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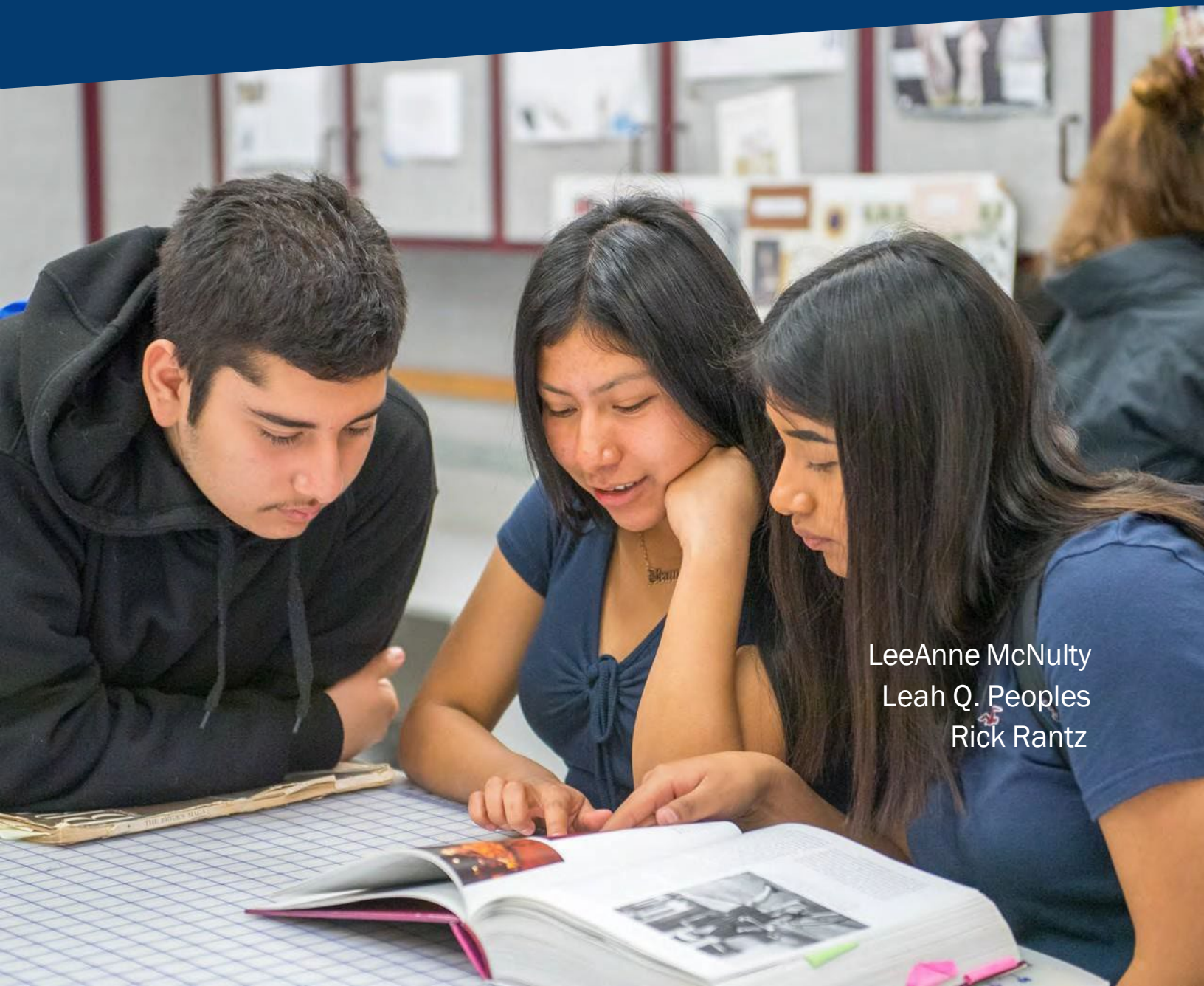
Culturally Responsive Higher Education Curriculum Assessment Tool

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Theoretical Framework

The Culturally Responsive Higher Education Assessment Tool
An Evidence-based Instrument

The *Culturally Responsive Higher Education Curriculum Assessment Tool* is an evidence-based instrument that can be utilized by faculty members to determine the extent to which their curriculum is culturally responsive. Results can be used to strengthen or modify existing curriculum or to develop new curriculum. Although this tool was designed to assess whether curriculum is culturally responsive, it was also designed to assess whether curriculum is culturally sustaining.

