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# Strategies for Creating Inclusive Learning Environments Through a Social Justice Lens


**Beverly Araujo Dawson, MSW, PhD**

*Adelphi University, Garden City, New York, United States*

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0272-7185>


**Whitney Kilgore, PhD**

*IDesign, Dallas, Texas, United States*

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8149-6260>

**Renée M. Rawcliffe, LMSW**

*Adelphi University, Garden City, New York, United States*

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9181-9342>

**Contact:** [baraujo@adelphi.edu](mailto:baraujo@adelphi.edu)

## Abstract

Culturally situated and cross-cultural approaches to instructional design and research have become increasingly important in higher education, particularly in online learning environments. As higher education becomes increasingly racially and ethnically diverse, learning environments must be structured and facilitated to meet the learning needs of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, people of color) students. Based on the Community of Inquiry (CoI) and culturally inclusive pedagogy, this paper provides an overview of inclusive teaching practices and the necessity to take a holistic approach to online teaching with BIPOC students. This paper provides an overview of key instructional design elements to achieve equity-minded instructional design.

**Keywords:** *inclusive teaching, equity, higher education*

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## Introduction

With the growth of online learning, post-secondary education has become more accessible to all students, including traditionally marginalized students (Allen & Seaman, 2016), and the rates of African American (39% to 44%) and Latinx (43% to 54%) learners enrolled in online education have steadily increased (Woodyard &

Larson, 2017). Additionally, higher education has experienced an increase in the number of low-income and first-generation students (Garriott et al., 2021; National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). The increasing diversity in students participating in online learning provides a rich opportunity to rethink online course design and create learning environments where every learner is set up for optimal success.

Despite the access online education provides, racialized people<sup>1</sup>, as well as student populations experiencing poverty, academic barriers, and support have led to low achievement. Students may not experience the full benefits that online learning has to offer (Cochran et al., 2014; Figlio et al., 2013; Jaggars & Bailey, 2010). Inadequate academic learning environments, technology gaps, and a lack of equity in learning environments have been identified as significant contributors to the experiences of traditionally marginalized students, including racialized people(s) in online learning environments (Chase et al., 2002; Kim & Bonk, 2002; Mavor & Traynor, 2003; Kutner et al., 2006; Salvo et al., 2019). Existing oppressive policies and practices in higher education also contribute to the marginalization of students based on class, race, ability, and gender (Scheurich & Young, 1997). And although there is no clear consensus surrounding the prevalence of institutional discrimination, there is notable agreement and research that supports the existence of institutional racism (Lincoln & Stanley, 2021).

Classism in higher education also contributes to students of lower socioeconomic status experiencing isolation in institutions that accept and rationalize social class inequities, further contributing to the adverse psychological outcomes among these student populations (Langhout et al., 2007; Lea & Butterfield, 2019; Walkerdine, 2020). These factors contribute to the limited focus on the learning needs of racially and ethnically diverse students and may hinder inclusivity in online learning environments (Hammond, 2015). With the increase of BIPOC students in higher education, we focus in this paper on efforts and strategies to create inclusive online learning environments for racially and ethnically diverse students.

When considering the online experiences of BIPOC students, particularly those in social work programs, it is essential to define related terms, such as diversity, inclusion, and equity. For example, although diversity refers to the representation of different characteristics, such as race, ethnicity, gender, and/or sexual orientation, having diversity does not mean equity and inclusion have been achieved by an institution (Avery & Thomas, 2004; Rankin, 2005; Williams, 2013).

Inclusion is defined as all students and employees feeling welcomed and their unique learning and working styles being attended to and valued (Dougherty & Kienzl, 2006). Relatedly, inclusion allows examination of how a range of diverse thoughts and perspectives are included within an institution (Hammond, 2015). Equity is defined as providing equal access and being fair and impartial to ensure opportunities for all to succeed. More importantly, equity includes assessing the bias within systems and institutions that can potentially impact the distribution of opportunities and resources (Bensimon & Polkinghorne, 2003). With the increasing representation of racialized people(s) among online students, institutions must explore their programs and online learning environments using these concepts, while creating learning environments that can contribute to the success of this growing student population (Williams & Clowney, 2007).

Traditionally, low achievement among racialized people in general, and in online learning environments specifically, has been attributed to learner deficit, inadequate academic preparation, cultural differences, and lack of technology training (Chase et al., 2002; Kim & Bonk, 2002; Mavor & Traynor, 2003; NCES, 2006; Salvo et al., 2019). Other scholars have noted that students' cultural backgrounds can impact their learning experiences, including engagement and interaction with fellow students (Wise et al., 2012). One qualitative study reported that African American male students highlighted lack of interaction with the online instructor

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<sup>1</sup>The authors choose to use "racialized people(s)" rather than BIPOC, to recognize race as a socio-cultural process. <https://www.lib.sfu.ca/about/branches-depts/slc/writing/inclusive-antiracist-writing/bipoc>

and limited feedback as negatively impacting their learning experiences (Salvo et al., 2019).

