
Assessing DEI in Written Communication: Antiracist Frameworks for Program Wide Assessment

— with Stephanie Hedge —
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Session Learning Outcomes

Attendees of this session will:

- Understand the key features of an antiracist framework for conceptualizing large scale assessment
- Develop a heuristic for antiracist interrogations in assessment work
- Learn how to deploy that heuristic at different points within the assessment process
- Learn strategies for incorporating diversity, equity, and inclusion values into assessments that do not organically make space for these values
- Learn strategies for building findings back into the curriculum, centering DEI

Introduction and Position Statement

- Hi, I'm Steph!
 - Dr. Stephanie Hedge, Associate Professor English and Writing Program Administrator at the University of Illinois Springfield, also chair of the General Education Council
- Brief Introduction in the Room
 - Who are we, what positions do we hold, and what institutions do we represent?
- Position Statement as a White Person doing Antiracist Work
 - How I am using the voices of BIPOC scholars to support and frame my work

Theory, Practice, and Assessment Frameworks

Transformative Assessment Frameworks

- Guiding Text: *Reframing assessment to center equity: Theories, models, and practices*. (2022).
- Thinking of assessment as lever for institutional change: a practice that determines what questions are asked, what stories are told, and what voices are heard
- Assessment as a “transformative process on behalf of social justice and decolonization in the academy and the world” (p. 303)

Henning, G. W., Jankowski, N. A., Montenegro, E., Baker, G. R., & Lundquist, A. E. (Eds.). (2022). *Reframing assessment to center equity: Theories, models, and practices*. Stylus Publishing, LLC.

Assessment is Never Neutral

- If we are not deliberate in our assessment framing—if we do not explicitly and consciously choose a methodology that centers equity—we are using the “default” frameworks of oppression, capitalism, patriarchy, and white supremacy
- Assessment “is planned and carried out by people and conducted within social institutions guided by norms, policies, assumptions, and preferences, which means bias is inherently part of the process because assessment is socially situated” (p. 5)
- “Assessment is complicit in either exacerbating the equity problem already existing in higher education today or mitigating it. It is not a value neutral exercise” (pg. 33)

Equity as Practice vs. Purpose

- How might we reframe assessment to center equity?
- Centering equity as **practice**
 - How we conduct assessment
- Centering equity as **purpose**
 - Using assessment to discover and remediate equity gaps

Reflection Point: Determining Your Framework(s) and Finding Practice vs. Purpose

- In what ways does your institution have a “default” approach when it comes to assessment?
- What are some of the “norms, policies, assumptions, and preferences” that define assessment at your institution?
 - Does your institution have a mission statement or set of beliefs when it comes to assessment? What kinds of things does it center?
 - What purpose does assessment have at your institution?
 - Who has access to assessment data at your institution, and how is it used?
 - Where does assessment “live” at your institution, and who generally conducts it?
 - What kinds of data does your institution usually collect, and how?
- If your institution were to center equity, would it be through practice or purpose? Why?

Background: the UIS Assessment Project and Invisible Held Values

- Due to external pressures (HLC requirements), I was charged by the office of the Provost to conduct a relatively fast assessment project of first year writing (Written Communication) with very little guidance
- There was no sense of the learning outcomes we should assess, and no purpose provided beyond compliance
- We had one assignment that was consistent across all sections of comp: an 8-10 page research paper, and we chose to assess this for a random sample of all students
- Our institution uses the AAC&U VALUE rubrics (and I am trained in the WC rubric), so we used that as a foundation for our thinking
- When trying to determine our rubric and approach, we realized that while Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion were a held value for our courses and our institution, there was no room for assessing DEI in AAC&U rubrics or our other possible instrumentation
- Our courses are called “Rhetoric and Civic Engagement”, and we wanted to honor and explore that value in our assessment

Activity: Naming Your Held Values

- What is your mission statement for your institution? What values are named there?
- Is there a strategic compass, or other guiding mission for the institution?
- What are the values of your specific program? Do you have an “about”, or a mission statement, for the part of the institution that you represent?
- What are the kinds of curriculum that are valued, or used in advertising, or otherwise centered at your institution?
- What are the learning outcomes for your program or curriculum or course? What is written there?
- What are the values that are not stated—reading between the lines, what is valued?

Activity: Naming Your Held Values

UIS Mission Statement and Vision

- <https://www.uis.edu/about>
- Centering “civic engagement” and “catalyst for change”
- Civic engagement and diversity are listed as values
- “Diversity” is a category under the “Why UIS” page
- Our upper division gen ed curriculum is called “Engaged Citizenship Common Experience” and all courses explicitly engage diversity and systems of power

What does the website for your institution indicate are your held values?

What do we mean when we say antiracist?

