

# Challenging Racism in Service Learning: When Doing Good Is Not So Great

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We CU

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# Land Acknowledgment

We are on the lands of the Peoria, Kaskaskia, Piankashaw, Wea, Miami, Mascoutin, Odawa, Sauk, Mesquaki, Kickapoo, Potawatomi, Ojibwe, and Chickasaw Nations.

These lands were the traditional territory of these Native Nations prior to their forced removal; these lands continue to carry the stories of these Nations and their struggles for survival and identity.



Pictured: *Beyond the Chief*  
exhibit by Hock E Aye Vi Edgar  
Heap of Birds

# Land Acknowledgment Continued

The University of Illinois has a particular responsibility to acknowledge the peoples of these lands, as well as the histories of dispossession that have allowed for the growth of this institution for the past 150 years.

We are also obligated to reflect on and actively address these histories and the role that this university has played in shaping them.



Pictured: *Beyond the Chief*  
exhibit by Hock E Aye Vi Edgar  
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# We CU Supports Instructors

- Connections to local community organizations through the Community Learning Lab
- Consultations on course design
- Trainings for instructors and students
- Mini-grants for students



# One Thing I Do...

- What is one thing that you do to ensure your service learning experiences promote equity?
- In small groups, share your ideas.
- Write your major insights on the [Jamboard](#) (see link in chat)



Do activities to help participants understand their own privilege and how they will be perceived

Make sure those doing the service learn first about the social, historical, and community contexts of those they are to work with

Offer training and conversation before students go into the field, including case studies and real examples

Talking about white saviorism and not being voyeurs

Start with the community org: what are their needs and their goals? This is a constant process that includes feedback

Understand those contexts (e.g., historical, social, etc.) - also as way to address biases they may bring into those communities.

"Watch the language we use" - Mindful attention to the words we're using

Inclusive communication techniques; trying to select a good representation (different identities; ethnicities; background) of students to go to site

encourage a culture of asking questions

Ensuring that projects are developed through shared priorities and reciprocity

Ensure that we're not making decisions for the community, but following their lead

What is one thing that you do to ensure your service learning experiences promote equity?

Creating strong connections between what happens in classroom and in the community

Emphasize reciprocity and collaboration in training materials

at orientation we have cross cultural communications/training workshop to get issues out in the open and create a safe space for students to bring issues/concerns up

Having a different lines of communication (email, chats, in person, etc)

orientation at the start of internship program on best practices

# Today's Goals

- Uncover some of the subtle (and not subtle) ways racism may show up in service (and other) work with communities of color
- Examine consequences of racism in service learning
- Identify strategies to challenge racism in your community engagement
- Engage with a panel of University instructors thoughtfully addressing these concerns



# Assumptions

- Racism, sexism, ableism, classism, antisemitism, and other forms of oppression harm our homes, workplaces, and communities
- We have all been exposed to systems of inequity and we have each adapted to them.
- We each have a role and responsibility to fight for fairness and equity for everyone
- This conversation is only a beginning!





# What are barriers to this convo?

- Discussion can be re-traumatizing, painful
- Stories of racism, marginalization, and resistance are often hidden
- It isn't polite to discuss (colorblindness, power-blindness)
- Lack good skills, role modeling to have the conversation
- Afraid people will walk away with hurt feelings
- We don't know what we don't know
- Worry that someone will say something offensive



# Defining Racism



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# What is Racism?

Racism is a complex system of beliefs and behaviors, grounded in a presumed superiority of the white race. These beliefs and behaviors are conscious and unconscious; personal and institutional; and result in the oppression of people of color and benefit the dominant group, whites. A simpler definition is racial prejudice + power = racism.

*<http://www.racialequityresourceguide.org/about/glossary>*



# Structural Racism

**A system in which public policies, institutional practices, cultural representations, and other norms work in various, often reinforcing ways to perpetuate racial group inequity.** It identifies dimensions of our history and culture that have allowed privileges associated with “whiteness” and disadvantages associated with “color” to endure and adapt over time.

*- Aspen Institute*



# Policy, Not People

“This is the consistent function of racist ideas - and of any kind of bigotry more broadly: to manipulate us into seeing people as the problem, instead of the policies that ensnare them.”

- Ibram Kendi *How to be an Antiracist*

# White Supremacy

"White supremacy is not simply the idea that whites are superior to people of color (although it certainly is that), but a deeper premise that supports this idea—the definition of whites as the norm or standard for human, and people of color as an inherent deviation from that norm."