Although much of the literature focuses on the impact of individual characteristics and online learning experiences of racialized people, less attention is given to how non-inclusive learning environments impact student experiences, as well as the changes learning environments, institutions, and systems can make to support racialized peoples' learning. A conceptual study, informed by the research of Arroyo and Gassman (2014), specifically focused on Black college student success at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). They found that dismantling a Eurocentric, student deficit-focused educational model is critical.

Arroyo and Gassman (2014) argued that focusing on institutional responsibility for change, instead, as well as the successes HBCUs have traditionally had for educating Black students, is more student-centered and primed for replication at all colleges and universities. Thematically, Arroyo and Gassman's study theorizes that a supportive learning environment contributes to student success at HBCUs, which has far-reaching implications for higher education standards, norms, and practices. Other research suggests a correlation between academic success and minority and first-generation students who draw strength from their connection to their home communities and cultures within the institution itself (Burt et al., 2019; Muñoz & Maldonado, 2012; Yao, 2015).

Some researchers argue that online learning environments have not been structured with the learning needs of racialized peoples in mind, therefore creating barriers to their success (Ashong & Commander, 2012). Woodley et al. (2017) argue that online education has roots in systemic bias, such as racism and sexism, which have historically plagued other disciplines, including in-person learning. Factors, such as institutional diversity, values cultivation on an institutional level, and a supportive environment beyond the classroom, also contribute to academic success (Gasman & Arroyo, 2014). Examining inclusivity should extend beyond the boundaries of the individual course and into the systems and institutions within which these courses exist as well as the disciplines that shape them.

## Experiences of Racialized Peoples in Online Learning Environments

Although the number of racialized people participating in online learning continues to increase, there is limited literature explaining their experiences in this learning modality. The few studies highlighting the experiences of students of color, particularly Black, Latinx, and Asian populations, highlight contradictory findings in online courses or programs (Rovai & Gallien, 2005; Salvo et al., 2019). Several studies have focused on the lack of alignment between how online courses are constructed and student cultural backgrounds (Smith & Ayers, 2006), learning needs (Tucker, 2014; Walton & Cohen, 2011), and experiences of discrimination (Hussain & Jones, 2019).

Some scholars argue that online courses may not be aligned with the values and practices of student populations from collectivist or high-context cultures (Smith & Ayers, 2006; Tapanes et al., 2009). It is clear that many online learning environments have been constructed without taking into account culture and the learning needs of racialized people (Dougherty & Kienzl, 2006) and have been instructor-focused or based on individualistic and dominant cultural values (Smith & Ayers, 2006; Goodfellow & Hewling, 2005;). Kizilcec and Cohen (2017) described a writing exercise designed to increase motivation and reduce attrition; it was 78% successful in learners who come from individualist cultures but ineffective for those from collectivist cultures. Another study by Tapanes et al. (2009) that investigated student perceptions of online courses found that students with a collectivist cultural background, such as Asian and Hispanic learners, were less motivated to participate in an asynchronous learning network than students with an individualist cultural background.

Additionally, the literature on racialized people in online programs has highlighted the need for students to experience a sense of belonging. Active learning opportunities, such as working with peers and instructors,

contribute to long-lasting academic success and well-being among those students (Walton & Cohen, 2011; Cohen et al., 2009; Tucker, 2014). Correa and Jeong (2011) found that African American, Latinx, and Asian online learners posted on course discussion boards more often than White students, and interactive tools helped connect students with communities where they can be seen and heard. One study reported that Black students enjoyed online learning due to the flexibility, color-blind context, and immediateness of exchanges with instructors (Tucker, 2014). According to Hart (2012), online students who manage to thrive and persist in their online courses are the ones who perceive a robust social presence and a sense of connectedness. In a small qualitative study, Kumi-Yeboah et al. (2017) showed that minority graduate students found that online collaborative learning activities, particularly small groups, promote knowledge building and provide opportunities to cultivate leadership skills through sharing and leading discussions. It has been reported that racialized people withdraw from online programs due to limited and inefficient interaction with the instructor and fellow students and a preference for verbal communication and some face-to-face interaction (Ke & Kwak, 2013; Moore, 2014). The findings above are consistent with the CoI and Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) frameworks, which posit that social connectedness contributes to the success of racialized people in online learning environments.

