Justice, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Toolkit

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Introduction

This toolkit has been designed for those who are developing new courses, who wish to update pre-existing courses, and/or who are teaching/supervising students. It was developed with input from MSc students, PhD candidates, and academic staff from the Department of Education, all of whom were asked to reflect on how the department could better support justice, equality, diversity, and inclusion. The toolkit has not been designed to be prescriptive. Rather, it is hoped that the questions posed will spark periodic reflection and action in line with the values of justice, equality, diversity, and inclusion.

Positionality

It is important to recognise your own power and how this relates to your approach to advocacy and allyship. For example, just because you are white, doesn't mean you don't have a role to play:

"[t]he practices of representation always implicate the positions from which we speak or write—the positions of enunciation; … though we speak … 'in our own name', of ourselves and from our own experience, nevertheless who speaks, and the subject who is spoken of, are never exactly in the same place. … What we say is always 'in context', positioned." (Hall, 1996)

Course content

Course content is not only substantive, but also performative; it is a representation of the knowledge, opinions, and voices that we think are worthwhile. Regardless of who is in the class or what their interests are, the course content sets the agenda for what gets discussed. Students notice who is represented in the course content, and who is not. They also expect the course content to reflect the international scope of their cohort, their academic interests, and the reputation of the department.

Questions for course developers:

- What is the focus or purpose of your course? Is there a legitimate expectation that the course will be global in its scope? Do you see this course as a site of political transformation? What does that mean to you?
- Which voices are represented in the reading list? Which voices are absent?
- Who is given the right to speak for whom in this course?
- How is the Global South represented in the course content? For example, is the Global South only discussed as the object of development and/or as recipients of knowledge and policy from the Global North? Are voices from the Global South contributing to our theoretical understandings, or simply used as case-studies?
- In your course material or among your guest lecturers, who is considered an 'expert' and what are they an expert on? Are different types of expertise identified and represented?
- To what extent does the course content reflect the interests and identities of your students?
- Is the course content pushing students to think about justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion in new ways?
- To what extent is research understood and discussed as a political practice in your course?

- In what ways does the course engage with the local Oxford community, or help the students to feel embedded in the city they live in?
- To what extent is Oxford itself legitimized or problematized as an educational institution within the course content?
- Does the course content allow input from students?

Suggested approaches:

- Reach out to colleagues or PhD students with different regional specialisms/experiences to help develop course content.
- Seek peer review on your course content, including from students.
- Where possible, familiarize yourself with the interests and identities of your students before they arrive in Oxford, and try to adapt your course accordingly.
- Expect the content of your course to change over the term; build in space for flexibility and change.
- Encourage your students to contribute relevant content material from their own research and reading.
- Use student presentations as a way to include students' own research interests and perspectives.
- Help students to understand the global landscape of publishing, and why certain voices dominate.
- Encourage students to seek out publications in their home languages.

A focus on the resources included / excluded

In examining papers to include on a module, ask:

- Does the module leader (ML) consider the paper as a site of political transformation?
  - o Does the paper locate the site of transformation elsewhere, in the field of the other (with the cultural other, the oppressed postcolonial, subaltern or subcultural)?
  - o If so, does this rarefy a binary between self/other?
- Does the ML use papers that consider 'alterity' as a primary point of subversion of dominant culture? If so, why?
- Is the author of a paper perceived as socially/culturally other and have they thus limited (or automatic) access to transformative alterity?
- Can a paper be criticised for its underlying assumptions of misplaced temporalisation whereby 'non-Western' practices are seen as a "throwback" to earlier times?
- For empirical papers, was the researcher wanted at the research site by the participants/community? If not, who wanted them there and whose voice do they represent?
  - o Was there a reflection on this question before developing an intervention?
- The same question can be applied to papers on the course:
  - o Will this paper be wanted by the students, and if not, why has it been included?

Pedagogical approaches

Pedagogical approaches – particularly relating to who gets to speak and on what content – is important not only for student engagement but also inclusion and equity. Ideally, the pedagogy employed should bring into conversation multiple voices and perspectives, and help students to feel connected to each other and to the course content. Careful pedagogical decision making can empower students to take ownership of their learning, make contributions to their academic communities, and act as a form of pastoral and community support.

