It has been a difficult past year,
with the pandemic, pivot to online learning, and racial unrest from coast to coast.

Listening to Students of Color 2021

Listening to
Students of Color…

"(What's it like for you right now, as a student of your race, ethnicity, or culture?) Everything is normal. I have not faced any negative issues or comments. I feel like it is a safe environment.

(Any instance of ignorance, stereotyping, or bias experienced your higher education?) N/A

I like how we can watch back on the class recordings if we didn't understand a topic or it went to fast.

I can not pay attention to class most times since I am at home with my family coming in and out of my room and the living room. I also feel as though I learn less online than in person and I can't make any friends since no one talks or sees each other often."

—A Latina, 18 years old, freshman, first generation college student, and older sister.

"Right now it is going good as most of my professors seem to be interested in the cultural aspect of having students of color and their input. My prof. is constantly admitting when her statement is privileged and her life is privileged and it makes me comfortable being in her class having her know and be aware of her social status as a white woman in America.

I would like faculty to understand that I speak in ebonics/AAVE because I want to and it does not take away my intelligence or professionalism. I do not want to have to 'code switch' every time I am on a zoom class to fit a vernacular of academia that is not necessary. My grades and my coursework speak for my intelligence—not the words I choose to use and how I use them.

(Any instance of ignorance, stereotyping, or bias experienced your higher education?) N/A

(What do you like about/is working for you in online learning?) Not having to worry about being late to class, (not) walking to and from, the option of having the camera off or on because sometimes I don't want to get ready.

(What don't you like about/is not working for you in online learning?) Learning content. Some professors have recorded lectures but that hasn't worked for me because it takes them days to get back to my questions."

—Black

"I haven't experienced ignorance at Sacramento State but I have in High School but I wouldn't like to talk about it.

(What do you like about/is working for you in online learning?) That it gave me more time to be with my family at home. Also I like the online learning, in my opinion it feels the same to being in class."

—I am 18 years old, this is my first year in Sacramento State also. I am Mexican and I'm first generation college student.

"I just transferred this semester from SCC so I'm still getting the hang of things.

(What would you like faculty, staff, and students to know most about your race, culture, or ethnicity?) We're really friendly people. The media paints a horrible picture of us Pacific Islanders as a whole but we don't all identify/relate to what's being put out there in social media or rumors. People should get to know us before judging.

(Any instance of ignorance, stereotyping, or bias experienced your higher education?) That I would end up in a gang because my favorite color and my race. I wore my favorite color (back in high school) and they racial profiled me saying that I was a gang member (not true). I have never been a part of a gang. I was also looked down on in a college campus because I was pregnant and young. People thought I wasn't going to finish community college and yet I proved them wrong. I just want to continue with it and be more educated in the field I want to pursue.

I'm used to online learning because ever since I started having kids it just became more convenient for me. I just give more leniency to my professors because I know the transition for professors who don't teach online must be hectic.

When professors are unorganized it gets confusing but again I'm still not holding it against them because I understand the transition has everyone all over the place.

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Lower tuition fees."

—I'm a Tongan/Pacific Islander. I'm 23 years old attending Sac State Spring 2021 and I'm a first generation college student.

"It's hard sometimes. People don't understand the challenges black people go through so our struggles aren't valid to them.

(What would you like faculty, staff, and students to know most about your race, culture, or ethnicity?) The black community isn't a threat.

(Any instance of ignorance, stereotyping, or bias experienced your higher education?) My professor…sharing her ignorant point of views in class today.

(What do you like about/is working for you in online learning?) The time at home.

(What don't you like about/is not working for you in online learning?) The missed out opportunities I've lost.

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Teach professors about teaching black students."

—18 year old African America (Black) female, first generation

"I think being Mexican and having grown up here in the U.S. has changed me a lot. I never really understand what it meant to accept my culture because I would often be presented with ideals of how Americans should be like and if not then one would be seen as odd or strange. I am glad to live in a state like CA, but I still think a lot needs to be done because CA is just one part our of a whole. I would love to learn about my culture more and have the freedom to express it and see it displayed. I know I can but I also can understand that it is not the norm here to display non-American patriotism. Well, I know we are free to do as such, but there is social pressure to normalize an Americanism as if there was nothing wrong with too much of something. And one way I feel like we can learn to just accept more of other cultures is to teach students from an early age about other cultures and that it is great to have an opportunity at learning about more than one's self.

(Any instance of ignorance, stereotyping, or bias experienced your higher education?) N/A

I like it (online learning) and its flexible, but I agree that it is not for everyone.

(What don't you like about/is not working for you in online learning?) The engagement is not there at times because you're not visually motivated in the sense that the home setting does not represent what the school setting is.

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) I feel like just keep trying to listen and get feedback."

—I am a first generation Mexican immigrant who is pursuing a BA in sociology. I want to get a Masters in Social Work later on. I think my background is important to me because it has been an intersection of reminders of how I know things are not equitable and that I know there is so much to learn and change.

"I would like others to know that some latinx people may be undocumented, or may not be fluent in English.

I am grateful to not have experienced any stereotypes, prejudice etc.

(What do you like about/is working for you in online learning?) It works around my schedule.

(What don't you like about/is not working for you in online learning?) I'm not as engaged."

—I identify as a Latina/hispanic or latinx individual. I am currently nineteen years old and a sophomore in college.

"My family and I are just trying to make through with these unprecedented times. We have been having trouble with healthy food because we do not have the money for it. And we are not eligible for Calfresh because we are not citizens. All of this is stressful and does not add up and weight on our shoulders. It weights me down as a student because all I want to do is help my family.

We are having a rough time. My parents cannot get better jobs because they do not speak English a certain way to get a good job even though they are very hard workers. Families like mine have to put necessities like glasses or cavities aside because they cannot afford it if they want to pay bills. One of my parents plays off their migraines because they cannot afford to get their tooth fixed.

(Any instance of ignorance, stereotyping, or bias experienced your higher education?) It happens a lot to one of my parents I have noticed because people hear her trouble pronouncing so when they get frustrated they start giving her attitude and lashing out until I go and help them.

(What do you like about/is working for you in online learning?) I don't waste time commuting and it is more efficient for me to get started on things.

The professors seem underprepared sometimes and it bothers me. I have tried putting myself in their shoes during the summer since I worked as a summer school teacher and I had to prepare beforehand and it was hard but doable.

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Maybe resources for immigrant families? And maybe have the professors seem overprepared? But that might be just me. I don't know."