Other research suggests that racialized people have more negative experiences compared to their White counterparts in online learning environments (Ashong & Commander, 2012; Okwumabua et al., 2011; Rovai & Wighting, 2005). Several studies found that African American students reported more negative reactions to asynchronous course features, as well as the lack of instructor and social presence (Ashong & Commander, 2012; Capra, 2011). Some African American students report anxiety in online learning environments despite expressing familiarity and comfort with computers. However, one limitation of this particular study was the lack of explanation of whether this discomfort reflects a lack of confidence in online learning or learning in general (Okwumabua et al., 2011).

One crucial factor in the experience of racialized people is the level of discrimination or bias present in the learning institution or course environment. Within the context of a primarily White online learning community, African American students report feeling alienated from the social and learning community (Rovai & Wighting, 2005). Multicultural graduate students have reported challenges in dealing with cultural differences and a lack of multicultural inclusion in collaborative online learning activities (Kumi-Yeboah et al., 2017). Hussain and Jones (2019) described discrimination and bias as a significant cause for a reduced sense of belonging for racialized people. For these students who attend a primarily White institution (PWI), more diverse peer interactions and an institutional commitment to inclusivity and diversity can help mitigate the adverse effects (Barber et al., 2020).

Furthermore, it is imperative that the digital divide among racialized people is considered when developing online courses, given that many online courses include a variety of technologies, such as VoiceThread and Flipgrid (Sieck et al., 2021). For example, some students have limited access to broadband internet services, which limits a student's ability to fully participate in online learning (National Digital Inclusion Alliance, 2019). In response to the existing digital divide, many institutions have developed laptop lending programs to address the digital divide (Summey & Gutierrez, 2012).

Based on the existing literature, instructional designers who contribute to course design must consider the student population and guide subject matter experts (SMEs) in implementing design strategies that capitalize on student cultural backgrounds and diverse experiences (Heitner & Jennings 2016; Woodley et al., 2017). The learning experiences of culturally diverse students in online education may be addressed through intentional instructional design methods that incorporate all learning needs.

The present paper will demonstrate the design choices implemented in social work courses to address the learning needs of racially diverse students based on the Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) framework and

the Community of Inquiry (CoI) Model.

## Theoretical Frameworks

Two substantiated theories, CRT and the CoI, will serve as the basis for strategies for developing inclusive learning environments for racialized people. Together, the models were selected to address the complex and multifaceted ecosystem of course development and delivery, from validating diversity through formal, symbolic, and societal curricula to facilitating cognitive, teaching, and social presences.

### Culturally Responsive Teaching

The cultural identity of learners relates to their learning needs and motivation, and therefore it should be considered when designing courses (Altugan, 2015). Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) posits that teaching practices should include learning opportunities that support racialized peoples' racial experiences and cultural identities by linking coursework to their experiences (Gay, 2013). Furthermore, this approach focuses on the learning needs of the whole student and helps them develop a sense of belonging in the class (Gay, 2013). Instructional designers and subject matter experts can incorporate CRT methods via design choices, classroom management, climate, and assessments (Zaretta Hammond, 2015). Culturally responsive pedagogies include opportunities to address and teach cultural diversity through formal curricula (such as, textbooks and course materials), symbolic curricula (such as, symbols, images, and phrases used in the course environment), and societal curricula (understanding the influence of mass media and popular culture on learner understanding of diversity and counteracting negative influence within the course; Gay, 2002). Existing studies document the link between CRT and student academic performance and experiences (Bondy et al., 2013; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Meyer & Murrell, 2014) and therefore serve as an essential guide when developing online courses.

### Community of Inquiry (CoI) Model

The ideas regarding developing and implementing strategies and structuring inclusive online programs are also framed by the CoI framework, which focuses on designing online courses that facilitate cognitive, teaching, and social presences (Garrison & Arbaugh, 2007). The CoI model provides a comprehensive framework that aligns with the learning objectives of social work education and functions as a guide to help faculty determine effective pedagogical choices for online course development (Anderson et al., 2001). The CoI model posits that effective online learning experiences occur through the development of three components—teaching, social, and cognitive presence—and the relationship between them (Garrison et al., 1999, p. 88).

Teaching presence, or instructor presence, is crucial to creating online learning communities that provide a space of trust and open dialogue (Garrison et al., 2010). Instructor presence has been identified as key to creating online learning communities that produce “intended learning outcomes” through creating an atmosphere of trust, open communication, and group cohesion. This is achieved through intentionally planned activities, such as design and organization, and the facilitation of the course, including the provision of feedback and interactions with students. Strategies for incorporating teaching presence should be included from the beginning of the course development process and in the course design. They should be facilitated in the form of meaningful learning activities and opportunities for students to incorporate their knowledge and experience into the course (Anderson et al., 2001).

