outside the dept)</td>
<td>SOC 350 and SOC 354, or POL 571 and POL 572 SOC 451 and SOC 452 SOC 530 SOC 535</td>
<td>students can take up to five courses on a topic they like. The SOC 280 fulfills this req as well as the option to take two courses outside the dept. However, none of the required courses directly reference race or gender as a main focus.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to Graduate Studies (Fall term) - SOC 305 Graduate Proseminar Colloquium. SOC 399. Minimum sociology units in years 1 and 2. Students are required to complete 46 units of course work in Sociology in the first year, plus 15 units of Sociology course work in the second academic year. Theory: Students are required to take at least two courses in sociological theory. One course should be in either macro-sociological theory (SOC 370A Sociological Theory: Social Structure, Inequality, and Conflict, or micro-sociological theory (SOCI 370B Social Theory: Interaction and Group Process), in the first year of the program. A second course, in research design, should be taken during the first year of the program. In addition, SOC 301</td>
<td>see left</td>
<td>Survey Courses: SOC 310 Political Sociology SOC 314 Economic Sociology SOC 316 Historical and Comparative Sociology SOC 318 Social Movements and Collective Action SOC 320 Social Foundations of Social Psychology SOC 323 The Family SOC 339 Gender Meanings and Processes SOC 340 Social Stratification</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to Graduate Studies (Fall term) - Sociology 500 Theories and Practices of Sociology I and II (Fall and Winter terms) - Sociology 505 and 506 Statistics (Fall and Winter term) - Sociology 507 First-Year Seminars: Research Practicum (one of the following): Qualitative Research Methods - Sociology 522 Quantitative Research Methods - Sociology 542 Survey Methodology - Survey Methodology 500, 507, 543 (optional) Students are not required to take these courses outside the dept. However, none of the required courses directly reference race or gender as a main focus.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to Graduate Studies (Fall term) - Sociology 500 Theories and Practices of Sociology I and II (Fall and Winter terms) - Sociology 505 and 506 Statistics (Fall and Winter term) - Sociology 507 First-Year Seminars: Research Practicum (one of the following): Qualitative Research Methods - Sociology 522 Quantitative Research Methods - Sociology 542 Survey Methodology - Survey Methodology 500, 507, 543 (optional) Students are not required to take these courses outside the dept. However, none of the required courses directly reference race or gender as a main focus.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;class offerings rotate; not all approved surveys are offered every year.&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Applying to individual programmatic review

- **Next steps:**
  - Pulling syllabi from each class to determine:
    - If course descriptions accurately illustrate level of race or gender covered (theory, methods, authors of articles, perspectives and issues interwoven [not othered or exoticized], etc.)
    - Ways in which courses can be diversified*
  - Interviewing and/or surveying students from these programs for areas of concern they identify
  - Interviewing and/or surveying academics from these programs for supports needed to execute these changes
  - Administrative support for all of the above (department and higher, if possible)
Ways in which courses can be diversified

- Theory, methods, authors of articles, perspectives and issues interwoven [not othered or exoticized], etc.
- “Race [and gender need] to be named, interrogated, discussed, and ‘demetaphored’ in ways that are specific, explicit, and additive” (De Müller & Ruiz, 2017)
Ways in which courses can be diversified

- Beyond subject matter:
  - Critical pedagogy
    - Leading first with academics, then their students, through critical reflection around race and gender
  - Creating a space in the classroom that is safe for all students to engage in the above work and in rigorous inquiry
  - Teaching strategies
Administrative support: what does that look like?

  - “[administrators] hold a great deal of power to affect change in … program curricula due to their ability to dictate what happens in terms of pedagogical training, faculty development, assessment practices, and student support” (p.19)
If POCs working on these initiatives have writing program and wider institutional support, successful strategies can be instituted and sustained. One respondent names a few successful strategies at their institution:

[There is] a diversity requirement for all undergraduates, a writing center that provides assistance for both undergraduates and graduate students as well as putting on workshops for faculty and students alike (staffed by undergraduate students who must have taken courses in tutoring and have a faculty recommendation before the students are hired by the Director of the writing center). Numerous courses, even those not designated as satisfying the ethnic studies or women and gender studies requirement, include works by non-European authors.
Administrative support: what does that look like?

One respondent stated,

We have worked very consciously in the last 5 years to change our curriculum to meet the changing demographics of our students. We do lots of professional development and are now working on putting diversity and inclusion into our merit documents.
Administrative support: what does that look like?

Instructors are well connected to the Writing Center staff and often have conversations about linguistic diversity and inclusion in terms of student writing. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds (who are overwhelmingly non-white) are also able to participate in a Higher Education Opportunity Program (HEOP) prior to the start of their first semester, where they are encouraged to embrace and explore the rich literacy traditions they come from while preparing them for the kinds of academic standard Engishes they will encounter in college.

This response particularly speaks to the common theme of administrative and institutional support. When race-based initiatives are grounded in and sustained by an institution and administrators that values students of color and their linguistic histories, then students benefit; instructors feel prepared; and programs are more able to address race in writing programs.
Conclusions

- To effectively diversify curriculum one must:
  - Solidify goals (Ultimately, who are you trying to serve? Why?)
  - Assess the status quo (What are you doing already? What are you not doing?)
  - Acknowledge the importance of administrative support and exercise it in concrete ways where possible
  - Work on curricular diversity in terms of content, classroom environment, and pedagogy
  - Get to work!
Questions?