—Hispanic, Mexican, 20, 3rd year, first gen

"Personally I have not experienced any prejudice since I look White, however, I have friends who have been given dirty looks while walking on the sidewalks in my community.

(Any instance of ignorance, stereotyping, or bias experienced your higher education?) Luckily, I have not experienced any.

I like that I am able to take a quick nap immediately after finishing my assignments. I also like that I am able to do most assignments at my own pace.

I have been struggling to teach myself in some of my classes. I currently have a class where the lecture is written and I have to read it, and that can be difficult because I am a visual learner, thus making it harder to understand the material.

I feel that Sacramento State is doing great. There are a few nitpicks, but those don't draw away from the positives. Overall, the University doing a good job."

—Mexican, 18, Freshman, and first generation college student

"I get overlooked a lot of the time because I am a female, almost looked at as less than. In some classes men will talk over me or act like my voice is not important. When it comes to religious discussion, I am not seen as equal because my culture is different from their ideology.

Being an Indian Fijian, many people don't know my history. I am not seen as an islander because my ancestors are from India. I am not seen as an Indian because we are looked at lesser than because my people were enslaved. It is hard to identify Indian Fijians.

(Any instance of ignorance, stereotyping, or bias experienced your higher education?) In my higher education people will assume that I am smart because my last name is a traditional Indian last name. When they see me it is almost the quite opposite reaction for whatever reason.

(What do you like about/is working for you in online learning?) Not much. I guess not having to commute is good.

Working online makes being a student really stressful. Teachers think that because I am at home now I have so much more time to focus on school, when that is not the case. I am a full time student, yes, but I also have a family who works harder than me for their own education and my mother is a healthcare worker. So I have my own struggles when it comes to being 'stuck at home.'

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) I would love an easier way to navigate the websites to find what I need."

—I am a 21 year old Fijian Indian. I identify as a cis female.

"Not really many experiences as of now, everything is online so I haven't been able to experience much.

(What would you like faculty, staff, and students to know most about your race, culture, or ethnicity?) I'm not sure as long as my background and race is respected.

(Any instance of ignorance, stereotyping, or bias experienced your higher education?) N/A

(What do you like about/is working for you in online learning?) I feel like I'm more independent of my work and really have to keep track of everything which is a good thing.

(What don't you like about/is not working for you in online learning?) Communication in classes can sometimes be limited and the work can be misinterpreted.

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) At the moment I'm not really sure."

—Latino

"The disconnected nature of virtual learning makes me feel even more separated from the school. I worry I am missing out on obligations or events from the school. I'm really walking in the dark as this is my first year college experience during the pandemic.

(What would you like faculty, staff, and students to know most about your race, culture, or ethnicity?) Hispanics are an ignored minority

Though it does not cause an emotional response to me, the term bean or beaner has been used lightly in relation to the N word that is widely unaccepted. I just feel there is a hierarchy of minorities. If you're gonna defend justice for one race you can't ignore the injustices the rest face, including white people. This shows what they actually care about, not justice and equality for all race, but attention and the perception of being 'woke' and accommodating for minorities.

(What do you like about/is working for you in online learning?) Not much, but I enjoy the extra time I get with my family however that's a trade off because at home I am prone to distraction.

(What don't you like about/is not working for you in online learning?) The classes are difficult to engage with, motivation is low and school has become about turning in assignments rather than learning something.

I don't believe Sacramento State is responsible for these hardships but it could be beneficial to have huge webinars for the entire school with popular guest speakers that will promote unity in these isolated times."

—Hispanic, Mexican, 18, male, first generation student, first generation American, San Diego native leaving home to study at Sac State

"(What would you like faculty, staff, and students to know most about your race, culture, or ethnicity?) We are categorized with Asians. And we are NOT Asian at all. Asia is on the other side of the world while we are right around Hawaii. Sac State categorizes us as Asian Pacific Islanders. We are not Asian at all.

I haven't experienced any ignorance or bias or anything like that

(What do you like about/is working for you in online learning?) It's convenient. Saves gas and money. I love it. More flexible as well.

(What don't you like about/is not working for you in online learning?) Nothing.

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Stop requiring classes we took in high school. It's expensive as it is and requiring us to repeat a class we took is ridiculous."

—Samoan (Pacific Islander), 19, first generation college student, second year college student.

"(Any instance of ignorance, stereotyping, or bias experienced your higher education?) Never.

(What do you like about/is working for you in online learning?) It's convenient but I prefer human interaction. Open the schools up.

(What don't you like about/is not working for you in online learning?) I can't meet my teachers in person.

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Open the schools up. Quit being scared of the virus…."

—Hispanic American 22 years Junior Standing Transfer First generation

"In this time with police brutality and a pandemic, it's been crazy to see my generation go through all this when there should be peace but we don't know peace, all we see is violence and pain.

(What would you like faculty, staff, and students to know most about your race, culture, or ethnicity?) The Black community is trying to persevere through these tough times and we just want to be protected.

(Any instance of ignorance, stereotyping, or bias experienced your higher education?) I haven't faced anything during my 4 years.

(What do you like about/is working for you in online learning?) I don't have to get up and walk to class.

I miss interacting with my peers on campus."

—African American, 25 Senior

"(What's it like for you right now, as a student of your race, ethnicity, or culture?) Normal

There is a bias that my needs are more important because I am a POC. Problems are usually due to economic status."

—N/A

"I would like others to know that some latinx people may be undocumented, or may not be fluent in English.

I am grateful to not have experienced any stereotypes, prejudice etc.

(What do you like about/is working for you in online learning?) It works around my schedule.

(What don't you like about/is not working for you in online learning?) I'm not as engaged."

—I identify as a Latina/hispanic or latinx individual. I am currently nineteen years old and a sophomore in college.

"Being a person of color is pretty hard right now seeing all the news and drama with the elections. People of color have a lot on the line if the wrong person gets elected.

As an African American we are fighting for our lives in America right now, and college shouldn't make our lives harder than they already are. Having college online is very difficult with trying to create friendships.

(Any instance of ignorance, stereotyping, or bias experienced your higher education?) During schooling teachers always group me in with the athletes just because my color and height and believe that sometimes I take sports more seriously than schoolwork and academics.

The only thing that's better is that I don't really have to get dressed or anything to go to class, I can just get out of bed and turn on my computer.