*Social presence* includes opportunities for affective expression, open communication, and a sense of group cohesion. Incorporating social presence into a course facilitates student development of belonging and provides satisfying interactions with fellow students and the instructor (Anderson et al., 2001). Instructors



can create opportunities for students to discuss their lived experiences and personal characteristics. Instructors can also ask students to discuss their personal and professional experiences to help them connect to the course material and the online learning environment.

Lastly, cognitive presence is how participants can construct meaning or develop an understanding of course topics through interaction in an online learning environment (Garrison et al., 1999). Instructors can support cognitive presence by providing opportunities for online learners to connect and apply new ideas, as well as incorporate their previous knowledge and experiences into the learning environment. For example, instructors' prompts can include: "Think of a time in your field placement or employment when...." The process of cognitive presence encourages critical analysis, reflection, and integration through participatory activities that encourage students or course participants to actively engage with the material being studied.

The CoI model was selected as an ideal tool to help assess the level of interaction in existing online courses, as well as the design and learning activities included in existing social work courses (McKerlich et al., 2011). Assessing all three types of presence during the revision process provides the opportunity to examine the effectiveness of the instructional design and student learning experience.

## Strategies for Creating Inclusive Learning Environments

It would be naive to imply that racial equity in online learning environments can be wholly achieved by applying specific design and facilitation strategies in individual courses. Systemic racism is rooted in the institutions that support and govern educational systems, and it impacts multiple aspects of learners' lives, including employment, healthcare, housing, legal justice, and other societal factors (Feagin & Bennefield, 2014; Lee, 2018; Tourse et al., 2018). True equity is not possible without dismantling the larger systems that reinforce the structural barriers, as well as the biases, which hinder the academic achievement of racialized people.

Research has shown, however, that design and facilitation strategies can create culturally responsive and inclusive learning environments that increase engagement (Hammond, 2015). Creating inclusive learning environments for racialized people often requires online educators to reshape their courses and pedagogical practices (Fuentes et al., 2021; Pacansky-Brock, 2020). This work begins with knowing students and their strengths, developing course design, and facilitating strategies that build on unique student qualities and learning needs (Farinde-Wu et al., 2017; Milner, 2015). Our recommendations for creating inclusive learning environments are informed by the CoI and Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) models and guided by the Peralta Equity Rubric (Peralta Community College District, 2020).

The Equity rubric includes some of the following criteria:

- Addressing student access to technology and different types of academic and non-academic support
- Demonstrating value in diversity and inclusion through instructor commitment and course content
- Addressing and analyzing common forms of human bias
- Fostering connections between students and connections between their identities and the course content
- Following Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles

**Table 1.** *Overview of Equity Criteria and Inclusive Practices*

Equity criteria	Inclusive practices
Demonstrating value in diversity and inclusion through instructor commitment and course content	A diversity statement was included in the course syllabus (see Appendix A). Students were invited to contribute ideas to the course community agreements.
Addressing student access to technology and different types of academic and non-academic support	Based on Pacansky-Brock's (2020) work, a student equity survey assessed online student access and technology, learning needs, and the best ways the instructor can support them (see Appendix B). Students were provided with opportunities to engage with fellow students in small groups and group projects.
Addressing and analyzing common forms of human bias	The course used a collaborative professional accountability partner model. Community agreements allowed instructors to reflect on personal bias (Appendix C).
Following Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles	Students could select the assignment format (See Appendix D).
Fostering connections between students and connections between their identities and the course content	Instructors created assignments that ask students to incorporate their lived experiences and identities. Groupwork assignments were featured in the course.

### **Addressing Student Access to Technology and Different Types of Academic and Nonacademic Support**

Based on the Peralta Equity Rubric (Appendix D), instructional designers can collaborate with subject matter experts (SMEs) to hone course design strategies that support racialized people, including access to technology. Pacansky-Brock (2020) suggests surveying students at the beginning of the semester to determine their technology and learning needs (see Appendix B).

Furthermore, students should be provided with information regarding whether the institution has a laptop lending program to assist them. Several universities provide students with electronic device borrowing programs when students can verify their need to borrow laptops for the semester. Many academic institutions have implemented laptop lending programs through their libraries or IT departments (Summey & Gutierrez, 2012).

## Case Study

To incorporate the technology criteria based on the Peralta Equity Rubric, two faculty members from a midsize private university in the Northeast developed and administered an equity survey at the beginning of the semester to help gauge student technological and learning needs. This targeted process can also serve as an invitation for students to reflect on their own technological needs and ask for accommodations, if needed. The survey also communicates the instructors' intention and willingness to operate from a culturally responsive lens.