Anti-racism is the active process of identifying, challenging, and changing the values, structures and behaviors that perpetuate individual and systemic racism. **It does so by examining the power imbalances between racialized and non-racialized or differently racialized peoples.** (Anti-racism Digital Library)

As Asao Inoue writes in *Above the Wall: An Antiracist Argument from a Boy of Color*: “White readers too often act as if rooting for the Brown kid, being on his side, is enough. It is not. You must do antiracist work [. . .] **It’s not enough to just feel for others’ misfortunes and abstain from racism. We must act in different ways and change the structures in our lives that enable us to act or stand by and watch**” (4-5).

A useful reading: [Performing Antiracist Pedagogy in Rhetoric, Writing, and Communication](#), the [introduction](#) specifically has useful definitions and framing.

An Antiracist Pedagogy

Anti-racist pedagogy is not about simply incorporating racial content into courses, curriculum, and discipline. It is also about how one teaches, even in courses where race is not the subject matter. It begins with the faculty's awareness and self-reflection of their social position and leads to application of this analysis in their teaching, but also in their discipline, research, and departmental, university, and community work. In other words, anti-racist pedagogy is an organizing effort for institutional and social change that is much broader than teaching in the classroom. (Kishimoto, 2018, pg. 540)

The Problem of the Standard

“Now, let me be blunt. If you grade writing by a so-called standard, let’s call it Standard English, then you are engaged in an institutional and disciplinary racism, a system set up to make winners and losers by a dominant standard. Who owns the dominant standard? Where does that standard come from? What social group is it most associated with? Who benefits most from the use of the standard? How is that social group racialized in our society? Do you see where I’m going with this? To evaluate and grade student languaging by the method of comparing it to some ideal standard or norm—no matter what that norm is—will participate in racism” (Asao B. Inoue, 2017, pg xv).

Antiracist Framework

An antiracist framework pays attention to the following things: 1) the **power differentials inherent in systems and practices**, particularly those related to whiteness; 2) the **systemic structures** themselves, and how they are defined, upheld, and reinforced; 3) the **ecology of those systems** and of writing as a lived practice—how any single decision, structure, policy, practice, or piece of assessment impacts the whole; 4) the **specific language** that is used to define key terms and practices (Inoue 2015, 2019a, 2019b; Inoue, Poe, and Elliott 2018)

Reflection Point: Making Antiracist Frameworks Legible and Local

- What are the **systems** that frame assessment at your institution?
 - Who is in charge of those systems? Who do the reports go to? Who controls access to funding and resources?
 - Who sets the schedule for assessment, and creates the assessment plan?
 - Who determines **what** is being assessed, and how is that enforced?
 - What is the relationship between actors in this system: administration, TT and NTT faculty, staff, students? Who holds power, and how is that distributed?
 - Where is whiteness in this system: who has established this system? Who benefits from it? Where is there room for dissent, or discomfort, or checks and balances?
 - What is the history of assessment at your institution? Who has, historically, benefitted from assessment work?

Reflection Point: Making Antiracist Frameworks Legible and Local

- How is assessment a part of the **ecology** of your institution?
 - How are reports shared out, and who has access to them?
 - How is assessment data used in decision-making, and what kinds of decisions are made? Does this impact funding, or tenure/promotion pathways, or reappointment?
 - How is assessment used in curriculum development?
 - How is assessment used for the creation of programming or student support?
 - How is assessment shared out to students, or parents?

Reflection Point: Making Antiracist Frameworks Legible and Local

- What is the specific **language** that your institution uses to talk about assessment?
 - Where does this come from? What kinds of sources are you citing, or what history are you engaging?
 - How often is terminology revised, or discussed among broad constituents?
 - How often are assessment practices defined or discussed broadly?
 - How is language adjusted based on different audiences (eg. internal/external reports), and where do those adjustments come from?
 - Who writes your assessment reports and internal documents, and who writes your websites and other public facing text?

Written Communication Assessment at UIS: A Case Study

Rubric Development

- We started our assessment journey by trying to identify the rubric categories we wanted to use as we assessed student work
- We considered several different learning outcomes and sources
 - Including our own gen ed language, the WPA learning outcomes (which are the LOs on our syllabus), and the Illinois Articulation Initiative LOs (which I helped revise)
 - We ended up with AAC&U, partly because of an institutional push to use those
 - It was important to look at where our language and LOs came from, the history of those terms, and the systems that supported them
- We created a rubric that used several different AAC&U rubrics, but discovered that we didn't have anything that looked specifically at DEI
- So we added that as a unique category that we created to engage DEI