(What don't you like about/is not working for you in online learning?) The main problem doing college online is I'm not meeting any body or making any friends at all. In college you have to know people to survive and as of now I don't know anyone that I knew coming into college.

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) If they hosted virtual meetings to meet different people that are also freshmen and are also looking to create friendships that could last a lifetime."

—I am African America male

"(What would you like faculty, staff, and students to know most about your race, culture, or ethnicity?) Age discrimination, with the comments and treatment of an old lady student in the class of the 90% of the students attending Sac State, color discrimination not being dark enough to be considered Latina, and too Latina to be considered white because of the color of my skin. Discrimination adds to any anxiety issues 10 fold.

(What do you like about/is working for you in online learning?) Not dealing with discrimination of the other students.

(What don't you like about/is not working for you in online learning?) You can not get anyone in any office to call you back or take a moment for a Zoom meeting.

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Me, forget it, nothing will be done, I am leaving. For others who will no longer tolerate the discrimination of the academia that is practiced and dominated by those few other professors who ask other professors to only speak in English in the teacher's lounge, what is wrong with those educators? Sac State is in for a rude awakening and will not be able to get away with what they have in the past."

—anxiety, over 60, Latina, Senior graduating this semester. I am a veteran and I am the first generation college student.

"It frustrates me that everyone thinks they must pity and give special treatment to people of color. Yes, there is a history of hatred and abuse towards people of color but those days are mostly behind us. I am strong, smart, and empowered to make my life whatever I want it to be. No one with any so called 'privilege' can take that away from me so I don't need them to feel sorry for me or tell me my life matters. I already know.

(Any instance of ignorance, stereotyping, or bias experienced your higher education?) None. If you don't work hard, your professors can see that. If you do, they can also see that. Color has no bearing on this."

—Hispanic, returning after a long gap, graduating this semester

"I am experiencing heavy microaggressions from a professor this semester. Although Sac State just had the Fall 2020 Convocation, there is still faculty on campus who refuse to join the fight against racism. It is frustrating because I don't know if I should report it or not because the professor may be friends with the higher up. Then I may be penalized in some form or another.

(What would you like faculty, staff, and students to know most about your race, culture, or ethnicity?) You don't have to fear Black people. Stereotypes dictate how you see a group of people, and in turn how you respond to them. Look at the big picture. See the struggle of Black people in this country from the source.

(Any instance of ignorance, stereotyping, or bias experienced your higher education?) I have been called by names that sound like they may be another black girl's name, just not mine. Professors have shown that they have low expectations of me. I have had to email professors about the grade they tried to short me. I've been put in groups of 5 with the only (4) other black students in the entire class.

(What do you like about/is working for you in online learning?) That I can be in the comfort of my home. That I don't have to spend half an hour looking for parking.

(What don't you like about/is not working for you in online learning?) That I am not in class talking with people in person and getting more of a vibe. That students are expected to know how to professionally navigate all the different platforms.

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Let go of the racist faculty and staff. You can do it!"

—African-American Woman First Generation 4.0 GPA Graduating

"I strongly disagree with race being used as a political tool. I have never witnessed anyone on campus or ever heard a story of a person on campus being mistreated due to race. The act of saying that minorities need extra help or support is in itself an act of racism. This is implying that a group of people is inherently inferior and therefore cannot succeed on their merits on an even playing field. I am proud of California for rejecting racism in saying no to prop 16.

All cultures should be celebrated and respected with none taking precedence over any other, including our shared American culture. We are all just people who want the same things and over emphasis on the differences in culture is just another tool to divide the population into tribes, very useful for politics, horrible for the people.

I have never experienced or witnessed racism while attending junior college or at Sacramento State. Everyone knows this is wrong and would come with major ramifications therefore this problem is well-controlled.

I like saving on gas and commute time.

There are too many distractions at home that make it hard to study.

I would love to see better balance in treating people equally…. I would love a discussion about how there is real discrimination against unpopular view points with well founded fears of employment as well as social discrimination, this is the tragedy of our times. In a free society we should all feel that we can voice our opinion without fear of discrimination and as a society this ability to speak freely is quickly vanishing. How can we have a meaningful exchange if one side is being shouted down either through actual shouting or the threat of retaliation for not following the narrative? Let ideas stand on their merits, if it is a bad idea it will inevitably disintegrate but we will all be better for at least hearing it. As an example, I do not feel comfortable expressing my views on campus because I know I will be discriminated against for seeing things differently and will suffer consequences for having a different opinion. This is a shame not only for myself but for others who could have taken my viewpoint as another way of thinking that would help to expand everyone's mind regardless of agreement or not. Do we have to be so tribal? Why can't we agree to disagree and still be friends?"

—Puerto Rican

"Online learning has been a challenge, but I am stepping up and adjusting to it. As a single mother and grandmother, I am also distance learning a high school senior and a second grader while also working and attending school full time.

(Any instance of ignorance, stereotyping, or bias experienced your higher education?) N/A

I am thankful that I do not have to travel so far and to multiple locations to ensure that my family and I get to where we need to be when we need to be there"

—I am a Black/African American woman who started Sac State as a transfer student in 2019. I am a nontraditional senior who is planning to graduate in December.

"(What's it like for you right now, as a student of your race, ethnicity, or culture?) In class, not so much. In general, I am excited and proud to see myself graduate this May. I have overcome adversities (bullying, verbal abuse, family addictions and alcohol/substance abuse, family issues, traumas, stereotypes, and oppression) in which have helped me be a better role model for myself and younger siblings. I am a middle child of 7 and I only wish myself for success in life and a good career that will enrich my passion in the health field, represent in my profession that Hispanic/bilingual women should and will be acknowledged/valued. I want to give back and be the best nurture in my nursing career and lead instead of being mansplained.

(What would you like faculty, staff, and students to know most about your race, culture, or ethnicity?) Pronouncing my full name correctly or nickname I go by, respecting and understanding pronouns, and identifying individuals through person first language, stay open minded, ask questions and do not judge or assume their students or perceived backgrounds.

(Any instance of ignorance, stereotyping, or bias experienced your higher education?) I attended a…cultural (event class)…(where something happened with two other students before the class started)…. The instructor acted like she saw nothing and didn't even take the time to create a safe space through icebreakers, space rules, or see my distress and talk to me. I couldn't relax the whole time and forced myself to continue to participate in the class. Once I left, I breakdown in my car…and called to talk to my supervisor that I needed some time to self care and had to miss out on my shift. I emailed staff (about the incident) and all the lady replied back was my condolences and they try their best to ensure safe spaces. After that experience and unhelpful email response, I did not want to join other events nor I ended up doing so. I identify as a woman of color even though I look more light skinned. I am Mexican and empower other women. But those girls making rude judgments about me show their ignorance towards inclusion and acceptance.