Culturally Responsive Education
The Paradigm

Rooted in the theoretical underpinnings of culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, G., 1995), the early work associated with cultural diversity and multicultural curriculum (Gay, G., 1996 & 1999), and the later focus on culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, D., 2014 and Paris, D. & Alim, H. S., 2014), culturally responsive-sustaining education developed into a strategy to enable deeper connections to content, individual development, and humanizing expressions of knowledge. By putting aside dominate world views and focusing on the cultural attributes inherent within all students, information and knowledge flows forth from multiple stories instead of frugal attempts at seeking knowledge and enlightenment from narrow parameters confined within a single story (TED Talk, "The Danger of a Single Story," Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie).

It is through multiple stories of the human condition, science, technology, achievement, turmoil, toil, and failure, that knowledge becomes a wide spectrum of relative experiences, empowering students to identify with, relate to, and freely absorb course content. Utilizing this approach inspires students to take ownership of the concepts and materials examined because they are encompassed within highly relatable and personal contexts. By embracing "multiple expressions of diversity" (e.g., race, social class, gender, language, sexual orientation, nationality, religion, and ability), that these can become central assets that drive student learning and success to a higher level (New York Department of Education).

Culturally responsive instruction is based on curriculum that is "multidimensional, empowering, validating, comprehensive, trans-formative, and emancipating" (Gay, G., 2000). As an instructional approach, it utilizes curriculum promoting "academic achievement, cultural competence, and social-political awareness" (Ladson-Billings, G., 1995). Culturally sustaining, instruction is derived from curriculum that sustains linguistic and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic process of inquiry (Paris, 2012; Paris & Aim, 2014). It further utilizes curriculum that acknowledges the attributes of shifting and diverse communities, embraces pluralism, moves away from educational stereotyping, and steers clear of imposing viewpoints, philosophies, and ideals. By removing narrow perspectives, students develop a wider view of the world and the value they hold within our society.

Culturally Responsive Higher Education

Instruction in the higher education classroom, like instruction geared toward younger ages, focuses on moving students toward a set of common and predefined learning outcomes. Methods and techniques for doing so are varied and some efforts are met with more success than others. At the end of the term, or at various points leading to this, instructors often question why some students are more successful than others. In some cases, instructors examine institutional data in search of clues as to why some students succeed, while others do not. Data often confirm that dominate populations perform at a higher level academically, have greater retention and persistence, and are more likely to achieve their stated goal(s). Instructors are often left scratching their heads, wondering why less dominate populations are not achieving at the same level as the dominate population.

Low achievement among students of color is often blamed on the students themselves, (e.g., low English proficiency, failure

to assimilate into the dominate culture, or lack of parental support), and the list goes on. Curriculum, on the other hand, is rarely examined as a root cause. Instead, attention is often directed to the kinds and levels of student support services offered to populations of color. Although important to student success, these services alone do not paint the full picture of why some students succeed and others do not. Without including curriculum in the examination, an incomplete and inaccurate view of student success can emerge.

The *Culturally Responsive Higher Education Curriculum Assessment Tool*, provides an opportunity for faculty members (individually or as a team) to take a deep -dive into their curriculum to discover whether it is culturally responsive and sustaining, or if modifications are needed. If necessary, steps can be taken to revise or adjust curriculum. In cases where individual components or the entire curriculum is culturally unresponsive, these changes can bring about increased success among all students, especially among those from historically oppressed cultures and ethnicities.

Enhancing Motivation to Learn
The Motivational Framework

"All adults want to make sense of their world, to find meaning, and to be effective at what they value – this is what fuels their motivation to learn." (Ginsberg, 2017).