Questions for lecturers/tutors:

- Who speaks in class? Who never speaks in class?
- How well do you know your students? Who in your class has caring or other responsibilities that affects their time availability? What are the research interests of your students? Who in your class is facing personal challenges in their life?
- What assumptions are you making about what students know?
- How are you accommodating students who might take longer to respond to your questions/prompts?
- How do you encourage/reassure students who express a lack of confidence in offering their views?
- In what ways do you indicate to your students that you are approachable?
- Are you confident in how to pronounce all your students' names?
- How clear are the expectations for what students should have prepared before coming to class?
- To what extent do your assessments allow students to pursue their own research interests?
- How helpful is your assessment feedback in enabling students to meet the objectives of the course?
- How can alternative/supplementary forms of assessment be incorporated into your course? E.g. self-assessment, peer assessment
- What opportunities do you offer students to support each other and work together?
- What opportunities do you offer students to get to know other members of the department?
- With whom do you critically reflect on your pedagogical approach?
- How do you respond to feedback from your students?
- To what extent do you draw on the teacher-training expertise that exists within the department?
- To what extent can a hybrid teaching approach (which uses both online and face-to-face learning and teaching) improve your pedagogy?
- What is the most valuable way of using face-to-face time together?

Suggested approaches:

- When asking a question to the class, give students time to think before asking for their answers.
- Ask students to answer questions in small groups, as this facilitates peer-support and might be a less intimidating space for 'shy' students.
- Weekly assignments (which students report back on during class) allow more time to assimilate and reflect upon information than lectures.
- Presentations in class allow students to think deeply and focus on topics/contexts of their own interest. Presentations can be pre-recorded by students, and then uploaded to Teams before class, thus maximizing discussion time in class.

- Be clear about expectations: Are students expected to do *all* the readings before class? Best practice seems to suggest that lecturers set two absolutely essential readings per week, which students are expected to be able to discuss in depth. Clear expectations help motivate students to do a reasonable amount of work. Students feel empowered to contribute to class discussions when they feel they have done "enough" preparation. When everyone has done the same reading, discussions improve.
- Ask students to submit anonymous questions beforehand and then display these questions on the board during class and use them as prompts for discussion. This helps you to understand what students do not understand, while allowing the discussion to be led by all students.
- When students make an interesting point, ask them to direct you to any relevant readings on the topic.
- Include alternative forms of assessment in your course, e.g. giving students the opportunity to self-assess their work, or 'peer-review' the work of their peers.
- When giving feedback on assignments, use track-changes to indicate to students precisely what aspects of their essay need improvement. Remember to also let students know which aspects of their essay are excellent, and why.
- Arrive in class a few minutes early, to give opportunity for 'small-talk' with students.
- Make sincere attempts to pronounce students' names correctly; this is a helpful website: https://www.pronouncenames.com/
- When receiving critical feedback from students, make sincere attempts to be open-minded and non-defensive. Perhaps institute a 24-hour cool-down period before responding if you feel defensive.
- "Check in" with students by sending a short email if you think that they may be going through a difficulty (e.g. students with family in India during the Covid-19 pandemic).
- Do not assume that all students want to speak on behalf of their countries or continents; let students volunteer information about the contexts they feel most comfortable to speak about.

Supervision

Supervision is arguably the most important and formative experience that a student has in the department. A supervisor is the only person in the department who meets with a student one-to-one, and they are therefore likely to be best placed to provide pastoral support. How supervisors engage with students has a big impact on how confident they feel as researchers, as well as their sense of belonging in the department.

Questions for supervisors:

- To what extent do you create opportunities for your supervisees to participate in wider departmental or disciplinary activities?
- To what extent to do you create opportunities for your supervisees to seek research support from other researchers in the department?
- In what ways do you acknowledge the oftentimes difficult personal experiences of conducting research?
- In what ways to do you encourage your supervisees to think of the broader implications of justice, equality, inclusion, and diversity for their research?

- Have you explained to your supervisees what the self-assessment mechanisms are, and what will happen if they report that they are having trouble?
- How do you indicate to your supervisees that you are committed to them and their research? Eg. Replying to emails promptly, preparing for supervision sessions, not cancelling at the last minute.
- Do you feel supported to provide pastoral to your students? What kind of support do you need?

Suggested approaches:

- Facilitate introductions for your supervisees to other academics in the field.
- Circulate CFP, conferences, and other academic opportunities to your supervisees.
- Consider 'pairing' your MSc supervisees with your PhD supervisees, to promote alternative avenues of mentorship and collaboration.
- Encourage 'peer-review' among your supervisees.
- Seek to understand the personal motivations behind supervisee's chosen research topics.
- Explain to the supervisee the purpose of the self-assessment mechanisms.
- And of course: reply to emails, read work that supervisees have sent you, and don't take their time for granted!

References

Hall, S. (1996) Cultural Identities and Cinematic Representation. In H. A. Baker, Jr., M. Diawara (eds) Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader, 201–222. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.