- Robin DiAngelo



# Three Pillars of White Supremacy

- ***Slavery/Capitalism***

*Renders an individual – particularly Black folks in the US – as property, commodification and exploitation of one's labor*

- ***Genocide/Colonialism***

*In order for claim to land/property, frames some groups – especially Indigenous folks in the US – as a “present absence” who must be “disappearing”*

- ***Orientalism***

*Process of defining the West as superior as compared to an “exotic” and inferior groups – particularly Middle Eastern, Asian Pacific Islander, and Latinx folks in the US – who are seen as a perpetual foreign threat*

*Based on work of Andrea Smith*



# Racism Without Racists

- Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's book *Racism Without Racists* posits the notion that racism continues whether or not individual actors intend to be racist.
- Structures of racism (and other forms of oppression) do not need to be explicitly “evil” to harm people of color.
- Racism is *supposed* to look like the status quo, which is how it is so easily perpetuated.





# Does Intent Matter?

*The impact of unintentional racism—the ways we participate in and bolster racism without actively trying to do so—is indistinguishable from the impact of intentional racism. Imagining myself as a good person, as a progressive person, means little if I am not examining and changing the impact I’m having even through actions I once took without intention.*

- Paul Gorski, EdChange.org



# Racism in Service Learning



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# Racism in Practice

- **In small groups, discuss your thoughts:**
  - How might service-learning support racism and/or white supremacy?
  - How could service-learning challenge racism and/or white supremacy?
- **Come up with 3 key insights and add those into the Jamboard ([see link in chat](#))!**



# How Might Service Learning

## Uphold Racism

Savior mentality - outsiders believing they know what's best for community

Completing action without participation or buy-in of community as to what they would like the action to look like

Only interact with community when we need something.

Short timeframe - coming in for 1 week, not really maintaining relationships before or after

Allow ourselves to continue with unintentional biases and privileged thinking

Limited resources and staffing to ensure equity, inclusion, and reciprocity

Taking photos with local community and marketing service learning (formally or informally) in a particular way that doesn't respect or take into account the community

separation between community orgs and community

## Counter Racism

Having appropriate conversations with community before any actions

Engage with other communities

Consideration of the types of research methods being used - are they true and understandable to the community? Try to make sure the community doesn't feel scrutinized.

provide historical context to prepare students

Training and workshop opportunities to educate about white savior complex, cultural humility etc.

Ensuring a diversity of participants in your research, speakers, etc. to represent many perspectives

Forcing students to create relationships with people they normally do not come across

Promote communication and collaboration over saviorism

Listen to community partners, build strong relationships, stay informed and respond accordingly

Engaging in regular reflection and considering how it would impact what students can do in the same or other communities after service learning

educate ourselves about community perspectives and needs and respond to those rather than our own agenda

explore and reflect on our own power and social perspectives

# Ways Service Learning Combats Racism

- Increase understanding, empathy, knowledge about experiences of marginalized communities
- Increase available narratives about community strength, resistance



# How might service learning support racism?

- Paternalism/Savior Complex
- Centering the Dominant Voices (Who defines the problem?)
- Exploiting labor of community of color
- Not showing up consistently, breaking promises
- Racist treatment from volunteers

**Guest Instructor:  
Dr. Ann Abbott**



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# Meet Dr. Abbott

- Associate Professor
- Director of Undergraduate Studies, Department of Spanish & Portuguese
- Teaches SPAN 232: Spanish in the Community





# Questions to Consider

- What are some examples of service learning that you utilize in your courses?
- How do you construct your service learning experiences to minimize/address racism and other forms of exploitation or harm?
- What should instructors using service learning consider when implementing service learning experiences?

# SPAN 232: Spanish in the Community

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Ann Abbott, Department of Spanish & Portuguese  
arabbott@illinois.edu / @AnnAbbott

# Offered every semester since 2004

## Community partners:

- Human service agencies
  - The Refugee Center
  - Immigration Services of Champaign-Urbana
  - New American Welcome Center
- Schools
  - Dual immersion schools
  - ESL classrooms
  - Tutoring
  - Events
- Other
  - Clinics, research projects, public engagement (e.g., CLACS)

## Logistics:

- Partner with WeCU
- [My homegrown system](#)

# In class, use active learning techniques.

Giving students clear instructions on what to do with information regarding racism might help alleviate some of the tensions that can hold us back in our classroom discussions.

This example highlights the importance of showing students specific examples of structural racism.

## Con una pareja

1. **Una persona mira "The racist history of immigration laws".**
2. **La otra persona mira "Are Deportation Laws Racist?"**
3. **Juntos, resuman, comparen y conecten los dos videos con nuestro tema de esta semana: La racialización de los inmigrantes.**

# Localize your anti-racist approach.

Because of our relatively large Maya community in Champaign-Urbana, we have a unit on “Indigeneity.”