Instructors are usually good at spotting students within their classrooms who are "tuned out." However, they are not successful at identifying ways to motivate student engagement. By comparing students who are motivated to those who are not, instructors intuitively comprehend that motivation is a foundational construct that impacts student engagement, learning, and educational achievement (Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 2017). In comparing these two disparate groups, it is apparent that motivation influences how students relate to their educational environment and respond to it; and how this, in turn, impacts student goals and achievement.

Despite the best attempts and good intentions of instructors, motivating students can be a difficult and daunting task. To confound this further, effort,

engagement, and determination are often used to gage student motivation. Unfortunately, these assumed indicators can lead to faulty and misleading assumptions, simply because the significance of each can be viewed and interpreted differently across cultures. For example, work ethic in one culture may require long hours and dedication to the corporation or workplace, whereas another culture may view free time, entertainment, and relaxation as important for preventing burnout.

Many instructors realize that they can heighten motivation when they are able to elicit an emotional connection to the concepts and materials being presented. In the absence of this emotional connection, students are often disengaged, uninterested, and bored. Therefore, there is a strong relationship between emotion and motivation. It is the emotional connection that stimulates students to be inquisitive, curious, and thirsty for meaning and understanding. Without an emotional connection, and especially without one that is placed in a cultural context, students either tune out or drop out.

Despite the challenges of sparking an emotional connection to motivate learning across cultures, there seems to be some commonalities that can help instructors. Four conditions that need to be present for motivation to occur were identified and placed into the *Motivational Framework for Culturally Responsive Teaching* by Wlodkowski and Ginsberg (1995): inclusion, developing a positive attitude, enhancing meaning, and engendering competence. These interrelated conditions work together to influence adult learning and instructors will want to investigate these further.

Teaching Across Cultural Strengths
Balancing Integrated and Individualized Cultural Frameworks

"By developing cultural self-awareness and learning about differing cultural frameworks, we can cultivate the ability to reinterpret others' cultural norms as strengths and redesign our teaching and courses to engage these strengths among students" (Chávez & Longerbeam, 2016).

Culture, from a very early age, shapes the way individuals perceive and think about the world. It forms their attitudes, norms, beliefs, and sense of self. It can even shape a person's worldview, sense of purpose, and overall sense of belonging. As such, culture plays an important role throughout a person's growth and development. When students are placed into an environment where their culture is not acknowledged, honored, or valued, they often experience an unrelatable and nonsensical void where connections to meaning, understanding, and reasoning are diminished or altogether nonexistent. They simply may not have a reference point for which to synthesize or triangulate visual, written, and verbal language back to representations within their own cultural.

For instructors, finding the most appropriate cultural framework in which to place the content and context of learning is highly important. These cultural frameworks, as defined by Chávez and Longerbeam (2016) can be separated into teaching and learning models that place individuated instruction at the end of one spectrum and integrated learning on the other. As these scholars explain, a "culturally individuated framework" leads to a narrow view of the world where teaching and learning are singular, compartmentalized, and linear constructs. On the other hand, a "culturally integrated framework" encompasses teaching and learning that are interconnected, mutual, and reflective. Whereas culturally integrated teaching and learning leads to an independent worldview that is common, assumed, and valued, culturally dependent teaching and learning reinforces an interconnected view of the world.

A parallel to the above framework is monocultural teaching and learning, as opposed to multicultural teaching and learning. The inherent flaw in monocultural teaching and learning is that classrooms in the United States are rarely comprised of a singular culture. Therefore, adopting a strength-based approach that balances monocultural instruction with multicultural instruction has the potential to enrich the student learning experience. As suggested by Cháves and Longerbeam (2016), students are able to utilize the natural strengths developed in their early years to learning in college. Instructors are encouraged to learn more about the *Cultural Frameworks in Teaching and Learning Model* developed by Chávez and Longerbeam (2016).

Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Teaching and the Brain
Authentic Engagement and Rigor

"A systematic approach to culturally responsive teaching is the perfect catalyst to stimulate the brain's neuroplasticity so that it grows new brain cells that help students think in more sophisticated ways" (Hammond, 2015).