Rubric Development Cont'd

- We spent a lot of time interrogating the language that we wanted to use, and working through what we would consider evidence markers for benchmarking success in this category
- From our rubric: **Diversity of Perspectives**
 - Are they exploring viewpoints or perspectives different from their own worldview
 - Is the topic of their paper or thesis statement about issues centering on diversity, inclusion, equity, power structures, change,
 - Does the student look at how the central issue or topic impacts or manifests differently for diverse or intersectional groups—what is the contextual impact
 - Does the student acknowledge stakeholders surrounding their issue or topic
 - Change in the world, civic engagement, etc

Appendix I: Writing Program Assessment Rubric

Writing Program Assessment Tool—V2

Using VALUE Rubrics and Categories

Evaluation of Spring 2021 ENG 102 Project 3 Research Papers

	3	2	1	0
Written Communication: Context of and Purpose for Writing Includes considerations of <u>audience</u> , <u>purpose</u> , and the circumstances surrounding the writing task(s).				
Written Communication: Genre and Disciplinary Conventions Formal and informal rules inherent in the expectations for writing in particular forms and/or academic fields (please see glossary).				
Written Communication: Content Development How the student explains, builds, and develops their argument throughout their body paragraphs				
Information Literacy: Use Relevant? Information Effectively to Accomplish a Specific Purpose				
Critical Thinking: Student's position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis)				
Critical Thinking: Conclusions and related outcomes (implications and consequences)				
UIS: Diversity of Perspectives				

Ranking:

3 – Standard success: work that represents what we hope most first year writing students can achieve

2 – Middling success: The student may still be struggling with perfectly implementing concepts but is baseline successful

1 – Unsuccessful: The student is making an attempt at the markers, but is unsuccessful

0 – The markers for this category are not present in the work

Training and Norming Sessions

- We had several different training and norming sessions to familiarize ourselves with the rubrics
 - We met several times to talk about the rubric and develop our evidence markers and benchmarks
 - We did a test run of the rubric with a sample student paper, refining our language and expectations
 - We did two norming sessions, looking at 6 different student papers of varying skill levels, and refined the rubric and benchmarks further at this point
 - We sought to challenge the rubric and test the limits of it, as well as define and refine the language that we were using
- One thing we might have done differently was use this as an opportunity to look at who was doing this work, and how they were situated institutionally
 - I led the project, but the rest of the team were all contract instructors with little power
 - This may have limited our ability to truly interrogate structures and systems of power when it comes to our language and shared meanings

Data Analysis Strategies

- Student work was assessed anonymously, with no indicator of student identity or which course they were enrolled in, and instructors did not assess their own students
- Assessment scores were input directly into a spreadsheet, where I could use pivot tables to isolate findings (which allowed us to look at the DEI category in isolation as well as in context)
- We met and discussed findings twice:
 - once immediately after we did the assessment to get impressions, find trouble spots, and talk about challenges
 - once after the data was analyzed, to discuss the findings together
- We did not disaggregate the data to discover inequality points, or places where students of colour may be struggling specifically

Reporting and Framing Findings

- The (very extensive) report was written up by me with an eye towards HLC compliance, but also as a way to flag how much labor is required for assessment, and to advocate for assessment processes that included compensation
- The report explained why we included our DEI assessment category, mapping our reasoning to campus values
- The data was reported across four aggregate trends:
 - High Writing Scores
 - Middling to Low Critical Thinking Scores
 - Confusing Information Literacy Scores
 - Very Low Diversity of Perspective Scores
- The report was shared with internal stakeholders, but not widely with, for example, the campus senate, and the reporting was not summarized for easy legibility or sharing

Responsive Curriculum Development

- We found that, while our program was really good at teaching core writing skills, our students were not successful in the DEI category
- Some sections did not even assign work that asked students to tackle these ideas, while others were only doing so on a surface level
- Students were not engaging in diversity of perspectives (in this specific student artifact) in a way that was meaningful
- We would not have discovered this gap in our curriculum if we had not built in our additional rubric categories
- So we made some pretty substantial changes to our curriculum, beginning with our learning outcomes:

Responsive Curriculum Development

Previous 102 LOs

The goals below are based on the Writing Program Administrators' Outcomes Statement (Revised 2014; <http://wpacouncil.org/node/4846>).

- To critically read, analyze, and annotate essays written for civic and academic audiences.
- To write (invent, focus, organize, and develop) four intellectually engaging and publicly resonant projects for clearly articulated audiences and rhetorical situations.
- To engage civic discourse intellectually and persuasively from multiple disciplinary perspectives.
- To reflect upon individual writing processes in order to self-reflexively and effectively revise the four major projects.
- To integrate smoothly research that is relevant, recent, and sufficient into writing.
- To understand the differences between primary and secondary research and integrate both types into research reports and research writing work
- To understand the language of rhetorical analysis for application within projects and beyond the classroom.
- To write with a clear, vital, and distinctive voice appropriate to the intended audience and rhetorical situation.