(What do you like about/is working for you in online learning?) It's flexible, I am able to rent a school laptop, I am saving on 2hrs of commute, parking permit, staying healthy and safe from walking to my car and driving home late at night since all my classes are in the evening. I don't skip meals anymore since I am at home and have quick access to kitchen as well as bathroom breaks, and I have more time to rest and have time to organize and complete assignments at better ease with more time. Part of my work is virtual and in person so it's manageable and makes me glad this is how my last year before graduation ends.

(What don't you like about/is not working for you in online learning?) Professors not emailing as promptly, sending reminders, canceling class last minute instead of notifying ahead of time, not giving us enough time to complete tests, not providing study guides or content on what to expect in our quizzes, grading harshly, buying a classroom textbook when they could ease our expenses by finding a free pdf or providing scanned electronic copies because the book isn't consistently used/read often. I don't like how the library isn't lending books to students when they most need it or don't have the money to be spending

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Provide student discounts to renting textbooks, provide refunds due to covid, provide resources/discounts in the area you are residing at, send more emergency grant assistance, food pantry connections, scholarship/internship opportunities, career plan sessions."

—Hispanic (Mexican), first generation, female, age 22, senior at CSUS

"(What's it like for you right now, as a student of your race, ethnicity, or culture?) I'm not sure if I can speak for 'my community' so much as I can speak for my family members, but the Trump administration made things real tense to say the least. If racial biases were prevalent before, then they were put on a pedestal during this time given the discord that resulted. I'll admit that it's shaped my thinking in me vs. them kind of way. I don't entirely say that against racist white people, but I say that entirely as I've seen members of the Chicano/Latinx community either agree with the rhetoric said against or simply not care. It's not to say that I have it out for anyone, or hate anyone like many have learned to do recently, it's rather the opposite. I try not to embrace race vitriol, but it can be so present on either side in many shapes and forms that I chose to minimize any conversation about the conditions in which we live in, or our society embraces.

(Any instance of ignorance, stereotyping, or bias experienced your higher education?) N/A

(What do you like about/is working for you in online learning?) I don't have to talk to many people. It's ironic really, but at the same time I fear that peoples biases will emerge in some shape or form and it's not something I wish to see. I'm not trying to say I hold superior ideas cause I don't but since most people are muted and don't speak much on zoom, it's very nice to not hear much come up in that way instead of the brief discussions we'd have pertaining to the class.

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Please don't copy and paste the same material from one class to another. I don't know if that's just normal, or I'm supposed to learn the same material twice but I had a couple classes by the same professor who literally used the same material and everything word for word was the same. I get that it's all online but the same reading material, syllabus, videos, etc…. There are some very slight differences in those two classes but it's definitely not as engaging as other courses that actually drives you to think on the matter and work with other students. Professors forming their own positive and engaging pedagogy shows you care and makes us want to learn more from you and not just the textbook."

—I identify as Chicano. My family is from Mexico and would all gladly identify as purely Mexican given they were born there with the exception of my younger brother who was similarly born in LA like myself. I am 25, first generation college student.

"There isn't much of a sense of community now that everything has gone virtual. I am missing some of the face-to-face interactions that I took for granted. In terms of culture, I feel that there aren't many opportunities to experience black culture aside from the BSU club. It would be cool to see other clubs (like film, media, music, etc) that studied various cultures at school.

(Any instance of ignorance, stereotyping, or bias experienced your higher education?) A lot of the classes I am in…there isn't enough emphasis on integrating culture into the curriculum…."

—I am an African American woman. I am 21 and I am in my 4th year at sac state

"I am a returning student to school, my wife passed away and I had a tough time dealing with her death. Right now I am finally getting used to taking online classes using Zoom. This pandemic brought on a lot of anxiety, depression, and fear to me because I have always avoided technology because I never felt comfortable learning online, but I am slowly working my way through that fear.

(What would you like faculty, staff, and students to know most about your race, culture, or ethnicity?) That being black has been a challenge for me to overcome. I have been stabbed in the military by a White Lieutenant while serving on active duty for no reason, because he called me the N word and stabbed me because he was drunk. I really don't have a lot of trust in people or the justice system that saw no punishment to that person. I think as a Black community we don't see enough justice enforcement by our oppressors.

(Any instance of ignorance, stereotyping, or bias experienced your higher education?) It has taken me awhile to feel like I fit in somewhere in the higher education system. I finally understand that things are not fair in life and that I had to discover the true meaning of self. Happiness and joy comes from inside.

The biggest thing that I like about online learning is that I have to ask my professor or another student for help because sometimes I was reluctant to ask for help, but in order for me to succeed I need help.

(What don't you like about/is not working for you in online learning?) I struggle with isolation I guess like everyone else, and my confidence is a little low because of the lack of resources. When Sac State was open I would visit the tutoring centers and library, and make office visits to see my professors. I would also go to the Veteran Resource Center and Project Rebound to socialize so I miss that interaction.

I think Sac State had done a good job of communicating with the students during this unique time period. I look forward to going back to the campus in the Fall semester. I have received both of my vaccine shots…so I feel grateful."

—African American, male, 56 years old, Army veteran, 3rd year in school, widower, previously incarcerated.

"I come from an Eritrean American household, where family and our relationship to God are extremely important.

(Any instance of ignorance, stereotyping, or bias experienced your higher education?) n/a

(What do you like about/is working for you in online learning?) flexibility and working at your own pace

(What don't you like about/is not working for you in online learning?) Social interaction, meeting new people

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Introduce people from my background that I can be related to, since I'm a political science major"

—African American, First Generation student

"(What's it like for you right now, as a student of your race, ethnicity, or culture?) It's confusing. On one hand I feel unapologetically brown and empowered to love my skin and culture and everything about me. At the same time, I'm anxious of all my authority figures seeing me with a bias because I'm leaning so heavily into my culture. Maybe it's because I've been conditioned over time to automatically expect my authority figures to have an ulterior motive when dealing with me. Or maybe I've just grown to expect them to take advantage of me or disregard my concerns. I'm mostly talking about work authorities here. When it comes to teachers, most of the time they are openminded enough for me to feel comfortable learning, however, I wouldn't say I've ever felt close enough to a teacher to be extra friendly, or even come to office hours. Most of the time I try to figure out the answer to my own problems or ask a friend in the class to help me. Guess its just the trust issues in me.