Achievement gaps between dominate and less dominate student populations continues to be a significant issue confronting colleges and universities across the nation. Scores of underprepared and dependent learners fill many college classrooms and instructors are left to determine the best methods and strategies to instill these students with the higher order, problem-solving, and analytical skills required to perform at the college level. Instruction for English learners, economically disadvantaged students, and those of color is often directed at the lower spectrum of Bloom's Taxonomy. Analyzing, evaluating, and synthesizing are substituted with an emphasis on remembering, understanding, and application. As a consequence, less dominate students receive instruction that is repetitive, unchallenging, and disconnected.

When students are denied opportunities to develop the higher order thinking and cognitive skills needed to succeed in college, their brainpower is diminished and their true potential is hindered or destroyed. African American and Latino male students are most often impacted and this leads to feelings of frustration and helplessness. When curriculum is disconnected and filled with unfamiliar content, frustration builds. This leads to low academic performance and/or decisions to withdraw or dropout.

Cognitive and higher order skills development are the basis for processing information and contribute to the way individuals are able to navigate challenging and difficult aspects of their environment. They promote brain growth, intellectual development, and the capacity to think critically. In order for these important skills to fully develop, students search for relevant connections to what they already know and have experienced, mainly the cultural aspects of their community and everyday lives (Hammond, 2015). When students are asked to search for meaning without being given the opportunity to make a connection back to their culture, they search for meaning where there is none.

When brain principles from neuroscience are examined, the important connections between culture and cognitive/higher order thinking becomes clearly evident. To summarize, learning leads to long lasting change in neural networks, and for adults to form or modify existing neural networks, prior learning must be capitalized upon (Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 2017). In other words, for instructors to successfully convey concepts on to students, connections must be made to students' previous learning, much of which is formed through cultural experiences within the environments students currently live or have lived. Without these cultural connections, students experience culture shock and the brain triggers the fight or flight response (Hammond, 2015).

In an effort to illustrate connections between neuroplasticity and culturally responsive-sustaining teaching, a *Read for Rigor Framework* was developed by Hammond (2015). This framework is comprised of four constructs: wise feedback, affirmation, instructional conversation, and validation. These prepare students for rigor and independent learning. Awareness, learning partnerships, information processing, communities of learners, and learning environments are included as independent variables instructors will want to examine further.

Curriculum and the Connection to Culture
Why it matters?

The connection between curriculum and culture creates an engaging educational environment which highlights cultural strengths, builds on existing knowledge, and motivates students to learn. The combination of these lead to student success. Culturally responsive-sustaining curriculum serves as the foundation of effective teaching and learning.

Allan Hancock College is proud of its partnership with the New York University Metro Center, and specifically The Education Justice Research and Organizing Collaborative, in presenting this *Culturally Responsive Higher Education Curriculum Assessment Tool*. We are hopeful this instrument, along with our associated professional development efforts, will lead to a greater understanding and use of culturally responsive-sustaining education practices at all higher education levels. Using this tool to assess curriculum will assist faculty across colleges and universities to better meet the needs of their ever-changing student populations.

Curriculum Assessment Tool

Assessment Categories

Representation:
The Representation section depicts cultures, communities, and people through the: Diversity of Individuals, Diversity of Authors, Diversity of Portrayals, and Accuracy of Portrayals.

Social Justice:
The Social Justice section is divided into two categories:1) Power, Privilege, and Multiple Perspectives and 2) Systemic Oppression and Action Orientation.

Assess Curriculum in Seven Steps

This assessment can be done individually, with a partner, or in diverse teams. *Suggestion: Locate and refer to the demographic data from your campus to ensure curriculum reflects the student populations you serve.*

1 Set aside a significant period of time to begin reviewing sections of the curriculum and other education resources. This could be a syllabus, chapter, textbook, assignments, section, introduction, environment, resources, grading policies, assessments, and/or course objectives. Setting aside a 4-hour slot of time for yourself and at least two of the colleagues, students, administrators, or community members who can leverage multiple perspectives is ideal. However, reviewing the curriculum alone can also be transformative.