### Diverse Images and Representation

It is essential that racialized people experience multicultural inclusion in the curriculum and online reading content. When designing inclusive learning, instructors should create learning opportunities that incorporate student cultural identities and prior experiences into learning (Farinde-Wu et al., 2017). Additionally, topics related to diversity should be included throughout the course and not siloed or discussed in one module (Fuentes et al., 2021). Diversity scholars argue that this practice of siloing sends the message that issues related to diversity are not essential and limits student understanding that diversity intersects with other topics (Vaccarro, 2019).

Racially diverse images should be included in the course banners, and racialized scholar research should be included in the course readings. Additionally, during curriculum development, efforts should be made to elevate the lived experiences of racially and culturally diverse populations.

### Addressing Human Bias

Facilitating online learning requires that instructors reframe their role in the courseroom and envision themselves as collaborators (Hammond, 2015). This reframing will likely have a more positive impact on student outcomes (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2007). Instructors, especially, must commit to confronting internalized biases and establishing a “nonracist White identity” to create an optimal learning space for racialized people (Howard-Hamilton, 2000, p. 48). Hammond (2015) suggests reflective practitioners be mindful and present, which requires engaging in the following steps: (a) *identify your cultural frame of reference*; (b) *widen your cultural aperture*; and (c) *identify your key triggers*.

In order for instructors to explore their cultural identities, they must understand their cultural background, which serves as a reference point when interacting with racialized people. Furthermore, instructors need to widen their cultural aperture, which typically views students through their own biased lens. This leads to cultural miscommunication and utilizing a deficit thinking paradigm (Dray & Wisneski, 2011; Hammond, 2015). Lastly, Hammond (2015) argues that culturally responsive instructors recognize their triggers and have coping strategies in place to help them not react to these triggers.

To address human bias, two social work educators used a collaborative accountability partner model in which the instructors supported each other in teaching from a culturally responsive lens in addition to holding one another accountable as reflective practitioners and utilizing the community agreements to reflect on personal instructor bias. The instructors met regularly to discuss the progression of their courses and the success and limitations of design choices.



**Figure 1.** *Example of Community Agreements*

## Class Community Agreements

Is there anything else you would like to add to this list? If so, please add your suggestions to the list below in a different font color.

1. I will treat you with dignity and respect and be flexible to support your individual needs.
2. You will treat me and your peers with dignity and respect.
3. I will be actively present in your learning.
4. I won't be perfect. I am human and will make mistakes at times. I will view mistakes as an opportunity to learn and grow.
5. I will reach out to you when I sense that you need support.
6. I will provide you with a clear, organized course that is designed to ensure you meet our course outcomes in a meaningful manner.
7. You will give yourself grace. Expect to make mistakes. You are human and mistakes are part of learning and growing
8. You will maintain an open line of communication with me so I understand how to support you.
9. You will contact me if you have a concern about meeting due dates.
10. Members of the community have ample opportunity to read/listen, reflect, and respond to your ideas.
11. You will do your best to have patience with technology. There will be hiccups, expect them. We will get through them together.
12. *We will allow for a place for respectful disagreement and ideological diversity on all content and conversations in the course*

<sup>12</sup>  
**Reference:** Adapted from Pacansky-Brock, M. (2020). *How to humanize your online class* (Version 2.0) [Infographic]. <https://brocansky.com/humanizing/infographic2>

### **Fostering Connections Between Students, Their Identities and the Course Content**

Given the learning needs of diverse student populations, it is important for instructors to understand how to establish a social presence and for instructors and designers to take steps to create a sense of community (Anderson et al., 2001; Barnes, 2016). Social presence in online courses contributes to students developing a “shared social identity” with fellow students (Garrison, 2009), which is imperative to the development of a collaborative and inclusive learning community. Garrison, through his research with colleagues, determined that students’ progress through three dimensions of social presence: the creation of a community and then

building trust and relationships in order to communicate effectively (Garrison, 2009).

Many instructors use group work to foster connections between students, which is supported by the CoI model. It is also important to consider group dynamics and how they can further marginalize minoritized students if their voices and experiences are not included in the group. There is existing, highlighted evidence that says that minority graduate students often experience benefits from participating in small groups (Kumi-Yeboah et al., 2017). Woodley et al. (2017) offer tools for helping students facilitate groups, including a group work contract that establishes the roles of students, in the group process, and the expectations of the assignment. The contract can be used asynchronously or synchronously.