(What would you like faculty, staff, and students to know most about your race, culture, or ethnicity?) I'd like them to know that the Black community isn't just people of African descent and the Latinx community comes in ALL shades, not just tan and brown but also black. There are Afro-Latinx people that are caught in the middle of both struggles. I mean, Mexico didn't even acknowledge their Black communities in the census until 2015. I want the history of all Afro-Latinx people to be more talked. Imagine if we had a class dedicated to the history of all Afro-Latinx cultures by themselves? I think that would be such an interesting class.

(Any instance of ignorance, stereotyping, or bias experienced your higher education?) N/A

I like that Sac State allowed me to check out a laptop for the semester

(What don't you like about/is not working for you in online learning?) Pre-recorded lectures. I don't feel like I can benefit from other students asking questions during the class like I usually do. I'm oftentimes the quiet student and when I don't get something, I ask someone I'm sitting next to, or wait for someone else to ask about it. (Usually there is someone in the class that has the same question as me that will ask.) With pre-recorded lectures, I don't get to hear what my peers are asking because no one can interject with a recording.

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Continue to hire open minded faculty and increase the diverse options for ethnic studies classes."

—Ethnicity: Afro-Mexican American Age: 22 School year: junior transfer student

"I would like others to know that some latinx people may be undocumented, or may not be fluent in English.

I am grateful to not have experienced any stereotypes, prejudice etc.

(What do you like about/is working for you in online learning?) It works around my schedule.

(What don't you like about/is not working for you in online learning?) I'm not as engaged."

—I identify as a Latina/hispanic or latinx individual. I am currently nineteen years old and a sophomore in college.

"Being a Mexican woman it is hard to find the balance with family, doing courses online, working 30+ hours a week, and finding time to relax and focus on myself.

(What would you like faculty, staff, and students to know most about your race, culture, or ethnicity?) Being of Latinx culture, embrace the change, continue to challenge us, we have been told to always work hard and never complain about anything. If our parents came up from nothing so can we and that makes us proud of who we are and where we come from but also causes us major stress to become successful.

In my higher education experience I have never experienced ignorance, bias, or prejudice.

(What do you like about/is working for you in online learning?) At first I was for it because of covid but I am overtaking online courses. I would much rather be on campus, making connections in person with my classmates and professors.

(What don't you like about/is not working for you in online learning?) I cannot find the necessary links to the resources I need. There is usually a 30 minute time limit to a counseling appointment and that is not enough time. I had horrible connection and was not able to get my questions answered accordingly. I have to make multiple appointments.

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Send information packet to its students, flyers"

—I am a 29 year old Mexican woman completing her bachelor's degree in social work

"(Any instance of ignorance, stereotyping, or bias experienced your higher education?) A faculty person…referred to me as a nice Indian lady instead of using my name. They also confused me and another person of color a lot. I said she had blond hair and I have black hair and she said 'you can call us Thing 1 and Thing 2.' The faculty responded Curry 1 and Curry 2. Every one of my classmates, majority white, laughed. This was extremely offensive and inappropriate, and hurt my self esteem and performance. I never would have expected something like this from faculty, especially in higher education. I spent my whole life dealing or watching my loved ones deal with racism. Every single person made me feel like me being upset was an overreaction and that I can't take a joke. As white people, they don't understand what it's like to be a minority and to think you have a safe space away from things like racism only for them to follow you into the learning setting. And for it to be coming from a professor. Just because some POC are ok with jokes doesn't mean all POC are. We should never be put in a situation like this. Racist jokes are unacceptable in the academic setting.

(What don't you like about/is not working for you in online learning?) Finding a quiet, uninterrupted place to study. Home is too noisy. I miss the 4th floor.

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Reopen the library with social distancing in mind and mandatory masking with sanitizing stations to wipe down seating. All floors used for quiet study to discourage people congregating."

—Brown person of color 4th year. First generation college student.

"I personally feel I don't see people of my ethnicity represented in the faculty, rarely do I see it, and I mostly see people like me working in the staff positions. It isn't until I took upper division classes that I see people of my ethnic group somewhat represented, and only in classes that relate to Latinx issues.

Financially it can be difficult to support myself through college, I can't rely on my parents so much as I can on loans to pay for all the college expenses. I can't rely on them to help me through the technical aspects of college, since they didn't have the chance to attend.

Not so much stereotyping or prejudice that I personally have experienced as a Latinx male, to the point where I question if I'm overlooked.

Virtual learning through zoom has been working for me, it gives the sense that I'm in class and have to set a schedule every week.

What hasn't worked for me is on the teacher's side, some teachers are still struggling to communicate online and definitely causes some confusion with regards to assignments.

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Diversify the faculty! I would definitely feel more motivated to pursue a career when I see people that look like me that have these important positions as tenured professors, deans, department chairs etc."

—I am a Mexican American first generation college student and consider myself Chicanx, 20 years old, and third year at Sac State.

"(What's it like for you right now, as a student of your race, ethnicity, or culture? Any experiences you would like to share?) During club rush week I had an experience where I felt unwanted for a club. I inquired about a club that I thought would help me branch out and when I asked for information by a member at the table I was told that 'Usually this club is only for (insert ethnicity and culture here), but we do…' I think the member did not realize what they said, but needless to say I didn't look into any other clubs that were not clearly marked for Hispanics.

(Any instance of ignorance, stereotyping, or bias experienced your higher education?) N/A

I think having computer science classes online has helped because I am able to better follow along with using the software that the instructors are using. Also, if we do have issues we can screenshare and not have to worry about having the software on our laptops to show instructors what issues we are running into.

(What don't you like about/is not working for you in online learning?) Staying focused is a big issue

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Adding workshops on communication and how to ask questions for answers you are looking for. Better guidance on types of jobs that are available for your major and what they entail."

—Mexican, female, first generation college student, late 20's, senior computer science student, introvert

"I feel scared or uncomfortable to express my viewpoint as a POC in discussion that relate to our class work.

I definitely feel like race and culture is something that should be taught! I think it will help break stereotypes that can be harmful and create an open community for all.

During my…class, I felt as if everyone there was against POC communities. They only expressed their interest in conservative politics rather than in other parties or political views, especially when on the topic of poverty and the correlation between POC.