Revised 102 LOs

- **Rhetorical Knowledge and Civic Engagement:** students will continue to explore rhetoric and writing's connection to power, equality, and social change—and how this connection manifests and impacts students' academic, professional, personal, and civic lives and community through the participation in civic engagement, as students explore how civic literacies empower citizens to affect change through writing and participate in public writing for civic ends
- **Writing Rhetorically:** students will make effective, strategic, meaningful choices appropriate to “genre, purpose, audience, discourse community, and cultural context” (IAI) and they will write (invent, focus, organize, and develop) towards particular and public audiences/readers, showing a sophisticated awareness of genre conventions and consideration of unique rhetorical situations
- **Information Literacy:** students will learn how to locate, evaluate, and make use of information from both scholarly and popular sources, and learn how to carefully read, select, evaluate, and interpret a variety of sources
- **Research Writing:** students will formulate research questions to explore the complexity of civic problems and social issues and the diverse stakeholders and conversations surrounding them, and they will develop the ability to synthesize information, establishing relationships between sources and effectively integrating sources alongside original ideas
- **Writing as a Mode of Thinking:** students will use writing to explore social and civic problems with depth, advocate for solutions, and persuade readers
- **Public Writing:** students will apply their understanding of writing for civic change and their ability to recognize genres, contexts, and purposes to the production of text(s) that apply academic skills of research and analysis to some public purpose
- **Metacognitive Reflection:** students will use reflection to articulate a sophisticated strategic awareness about their writing and revision choices and will develop a personal, flexible, purposeful writing process

Strengths and Growing Edges

Strengths:

- Paying attention to systems of power in student artifacts
- Building in DEI to the rubric; changing the questions we ask
- Interrogating the systems and ecologies that produced our existing learning outcomes, and expanding and naming held values
- Exploring and defining our language, in our learning outcomes, our assessment tools, and our program
- Building new learning outcomes that explicitly name DEI values; developing the curriculum to reflect these outcomes

Strengths and Growing Edges

Growing Edges:

- Room to include student voices at multiple points in the process
- Disaggregate the data to discover points of inequality
- Interrogate who is doing the assessment, why, and how they are compensated
 - Developing the Star Faculty Fellows Program in part to address this
- Reporting and framing could and should explicitly name antiracist frameworks and equity approaches

Reflection Point: Finding YOUR Intervention Points

- Where are you located at your institution? Which parts of the process do you, personally, have control over?
- List out the stages of the assessment process at your institution.
 - Look at the documentation or processes that are public (for example, on the website)
 - What is mentioned? What is left out?
 - Look at the internal documentation or processes
 - Again, what is mentioned? What is left out?
- What kinds of assessment tools does your institution use? What has been used historically? Why?
- Where do your Learning Outcomes come from? Who wrote them? What inspired them? What is the history of the learning outcomes? What kinds of language is used?
- How is the assessment used at your institution, and how might that limit or challenge what is assessed, or what findings are reported out?

Developing an Antiracist Heuristic: A Guided Activity

- Freewrite: thinking about the four keys to an antiracist framework: **power differentials, systemic structures, system ecologies, and language**, how would you explain this framework to a colleague?
- Freewrite: what is your own positionality within the institution? What is your own relationship to whiteness? In what ways have you supported or upheld existing oppressive systems?
- Freewrite: in a perfect world, how would you use assessment to create change at your institution? What inequalities or concerns do you see already, and what are you hoping that assessment might highlight, uncover, or name?
- Freewrite: what values would you name as important to you, personally?

A Guided Activity cont'd

- Go through each of your previous freewrites and circle or highlight key words, phrases, or ideas
- List out those words, phrases, and ideas on a separate sheet of paper. What do you notice about them? How can you make connections?
- Reading through your freewrites, what is the dominant feeling in them? Hope? Optimism? Frustration or anger? How could you use that emotion to create action, or change?
- Which piece, or pieces, of the antiracist frameworks stood out to you the most? Which ones feel the easiest for your to access? Where do you still have questions?

A Guided Activity cont'd

- Using your list of keywords, phrases, or ideas, as well as the questions you have been asked throughout this presentation, create a list of **at least four questions** that you could give to colleagues at your institution to begin this work
- Using your list of keywords, phrases, or ideas, as well as the questions you have been asked throughout this presentation, create a list of **at least two intervention points** where you, personally, could create change
- Brainstorm a list of opportunities on campus for professional development or community building, and choose one to focus on
- Brainstorm a list of people on campus who are either current stakeholders or gatekeepers for assessment, as well as people who would be receptive to doing this work. Choose at least one to email to open a discussion about creating change

Discussion and Questions

Works Cited and Additional Resources

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