Another strategy for creating inclusive learning environments is the use of a liquid syllabus, where the course syllabus is developed as part of a collaboration between the instructor and students at the beginning of the semester (Pacansky-Brock, 2020). Instructors encourage students to contribute their ideas regarding course objectives, community rules, instructor expectations, and deadlines. Objectives, grades, and assignment formats could also be negotiated with the students in order to work collaboratively and take an active role in the course (Johnston, 2020).

## UDL Principles

The Peralta Equity Rubric (Appendix D) highlights the importance of aligning course development with Universal Design for Learning principles. The UDL framework emphasizes flexibility in the ways learners access, engage, and respond to course materials to meet the unique needs of all learners (Rose & Meyer, 2006). While initially intended to create equitable conditions for learners with special needs, UDL principles improve the learning environment for all learners by offering flexible ways to learn, flexible options for feedback loops, and multiple avenues of faculty and course engagement (Rose & Meyer, 2002). Incorporating this framework into course design is an integral part of equity-minded education because it includes potential for eliminating barriers and learning gaps that historically exist for racialized people (Fuentes et al., 2020; Pacansky-Brock, 2020).

**Figure 2.** *Sample Assignment*

Sample Assignment
<p>Guidelines:</p> <p>You may complete your reflection through a paper, VoiceThread, or video response, whichever you prefer.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Your response must meet the rubric criteria and the guidelines for this assignment, regardless of the medium you are using to complete it.</li> <li>● If you choose to complete with a VoiceThread, make sure to upload the VoiceThread link with or as your completed assignment.</li> <li>● 500-word written maximum; 5-minute video/audio maximum.</li> <li>● Cite or reference a minimum of 3 academic sources.</li> <li>● You will be graded on the following RUBRIC.</li> </ul>

## Conclusion

This topic has significant implications for the support provided to racialized people in online learning environments. With the increasing number of racially and ethnically diverse students enrolling in online social work courses and programs, it is imperative that institutions take bold steps to structure online learning opportunities that are inclusive of the needs of students of color. An instructor's limited understanding of the

impact of culture on student learning experiences contributes to a lack of authentic interactions with racialized people in online learning environments and negative academic experiences (Heitner & Jennings, 2016). Inclusive pedagogical practices, based on culturally inclusive practices and application, can contribute to the valuing and supporting of social work students of color. Furthermore, design and facilitation prioritized by an equity-minded approach can strategically address the academic, social, and cultural integration of racialized people in higher education, contributing to retention.

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## Appendix A

### Diversity Statement

Adelphi University' diversity statement states:

*Diversity is an affirmation of the richness of human differences, ideas, and beliefs. It encompasses the range of human differences that includes age, gender, race, ethnicity, physical and mental ability, and sexual orientation as well as the invisible differences such as religion, nationality, socioeconomic status, belief systems, thought-styles, military experience, and education. Adelphi University values and supports diversity to ensure that we are the model for a socially just and inclusive institution.*

The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) established an Education Policy and Accreditation Standard (EPAS), which requires all social work education programs to demonstrate how students achieve nine practice competencies. These competencies include requirements for explicit diversity content that promotes an understanding, affirmation, and respect for people from diverse backgrounds. Standards also require programs to prepare students to “understand the global interconnections of oppression and human rights violations and are knowledgeable about theories of human need and social justice and strategies” (CSWE, 2015, p. 7). In fact, the most recent draft of the EPAS 2022 includes revised and explicit language regarding antiracism, diversity, equity, and inclusion in social work education (CSWE, 2021). In order to honor these practice competencies, efforts have been made to integrate diverse sets of scholar work, in the course, as well as to welcome diverse perspectives among students.

As the instructor, I am committed to treating you with dignity and respect. We will construct knowledge together in this course, and the more perspectives we engage, the more robust and meaningful your learning will be.

It is my intent that students from all diverse backgrounds and perspectives be well served by this course, that student learning needs be addressed both in and out of class, and that the diversity that the students bring to this class be viewed as a resource, strength, and benefit. It is my intent to present materials and activities that are respectful of diversity: gender identity, sexuality, disability, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, nationality, religion, and culture. Your suggestions are encouraged and appreciated. Please let me know ways to improve the effectiveness of the course for you personally or for other students or student groups.

**Important note:** Given the sensitive and challenging nature of the material discussed in class, it is imperative that there be an atmosphere of trust and safety in the classroom. I will attempt to foster an environment in which each class member is able to hear and respect the other. As such, it is critical that each class member show respect for all worldviews expressed in class, as it is expected that some of the material in this course may evoke strong emotions. Please be respectful of others' emotions and be mindful of your own. Please let me know if something said or done in the classroom, by either myself or other students, is particularly troubling or causes discomfort or offense. While our intention may not be to cause discomfort or offense, the impact of what happens throughout the course is not to be ignored and is something that I consider to be very important and deserving of attention.