Online learning is good for creating your own schedule. You're able to work on things within your own time and can basically do it everywhere.

I personally can't learn from a computer screen. Online learning has made it especially difficult to reach out to your professors and ask for questions.

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Photos forcing 'diversity' is not as good as you think. Photos of students should be natural and should accurately display the community."

—Mexican Hispanic/Latino 19 years old Freshman

"(What's it like for you right now, as a student of your race, ethnicity, or culture?) Very stressful, I feel like we have to remind people to be inclusive.

(What would you like faculty, staff, and students to know most about your race, culture, or ethnicity?) We deserve to be seen and heard, in literature and as students in daily classes, in faculty, peers, communities, etc.

(Any instance of ignorance, stereotyping, or bias experienced your higher education?) No literature or history that involves BIPOC. Having to ask why there is not representation in faculty.

(What do you like about/is working for you in online learning?) I can easily schedule meetings with professors, it pushes me to get closer to people I most likely would not approach, I don't physically have to be at meetings and can attend many in one day.

(What don't you like about/is not working for you in online learning?) Communicating how difficult it may be for students. The staff/faculty to student understanding has been very low.

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Have BIPOC faculty, include literature that isn't so egocentric, provide resources for staff students and faculty so they may use them for academics. Require staff to not have such a white male point of view on everything."

—Chicana, 20 year old, junior, first generation college student, pansexual

"(What's it like for you right now, as a student of your race, ethnicity, or culture?) For me, I have not experienced a lot because I am in the distance, virtual learning environment. My experiences in community college before COVID (in my 20's) were different. I am fortunate at this time to not feel the need to share anything bad at this time. But time will tell. I hope I will not have to.

(What would you like faculty, staff, and students to know most about your race, culture, or ethnicity?) We want to be given the same fair treatment as those not identified by our culture. We have a rich culture, and I wonder why our culture is not a subject in the classroom and in college. Also, we want to be understood. Our thoughts and perceptions will not be the same as those from other cultures, so when we write our analysis of what we perceived, it shouldn't be counted as incorrect. Perhaps a difference of opinion, one you as an educator didn't think of. Is that wrong? Can you make room for culture in education and give us opportunities to build up our culture without it being considered a handout? We are just as important as everyone else.

(What do you like about/is working for you in online learning?) I do not need to see a difference in treatment – like where I sit in the classroom, stares I get from other students. Online learning shields me from that thus not allowing me to be frustrated so I can focus on learning. Honestly, I may not ever want to actually be in the classroom – this online learning is working out better for me.

(What don't you like about/is not working for you in online learning?) The computer fatigue. I work from online and go to CSUS from online. My eyesight is strained and sometimes a break may cause me to fall asleep or feel rushed trying to meet a deadline. I think the teachers think they have to assign something every week and to be honest much of what is assigned (including the reading) can be a 2-week assignment in some classes. Give us a little more time to stretch out and take breaks from the laptop. I would like the educators to really think about the time permitted to complete assignments – in this virtual environment it is more challenging when we only meet via Zoom and on Canvas … our eyes get tired and need a rest. Please consider that.

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Provide webinars on how to perform better with online classes, study and network with CSUS. I am certain I am missing out on a lot of benefits and opportunities as a student because I was never really given an actual online tour. I did 'watch' the CSUS online tours that were pre-recorded but much of that was not beneficial to me since I am not on campus. What I would have preferred is how to get connected with student affairs, activities, learn about the benefits of being a CSUS student, what information should I always be aware of (like resources for books, supplies, etc.). If I am an online student, help me connect as if I was a student on campus. Canvas is extremely hard to learn – there should be an actual tutorial (after we gain access) to understand how to use it. We should know how to access everything and what it means from Student Center. We are left to figure this out, meanwhile we are very far from understanding and benefitting from the college experience. I am in online due to COVID and personally by choice of the program I am enrolled in. I am also working from home per decision of my employer. I feel more connected at my job than I am with CSUS. I am hoping to help (as a student living in this environment) to better engage online students with CSUS….. I hope you will consider asking us to help with engagement efforts.

Thank you."

—I am black Cherokee descent. I will be the first in my family to graduate with a bachelor's degree and sadly, I will graduate at age 53. This will be my sophomore year at CSUS…. I had to stop going to school to work and raise my children – this is a common choice for those of color. We usually cannot afford to continue when raising a family.

"As an African American woman, I'm happy to be able to attend Sacramento State University.

I want faculty, staff and students to know that I'm a person as African American. I have a voice, I'm a woman. I may come from a lower socioeconomic background, but I'm human. The African American race is a culture and we are positive and we come to higher institutions to come to learn and be 'Somebody'. We can mix with other cultures and learn from one another.

I must report that in my first semester, I had one instructor that 'made me feel some type of way' where I noticed most of his students of color were not doing well in his class. One of my classmates left the class. I feel that he may be racist. The instructor has a very nice personality, but it's hard to say. I did not do well in his class. This experience made me feel uncomfortable…. I do feel that faculty and staff should not assume that African Americans cannot pass exams. It shouldn't be assumed they need Disability services for help.

I do like the fact that I was able to checkout a laptop. I do like that when there is a problem, I can call ITT for help.

I don't like online learning. I hate this pandemic. I feel so isolated with this online learning. I feel in so many ways, we are teaching ourselves. I hate that when we have to do group projects, we may be paired with someone we don't know and things don't always work out. I really can't stand when we get in groups that although your partner is not working with you, we may have to work the project alone and they may get credit for it.

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Assist with COVID-19 Testing, so that all students can be vaccinated so that the University can open back up on full scale. I'm ready for things to go back to 'normal'."

—I am a 51-year old African American woman. I'm also first generation college student and this is my last semester as an undergraduate. I'm excited! My journey has been a great milestone.

"Currently, because I was able to have access to a COVID vaccine, I am DIYing study abroad in Latin American counties in order to know myself and my heritage better. This has allowed me the space and time to focus on my studies. Before this however, I did not have an environment that was conducive to my learning. My house was always loud and I did all of my classes and schoolwork on the living room couch. The way our house-hold structures are set up along with general level of income, this is a very common situation for my friends, who are students of color, as well.

As an international relations student, my culture and the countries I come from are incredibly rich in culture, political history, variances. We are not just all the same failed state or fake democracy. Our political systems are just as valid and worth learning about as East Asian and European counties. And coming from this background is not a handicap, it just requires learning other forms of social patterns and priorities.