2 The units, chapter, section, or element you choose to assess should not focus specifically on diversity and multiculturalism; they should be typical examples/samples of your curriculum.

3 In the first two sections, Representation and Diversity of Authors, record tangible characters or authors in the curriculum you are analyzing. Curriculum may excel in one area and fall short in another, and it is important to record those differences.

4 Once you have your curriculum and the assessment tool in hand, review each item in the Representation and Social Justice sections. Record key words, ideas, and qualities from the statements that you will be looking for as you read through and review the curriculum, content, and materials. Gage your confidence level for each item.

5 To assess Representation and Social Justice Orientation sections, gage the confidence level for each item. Items marked "Somewhat Confident," "Not Confident," or "Not Observed," are areas indicating a need for curriculum modification.

6 Consult colleagues and examine resources to modify curriculum. A list of resources is in the Appendix of this assessment tool. You may also want to contact colleagues and scholars at other institutions.

7 Please share the results of your assessment by uploading documents and modified curriculum into *Culturally Responsive Higher Education Curriculum Assessment Tool* – Microsoft Teams folder.

Highly Confident: If you are highly confident, you should be able to provide an abundance of specific examples (stories, passages, illustrations, quotes, assignments, languages, etc.) from the curriculum or materials to show how and why the statement is accurate. Items in this column are culturally responsive and sustaining.

Confident: If you are confident, you should be able to provide some evidence from the curriculum or materials that the statement is accurate. The curriculum may not have been designed to be culturally responsive and sustaining, but elements are apparent in most cases.

Somewhat Confident: If you marked items somewhat confident, this indicates that there is little evidence that these are culturally responsive and sustaining.

Not Confident / Not Observed: If not confident or not observed, there is no evidence of cultural responsiveness in the curriculum or materials.

Assessment Guidelines
Representation & Social Justice Orientation

Use the instruments below to indicate how confident you are that the examined curriculum, adopted textbooks, and supplemental materials are culturally responsive and sustaining.

Representation - Diversity of INDIVIDUALS Record numbers below				
	Women Girls	Men Boys	Non- binary	Total
Latinx / Hispanic				
Black / African				
Native American				
Asian / Pacific Islander				
Middle Eastern				
White / Caucasian				
LGBTQ+				
Multi-Racial				
Persons with Disabilities				
Non-Christian				
English as a 2nd or Foreign Lang.				
Immigrant or Undocumented				
TOTALS				

Representation - Diversity of AUTHORS Record numbers below				
	Women Girls	Men Boys	Non- binary	Total
Latinx / Hispanic				
Black / African				
Native American				
Asian / Pacific Islander				
Middle Eastern				
White / Caucasian				
LGBTQ+				
Multi-Racial				
Persons with Disabilities				
Non-Christian				
English as a 2nd or Foreign Lang.				
Immigrant or Undocumented				
TOTALS				

REPRESENTATION SCALE A

Please rate the extent to which you are confident your curriculum includes the attributes below.

Diversity of Portrayals Contents / Statements / Perspectives	Highly Confident	Confident	Somewhat Confident	Not Confident Not Observed
The curriculum ...				
1. features diverse individuals, their life experiences, and their contributions to society.				
2. contains culturally-affirming references to different ethnic and cultural traditions, languages, beliefs, names, and dress.				
3. portrays diverse cultures, ethnicities, histories, and nationalities without stereotypes, generalizations, and assumptions.				
4. examines diverse relationships and family structures (i.e., gay couples, interracial couples, single parents, same-sex parents, adopted, foster children, other relatives living with the family, grandparents, etc.).				
5. highlights individuals with disabilities, honors their achievements, and values their contributions.				
6. contains multi-generational viewpoints and perspectives that bridge generational divides and lead to greater understanding between age groups.				
7. references struggles encountered by non-English speaking individuals, as well as their cultural contributions.				
8. includes current and historical contributions made by immigrants and undocumented individuals.				
CONFIDENCE LEVEL:				

NOTES:

REPRESENTATION SCALE B

Please rate the extent to which you are confident your curriculum includes the attributes below.