If and when discomfort or offense occurs, there are several ways to alleviate some of the hurt you may experience:

1. Discuss the situation privately with me. I am always open to listening to student experiences and want to work with them to find acceptable ways to process and address the issue.
2. Discuss the situation with the class. Chances are there is at least one other student in the class who

had a similar response to the material. Discussion enhances the ability for all class participants to have a fuller understanding of the context and impact of course material and class discussions.

3. Notify me of the issue through another source, such as your academic advisor, a trusted faculty member, or a peer. If for any reason you do not feel comfortable discussing the issue directly with me, I encourage you to seek out another, more comfortable avenue to address the issue. If you prefer to speak with someone outside of the course, Dr. Jacqueline Jones LaMon, Vice President for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion is an excellent resource.
4. If you have a name and/or set of pronouns that differ from those that appear in your official Adelphi records, please let me know, and feel free to change your name in your Zoom and VoiceThread accounts to reflect what you'd like to be called.
5. Any student who has difficulty affording groceries or who lacks a safe or stable place to live—and believes this may affect their performance in this class—is urged to contact me or Student Affairs (Schanica Pickens, [spickens@adelphi.edu](mailto:spickens@adelphi.edu)) for support.

## Appendix B

### Student Equity Survey

**Instructions:** Please complete the information below to help me understand more about you and your individual learning needs.

#### Section 1

1. I have read the syllabus and community agreements and support the instructors' suggested agreements for creating an inclusive, safe learning environment.
  - Yes
  - No
  - Other...
 Identify your course:.
  - SWK 502 Professional Development Seminar
  - SWK 511 Human Behavior Theory for Social Work Practice
  - SWK 752 Stress, Crisis, Trauma and Coping
  - SWK 788 Social Work with Immigrants and Refugees
  
2. How would you best describe yourself?
  - Latino, Latina, or Latinx
  - American Indian or Alaska Native
  - Asian
  - Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - White
  - Black or African American
  - Biracial/multiracial
  - Other...
  
3. What is your total household income?
  - Less than \$10,000
  - \$10,000 to \$19,999
  - \$30,000 to \$39,999
  - \$40,000 to \$49,999
  - \$50,000 to \$59,999
  - \$60,000 to \$69,999
  - \$70,000 to \$79,999
  - \$80,000 to \$89,999
  - \$90,000 to \$99,999
  - \$100,000 to \$149,999
  - \$150,000 or more
  
4. Identify your campus or program.
  - Online MSW program
  - Garden City Center
  - Manhattan Center
  - Hauppauge Center
  - Hudson Valley Center
  - Orange County Campus (OCC)

## Section 2: Student Preparation

5. Check all that describe you.
  - I know how to take digital pictures.
  - I know how to take a digital picture and save it to my computer (insert device, browse for image, and upload).
  - I know how to download an image from the Internet.
  - I know how to use a microphone to record audio into a computer.
  - I know how to use a webcam.
  
6. I have access to a computer with a microphone or webcam that I can use for this class.
  - Yes
  - No
  - Maybe
  
7. Do you have an iPhone, iPad, or iPod Touch? (If so, you can use the free VoiceThread app!)
  - Yes
  - No
  - Maybe
  
8. Which type of learning environment is more appealing to you?
  - \*Student-centered learning encourages students to create, collaborate, and contribute.
  - \*Teacher-centered learning requires students to memorize and recite information.
  - \*Student-centered (1)      (2)      (3)      (4)      (5) \*Teacher-centered
  
9. You will be required to leave voice or webcam comments in this class. Which of the following methods will you use to do so?
  - I will use a microphone with my computer to leave voice comments.
  - I will use the webcam on my computer to leave video comments.
  - I have an iPhone, iPad, or iPod Touch and will use the free VoiceThread app to leave voice comments.
  
10. How do you feel about the idea of sharing your ideas through voice comments in our class VoiceThreads?
  - Excited
  - A little nervous
  - Neutral
  - I'm ok with it but would prefer not to have to do it.
  - I'm really not feeling good about it.
  - Other...
  
11. Which classroom activities do you learn from the most?
  - Discussions
  - Papers
  - Video discussions
  - Small group assignments
  - Recorded lectures
  - Live lectures (synchronous)
  - Other...
  