(Any instance of ignorance, stereotyping, or bias experienced your higher education?) Luckily the only time it came from a professor was probably due to my being a first-generation and feminine presenting person. I was told that I didn't belong in his class and to retake some lower-division courses if I didn't understand what he was talking about when asking for help after class, despite having at the time a 3.5GPA. Privileged students, consisting of wealthy and/or white kids often, are the absolute worst though. In class discussions regarding ethnicity they always seem to dominate rather than listen. I've heard comments that poor students of color, even if intelligent and worthy of ivy-league admission, should be going to less prestigious schools because that's more 'their level'. Even at such a diverse school there are still students that have an us and them mentality, they still retain a 'better than' attitude despite all of us being members of the same institution.

I like that I can take my classes from any place and I like that teachers are now forced to keep all information neatly set up in a virtual space. It makes remembering deadlines, criteria for assignments, and the overall class teachings a lot easier and simpler to access than when Canvas was optional. I also really appreciate deadlines being at 11:59pm now, especially because nights are more often when I have the opportunity to work on assignments.

I HATE breakout rooms with an absolute passion. The pairings are always hit and miss and it activates my social anxiety. I would 1000xs rather have class discussions that the teacher can moderate rather than having to rely on the chance of getting good group partners. Often when other classmates don't want to talk or refuse to participate I'm the one having to guide, moderate, and coax the discussion or face absolute awkward silence, it kills me. At least when doing groups in real life if the professor saw that there was an awkward silence building they could approach and moderate, here you have to either step up and take charge or wait for the professor to come around to your group which there is no way of predicting when it would happen. At this point I literally just leave class when I don't feel I have the social battery available for a hit-or-miss breakout room.

Honestly, CSUS has been such a massive support and a fantastic school to be at as a person in my position. I would love to see more support or ways of connecting for the queer community. I've received so many scholarships over the years that luckily I haven't had to worry about how I'm going to pay for school. I constantly get emails offering academic support and peer networks. I appreciate that there are resources for dreamers and other students in disadvantaged positions. Overall, this is probably the best school I could have attended. Fantastic job."

—I am a queer, first generation, Mexican, 20 year-old senior.

Students of Color

COVID-19 ripped into the collective national conscious and shattered life as we knew it, turning our lives upside down.

This is true for all people, but especially for people of color, whose lives and livelihoods are statistically more likely to be negatively impacted.

And this is true for all students, but especially for students of color, who have always faced an achievement gap and lack of cultural awareness and cultural responsiveness in their education—and now trying to learn online in a global pandemic that compounds existing inequities.

In higher education, hundreds of college campuses were closed, thousands of classes pivoted online, and millions of college students tried to adapt to new and adverse circumstances in academia, personal life, family and living environment, and employment. Now, these stressors may be the same or worse for many, and certainly the cumulative effects of the past few years make things even harder for just about everyone.

Students of color are particularly at-risk in higher education at this time, however, according to recent studies conducted. Here are highlights from a few of those studies:

> "Suddenly Online: A National Survey of Undergraduates During the COVID-19 Pandemic" asked students whose classes moved from on-ground to online last spring about their experiences.
>
> > Students reported major problems in their education: Staying motivated to do well in the course, finding a quiet place to do the course online, fitting the course in with home/family responsibilities, not knowing where to get help with the course, feeling too unwell (physically or mentally) to participate in the course, and fitting the course in with their work schedule. The percentage of students experiencing these problems was typically higher for students of color, noted in the survey as Black, Hispanic, and Asian and Other, than for White students.
> >
> > When the study turned to look at Internet accessibility and technological hardware and software utility, again students of color, Black and Hispanic students, reported experiencing greater difficulties.
>
> "State of the Student Experience: Higher Education During Disruption" is another key survey, this time of students learning remotely last fall.
>
> > The study found that one-third of currently enrolled students say they have considered withdrawing from courses in the past six months, with top reasons given being the Coronavirus and emotional stress, as well as the cost of attendance and childcare responsibilities or caring for a family member or friend.
> >
> > Approximately half of students said that the Coronavirus is "very likely" or "likely" to adversely affect their ability to finish college, with considerably more students of color reporting this, Black and Hispanic, than White students.

[For much further information regarding students' experiences and challenges in their online education, please see:
The Digital Promise research, Suddenly Online: A National Survey of Undergraduates During the COVID-19 Pandemic (PDF)
https://digitalpromise.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/ELE_CoBrand_DP_FINAL_3.pdf
and The Gallup and Lumina study, The State of the Student Experience: Higher Education During Disruption
https://www.gallup.com/education/327485/state-of-the-student-experience-fall-2020.aspx]

As faculty or staff, we likely have born witness to student difficulties these past few years. In our virtual office hours or teaching Zoom classes or asynchronous courses where student self-recordings are a part of the course curriculum, you may have seen students at home, at desks or on couches, possibly outside in the sunshine, and even on vacation—but also students in their cars in parking lots at night, in medical facility breakrooms and wearing their scrubs, or in fast food uniforms with kitchen equipment behind them. There may be ill family members clearly seen or heard in the home backgrounds, or young children beseeching the student for assistance or attention. Some students, in emails or Zoom chat to you, will apologize for not speaking up in live Zoom class or for giving their presentation in a really low voice due to nearby sleeping younger siblings or parents who work graveyard shifts and cannot be awoken by noise in the day. Some students will apologize for a test unintentionally submitted before completion by a young child playing with their parent's laptop, or for an assignment not done on time or at all due to illness, technological difficulties, or over-work. And we may have seen signs of overwhelm, anxiety, and depression. Just about all of our students are experiencing difficulties in their higher education, and many are students of color.

Students of color make up almost half of all undergraduate enrollment. American Indian or Alaska Native Students account for almost 1% of student undergraduate enrollment, Asian students almost 6%, Black students a little over 15%, Hispanic students almost 20%, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander students almost half of 1%, students of more than one race a little over 3%, and White students a little over 50% of undergraduate enrollment, according to Equity in Higher Education, of the American Council on Education. "Overall, White students exhibit higher persistence and completion than students of color," the researchers note.