Accuracy of Portrayals **Contents / Statements / Perspectives**	Highly Confident	Confident	Somewhat Confident	Not Confident / Not Observed
The curriculum ...				
9. does not present minoritized populations as having low economic wealth or low educational attainment.				
10. examines individual issues within a larger social context or through a global, historical, or institutional lens.				
11. does not present non-dominate cultures as alien or exotic.				
12. illustrates that problems faced by people of color or women are not resolved through the benevolent intervention of a white person or male.				
13. highlights minoritized populations as assets to society.				
14. acknowledges obstacles generated by systemic oppression and discrimination.				
15. acknowledges that individuals impacted by the legal system can turn their lives around.				
16. does not make assumptions about individuals based on their visual appearance.				
CONFIDENCE LEVEL:				

NOTES:

SOCIAL JUSTICE SCALE A

Please rate the extent to which you are confident your curriculum includes the attributes below.

Power, Privilege, and Multiple Perspectives Contents / Statements / Perspectives	Highly Confident	Confident	Somewhat Confident	Not Confident / Not Observed
The curriculum ...				
1. highlights non-dominate populations, their strengths, and assets.				
2. focuses on the dignity and contributions of diverse races, classes, genders, abilities, and sexual orientations.				
3. acknowledges that power and privilege has played a role in minoritizing women, indigenous people, 2nd language learners, and people of color.				
4. presents alternate points of view on the same controversial issue or topic, including viewpoints produced by minoritized people/communities.				
5. examines power and privilege from the viewpoint of individuals who have been historical oppressed.				
6. recognizes the value and integrity of diverse faiths and other belief systems.				
7. examines flaws within the legal and judicial systems and highlights their impact on individuals and society.				
8. presents economic, cultural, social, and political divides and features individuals who have overcome these.				
CONFIDENCE LEVEL:				

NOTES:

SOCIAL JUSTICE SCALE B

Please rate the extent to which you are confident your curriculum includes the attributes below.

Systemic Oppression and Action Orientation Contents / Statements / Perspectives	Highly Confident	Confident	Somewhat Confident	Not Confident Not Observed
The curriculum ...				
9. connects learning to social, political, or environmental issues that affect students on an individual or societal level.				
10. promotes just practices, laws, and institutions that respect individual or group identities.				
11. explores the contemporary and historic oppression of people within structural systems such as prisons, the workplace, academic institutions, and houses of worship, etc.				
12. ensures accessibility for students by addressing multiple learning styles, types of disabilities, and intelligences.				
13. forges connections to the broader community by presenting examples of service, volunteerism, and activism.				
14. allows students to develop positive self-identifies while respecting and honoring individuals who are different from themselves.				
15. places value on a pluralistic, diverse, multicultural, and equitable society.				
16. encourages students to promote equity and combat inequity within their immediate environment, broader community, or society.				
CONFIDENCE LEVEL:				

NOTES:

Action Steps Based on Your Assessment

Examine each item marked as Somewhat Confident, Not Confident / Not Observed, and analyze what modifications you might begin to heighten your culturally responsive confidence levels. Research evidence-based best practices, consult colleagues, or find culturally responsive curriculum models that will assist you in this effort. You may also utilize the list of resources in the appendix of this instrument.

Not Confident / Not Observed Items	Somewhat Confident Items	Confident Items	Highly Confident Items
Curriculum Modification Needed	**Curriculum Modification Suggested**	**Curriculum Culturally Aware**	**Curriculum Culturally Responsive**
These items were not present or do not contribute to the overall cultural responsiveness of the curriculum. Consider diversifying curriculum by adding culturally responsive content and taking a deep-dive into the theoretical framework. Utilize resources and work with colleagues and consultants to modify curriculum.	These items do little to contribute to the overall cultural responsiveness of the curriculum. Consider diversifying curriculum by adding culturally responsive content. Utilize resources and work with colleagues and consultants to modify curriculum.	These items are adequate and contribute to the overall cultural responsiveness of the curriculum. Consider consulting colleagues and examining resources to strengthen the cultural responsiveness of these items.	These items are strong and contribute to supporting the overall cultural responsiveness of the curriculum. Consider sharing resources, approaches, and curriculum relative to these items with colleagues.