12. Select which days you prefer office/student hours (please select two days)
  - Monday
  - Tuesday



- Wednesday
- Thursday
- Friday
- Saturday
- Sunday

13. Select your time preference for office hours.

- 8-10 AM eastern
- 10 AM-12 PM eastern
- 1-3 PM eastern
- 5-7 PM eastern

### **Section 3: Syllabus/Course**

14. What is one thing that should be included in this course to support your learning experience?

15. In a few words, let us know how you are feeling about this class.

16. I would like to play music during office/student hours or live class sessions. Please upload a song you would like to include in the playlist.

17. Describe a great online class.

18. If you have a documented learning or physical disability that requires accommodation, please indicate below and email me your documentation. This is a private exchange.

- Yes
- No

19. Describe a supportive instructor.

20. Is there anything you'd like to share with me at this point?

## Appendix C

### Community Agreements

**Is there anything else you would like to add to this list? If so, please add your suggestions to the list below in different font color.**

1. I will treat you with dignity and respect and be flexible to support your individual needs.
2. You will treat me and your peers with dignity and respect.
3. I will be actively present in your learning.
4. I won't be perfect. I am human and will make mistakes at times. I will view mistakes as an opportunity to learn and grow.
5. I will reach out to you when I sense that you need support.
6. I will provide you with a clear, organized course designed to ensure you meet our course outcomes in a meaningful manner.
7. You will give yourself grace. Expect to make mistakes. You are human and mistakes are part of learning and growing.
8. You will maintain an open line of communication with me, so I understand how to support you.
9. You will contact me if you have a concern about meeting due dates.
10. Members of the community have ample opportunity to read/listen, reflect, and respond to your ideas.
11. You will do your best to have patience with technology. There will be hiccups; expect them. We will get through them together.

## Appendix D

### Online Equity Rubric



**Online Equity Rubric**  
Version 3.0 – October 2020

	<b>Incomplete</b>	<b>Aligned</b>	<b>Additional Exemplary Elements</b>
<b>E1: Technology</b>	Course structure & activities do not yet mitigate digital divide & technology access issues.	Course structure & activities mitigate digital divide & technology access issues (a) by clarifying how required technologies support learning, and (b) by providing alternative pathways to complete course activities if students face barriers.	Technologies are used in ways that amplify student voices and foster an inclusive course community.
<b>E2: Student Resources and Support</b>	Course does not yet highlight how student services support wellness and success.	Course highlights the ways that student services support student wellness and success.	Students access relevant support services or resources, at the college or elsewhere, as a part of course-related activities.
<b>E3: Universal Design for Learning (UDL)</b>	Course content and activities are not yet aligned with UDL principles.	Course content and activities are aligned with core principles of UDL-- i.e., multiple means of representation, action & expression, and/or engagement.	Students identify UDL principles that support their learning and/or are invited to make suggestions about how to improve course activities with UDL.
<b>E4: Diversity and Inclusion</b>	Communications and activities do not yet demonstrate that diversity is valued.	Communications and activities demonstrate that students' diverse identities, backgrounds, and cultures are valued.	Students analyze how diversity improves learning in classrooms, workplaces, and communities.

*Equity Rubric developed as part of the Peralta Online Equity Initiative in collaboration with Kevin Kelly, EdD - rev. Sep 2020*

	<b>Incomplete</b>	<b>Aligned</b>	<b>Additional Exemplary Elements</b>
<b>E5: Images and Representation</b>	Images and representations of people are homogenous and/or stereotypical, without acknowledgment or explanation.	Images and representations in the course reflect broad diversity; exceptions are explained and discussed.	Students analyze how images and representations impact inequalities.
<b>E6: Human Bias</b>	Human biases are not yet addressed.	Human biases are identified in course content and activities.	Students analyze and discuss human biases as part of course activities.
<b>E7: Content Meaning</b>	Connections among course content, students' lives, and students' futures are not yet clear.	Communications and activities draw connections among course content, students' lives, and students' futures.	Students connect course content to their identities, backgrounds, and cultures, and/or the identities, backgrounds, and cultures of others.
<b>E8: Connection and Belonging</b>	Communications and activities do not yet foster care and connection among students, or with the instructor.	Communications and activities foster care and connection among students, and with the instructor.	Students connect with other class participants, college or community members, and/or professionals in the field.

The criteria above, E1 – E8, are designed to be used in conjunction with, and not separate from, the [California Virtual Campus - Online Education Initiative \(CVC-OEI\) Course Design Rubric](#).

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For more info about the PCCD Online Equity Rubric, visit [Peralta Online Equity Initiative](#) or contact Didem Ekici [dekici@peralta.edu](mailto:dekici@peralta.edu) or Inger Stark [istark@peralta.edu](mailto:istark@peralta.edu)

*Equity Rubric developed as part of the Peralta Online Equity Initiative in collaboration with Kevin Kelly, EdD - rev. Sep 2020*



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