Illustrate the process of racialization, not just racism.

Help students engage with discussions regarding racism that go beyond the limits of our conversations in the United States.

Connect our discussion of immigrant justice to other justice movements (e.g., racial, environmental, etc.).  
Example: [Black Alliance for Just Immigration](#).

## ¿Cómo se habla del racismo en México?



# Explicitly address Whiteness.

We look at videos about undocumented Irish immigrants. Many students connect this to Polish immigrants in Chicago.

I explicitly address my own Whiteness:

- Linguistic ideologies. I am praised for being multilingual; racialized immigrants are told “Speak English!”
- Maps. I share my neighborhood and compare its data with immigrant neighborhoods.
- #doilookillegal

## ¿Y los inmigrantes indocumentados blancos?



# Addressing Racism in Service Learning



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# Considering Exploitation in Service Learning

- What did you appreciate about Dr. Abbott's work?
- How might you incorporate her strategies into your work?
- What are some of the most important strategies for you as you think about challenging racism in traditional service learning?



# Solutions to Racism in Service Learning

- Focus on the goals/intent of your experiential service
- Develop reciprocal partnerships with community organizations/leaders
- Create avenues for communication during service experiences
- Prepare students for experience
- Provide reflective opportunities with room for feedback



# Racism is Everyone's Problem

“When we choose to be antiracist, we become actively conscious about race and racism and take actions to end racial inequities in our daily lives. Being antiracist is believing that racism is everyone's problem, and we all have a role to play in stopping it.”

- *National Museum of African American History and Culture*



# Addressing Exploitation in Our Service Learning

Unity



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Global

# Applications for Our Instruction

- In small groups, discuss strategies you can incorporate into future service learning.
- Add your group's ideas into the [Jamboard](#)
- You may also identify barriers/challenges that keep you from implementing – add those to the bottom so we can discuss!



# Strategies to Improve Service Learning

Lays a lot of groundwork before her students ever meet with a community partner--explains definitions, gives examples, offers action strategies

Partnering with CP to structure courses, picking one or two instead of doing too much

Reflection + share and get a better sense of why they experience what they did

Interactive experiences and active learning practices to teach students strategies they can apply in real time

Show support to other faculty or instructors if issues arise in a service learning context

Ensure reciprocity by making sure the partnerships are long term, that partners are involved in course design, and follow up with partner after course ends

Reflection on identities and the community they're serving

Show up for community partners OUTSIDE of service learning (attend events and fairs, share materials on social media, and maintain communication beyond course)

Have students journal, so instructor can keep tabs on what's happening, tackle privilege, and interact even remotely

**Get peers (prior students) involved**

Help students identify community strengths and consider how to use them.

Find ways to ensure that linguistic barriers aren't leaving certain communities or community partners out.

# Challenges and/or Resources Needed

Difficult to  
balance  
obligations as a  
faculty  
member and  
instructor

some  
community  
projects are  
an "Instead of"

Attempting to  
broaden the way  
that research is  
done and ensuring  
that we're not  
relying on past  
practices just  
because it's the  
status quo.

temporality of  
projects with  
students and  
classes makes it  
hard to establish  
long-standing  
relationships with  
community partners

ensuring that our  
"community  
partners" aren't  
outsiders but are  
meeting needs that  
the community  
actually has or  
wants

Support from  
university -  
funding/grants

Teaching assistants  
to help with  
logistics and  
community partner  
relations

# Strategies for Antiracist Service Learning

- What were some of the strategies that felt useful?
- What are the major challenges you have encountered?
- What resources do you need to actualize these strategies?
- What resources do you need to overcome the barriers you identified?

# Who Needs Allies?

*Black people do not need allies. We need people to stand up and take on the problems borne of oppression as their own, without remove or distance.*

*We need people to do this even if they cannot fully understand what it's like to be oppressed for their race or ethnicity, gender, sexuality, ability, class, religion, or other marker of identity.*

*We need people to use common sense to figure out how to participate in social justice.*

- "On Making Black Lives Matter" by Roxane Gay





# Questions?



# Contact Us

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# Resources

- [Okun, T. \*White Supremacy Culture\*.](#)
- [Recognizing Racism in Volunteer Engagement. \*MAVA\*.](#)
- [Guidelines for higher education programs that require students to do special projects with nonprofits. \*NonprofitAF\*.](#)
- [White Women Doing White Supremacy in Nonprofit Culture. \*Tzedek Social Justice Fund\*.](#)