COMPLIMENTARY ASSESSMENTS

The following assessments are useful for determining how culturally responsive your andragogy, syllabi, and grading practices are:

ANDRAGOGICAL SCALE

Please rate the extent to which you are confident your andragogical strategies include the attributes below.

Andragogy includes...	Highly Confident	Confident	Somewhat Confident	Not Confident / Not Observed
1. teaching to multiple learning styles.				
2. utilizing the students' backgrounds, experiences, and ideas as resources for teaching.				
3. supporting English learners with supplemental material in their preferred language.				
4. providing links to community resources.				
5. using interviews with family and community members as a resource for teaching and learning.				
6. changing the design of the classroom to facilitate group discussions, dialog, and teamwork.				
7. using gender neutral terms.				

SYLLABI SCALE

Please rate the extent to which you are confident your syllabi include the attributes below.

Syllabi includes...	Highly Confident	Confident	Somewhat Confident	Not Confident / Not Observed
1. an instructor introduction and welcome.				
2. ways students can share their cultural perspectives.				
3. clear grading policies designed for student success.				
4. ADA and learning support services information.				
5. flexible policies regarding missed classes and tests				
6. well-defined academic honesty policy.				
7. wording that supports the LGTBQ+ community (safe space).				
8. land acknowledge statement.				
9. a list of available student services.				

ASSESSMENT SCALE
Please rate the extent to which you are confident your assessments include the attributes below.

From: Grading for Equity: What it is, why it matters, and know it can transform schools and classrooms, Joe Feldman. Corwin: 2019 **Assessments…**	Highly Confident	Confident	Somewhat Confident	Not Confident / Not Observed
1. emphasize individual growth over grade attainment.				
2. avoid zeros.				
3. avoid heavily weighted assignments (mid-terms & finals).				
4. focus on subject matter content only (e.g., not deducting points for spelling and grammar on history exams)				
5. allow assignment corrections and/or do-overs.				
6. avoid timed assignments and tests.				
7. utilize rubrics or examples for grading guidance.				

Curriculum Resources

When colleges and universities develop curriculum, they often refer to the whole package of learning goals and standards; units and lessons that detail what faculty teach daily and weekly: assignments, activities, projects, books, materials, videos, presentations, and readings.

Culturally responsive and sustaining curriculum is also embodied within the environment and the cultural design of the course. For example, the grading, assessment, attendance, the syllabus, and behavioral expectations shape the educational space which is connected to the curriculum and student outcomes.

Educational policies impact the students' perceptions of the entire college experience, including matriculation processes, student support resources, and the handing-off of students through transfer or employment. These elements of education are truly at the heart of a culturally responsive-sustaining education. Educational policies are explicitly connected to the students' experience, connection, and success and need to be embraced as part of the curriculum to be assessed through this assessment.

Curriculum is a key component of a culturally responsive education, as it is filled with stories, activities, assignments, and illustrations that influence how people understand the world, and contribute to centering and normalizing people, cultures, and values. Curriculum that only reflect the lives of dominant populations (White people and culture, nuclear families, or able-bodied people) reinforce ideas that sideline students of color, linguistically diverse students, single parent/multi-generation/ LGBTQ+ led families, and students with disabilities. A sustaining education presents multiple versions of realities, worlds, experiences, and stories to infuse the values, perspectives, and historical contexts of many cultures. This instrument provides a way for faculty to assess the extent to which their curriculum provides these opportunities.

WEBSITES

https://steinhardt.nyu.edu/metrocenter/ejroc/ culturally-responsive-curriculum-assessments

https://library.educause.edu/resources/2019/1/dei- book-recommendations

http://www.jspac.org/

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