



## Mellon Inclusive Teaching and Advising Grant Application December 2020

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We are committed to investigating the ways that the representation of people from different backgrounds in course syllabi impact students' perceptions about diversity and inclusion in particular academic fields. Systemic racism and gender hierarchies can be further reproduced if students feel that they "don't fit" in a class or major. This could impede learning, through lack of engagement with the course material, if students feel that the course material is not relevant for their particular lived experiences. This could also impact not only which students decide to fully engage with course material, but also which students go on to graduate study or employment in fields directly related to their undergraduate major. It can also influence life-changing decisions that are not related to academia but to the self-perception of the individual.

There have been discipline-specific calls to diversify syllabi. In economics, for example, there is an ongoing discussion about how to diversify the field, based on the recognition that "The 'sobering' gender and racial gap among economists is hurting everyone" (*Business Insider*, 2017). The organization D-Econ, for example, publishes resources such as reading lists which help bring more attention to economics research that is produced by people from underrepresented backgrounds.

In ecology, a high-profile, published list of "100 articles every ecologist should read" was critiqued for highlighting almost exclusively the work of male, White scientists (*Nature Ecology & Evolution*, 2018). A recent survey of college undergraduates identifies a consequence of this bias: The lack of same-race role models for ethnic minority students is a major contributor to their reduced sense of belonging in ecology compared to White students (*Social Psychology of Education*, 2020).

In culture studies, the traditional Western canon consists of white men and neglects to represent writers from different backgrounds (2009, סלע-שפי, רקפת). Although the discourse regarding inequality in the material taught in higher education has intensified in recent decades, there is still a tendency to teach texts that are considered fundamental. Nevertheless, there is a real need among students for a meaningful learning of diverse texts. Students believe the university needs to do more to address the diversity of course programs (The John Hopkins News - Letter, 2020).

Through this Mellon Grant, we plan on surveying students at Trinity College about the impact that representation (or lack thereof) of people from different backgrounds in their syllabi has on their sense of belonging in the major, broadly to see whether students feel that the teaching environment is inclusive.



## References

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