(For further information regarding each of these groups of undergraduate students, please see the
Race and Ethnicity in Higher Education Spotlight series
on American Indian or Alaska Native Students, Asian Students, Black Students, Hispanic Students,
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander Students, Students of More than One Race, and White Students
https://www.equityinhighered.org/resources/ideas-and-insights/)

Here on Campus

At Sacramento State University, the campus Factbook 2020 reports: 34% of students are Hispanic, followed by 26% White students, 19% Asian American students, 6% Black students, 6% Other/Multiracial Students, and less than 1% for each of the groups: American Indian students and Pacific Islander students. Much information and study can be found on these specific cultural groups, including work done for this university, found on this campus website:

Listening to Students
https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/retention-academic-success/spotlights/listening-to-students.html

While acknowledging the different cultural groups and the struggles specific to each, this work will focus more generally on students of color in higher education at this time.

In This Document

To follow, you will find sections on the broad areas of experiences that cause struggle for our students of color: ***Lower Income Level, Digital Divide, Less Academic Preparedness, Culture and Race,*** and ***Physical and Mental Well-Being***. In these sections, you will find suggestions for what we can do, as faculty and staff, in our teaching and work, Zoom meetings and online Canvas classes, and assignments and materials, in the name of greater equity, inclusivity, and student success during this difficult time in society and higher education.

Lower Income

They may come from upper- or middle-income families, but minority underrepresented students of color are more likely to come from a background of financial disadvantage, which may well be made worse by the current times. The pandemic has created economic uncertainty which, in turn, has disproportionately impacted people of color. While some may be working the same or even more hours in their employment, especially essential workers, some have seen the loss of work hours, loss of jobs, and loss of income. Different studies have shown that students of color are, indeed, struggling more financially in this pandemic—striving to learn while experiencing financial stress, and food insecurity or even homelessness.

Not having enough money may mean not having the means or motivation to stay in all their courses, or to stay in college at all.

Research tells us that when lower-income students drop out, they are less likely than their peers to come back to college. Some now worry that this may create a *"lost generation"* of lower-income students, many of whom are students of color and first generation college students, who may never return to college.

This would be harmful to their futures and to ours. Not finishing their higher education diminishes the student's life-long career prospects and financial earnings, statistically. Worse, they are now in an economic downturn without their college education. As a nation, we need to see them graduate to create the most knowledgeable and skilled work force we can possibly achieve to remain an economic leader in the world and increase national productivity and quality of life for all.

What We Can Do to Help with Financial Burdens

Not having the money to buy the course textbook and any other required class supplies (or needing to wait for financial aid to come in to purchase materials) puts students at a definite disadvantage in terms of getting off to a good start and feeling comfortable with coursework and assignments.

> Instructors can help to offset financial obstacles to learning by: Selecting no cost/low cost textbooks or putting course textbooks on Reserve, allowing older lower-cost editions of the textbook to be used, or offering an extra desk copy to loan a student in need. We can also keep required supplies or other class expenses to an absolute minimum and be mindful about assignments or extra credit opportunities tied to anything that would incur direct or indirect costs (e.g., advanced technology, events, transportation needed).

Struggling to pay bills, put food on the table, and pay rent can cause stress, exhaustion, and time away or distraction from their studies.

> Staff and faculty can help with financial burdens by: Spreading the word about the valuable resources on campus for students in financial need, including financial aid and scholarships, the student food pantry, opportunities for employment, housing assistance, and emergency assistance. A wonderful campus resource is:
>
> CARES
>
> https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/crisis-assistance-resource-education-support/

And we can all help to lower the significant digital divide, discussed to follow.

The Digital Divide

The Digital Divide was brought into stark prominence this past year—that gap between those with and those without full access to good working technological devices and Internet service.

Some of our students may be using older computers that are slower or have less download storage, and tend to have less battery power, making them harder to use without an outlet nearby. They may be sharing devices with family members or significant others who need to work from home or who also need to complete coursework. They may be doing work on tablets or Chromebooks, which don't always do everything a laptop does as easily or at all (Chromebook, for example, doesn't have local storage for storing and running non-cloud-based software). And they may be trying to write papers or take exams on their phones, complete with screen cracks, or even flip phones too old to properly support learning management systems, apps, or Zoom.

In addition to the cost of equipment and any repairs needed, there is the cost of Internet service (initial purchase, monthly fees, and overage charges) and potential difficulties there. Some students don't have the financial means for the faster, more stable wi-fi service needed to easily get on to Canvas, take an exam, or attend a Zoom class. And Internet service can be cut off or made slower by the provider, in the case of late payment for a student struggling with bills. Students with older devices, as well, tend not to connect to the Internet as easily due to outdated wireless drivers. Poor connectivity can limit access to public services, employment duties and job opportunities, social connections, and to college work.

Lower quality service means slow and patchy Internet connection, which can be stressful and frustrating for students trying to complete coursework. Connectivity also may be worsened in more rural areas, and under certain weather conditions, times of day, and if household members are sharing Internet service at the same time. Students may not have their own transportation or money for public transportation or gas to get to a wi-fi hotspot. For those who do, their campus student labs and library, and off-campus coffee shops and other places they used to go for wi-fi access may be closed or have more limited hours. And so we have students trying to write a research paper or take a midterm exam in a parking lot—with some reporting sitting in their cars during a Zoom class, freezing or burning up (depending on the weather), because they didn't want to turn on the heater or air conditioning, so that it wouldn't be heard in the background.

One key research study, "Technology Problems and Student Achievement Gaps," found that about one in five students experience difficulties with sufficient access to use of technology and the Internet, with most being students of color and/or lower socioeconomic status. Students of color are more likely to pay themselves for technology and Internet access, more likely to experience problems with equipment or wi-fi service, and less likely to borrow money from family during such times to solve these problems than White students. Much the same was found to be true for lower-income students. The report further notes the stress on these students in trying to cope with technological struggles in completing their coursework and the lower grade point averages some technological difficulties could cause.

With the digital divide also comes varying degrees of digital literacy, including the technological know-how to navigate online learning systems and complete course assignments. Most of our students have grown up with the Internet and the proliferation of technology, but we should not assume that all have sufficient skills or comfort level with technology. We have some students

unsure of how to do key academic tasks, such as creating a Word document, posting to a discussion board, researching online, making presentation slides, or participating in Zoom class. Not only do we have a duty to help these students with digital literacy for the sake of their college completion, but also to help them to become more sufficient in a society that will increasingly operate virtually, post-pandemic. Setting them up for success in our classes and in their college education also sets them up for success in their career employment and civic engagement throughout their lives.

[For further information, please see:
The *Communication Research* (2020) study by Amy Gonzales, Jessica McCrory Calarco, and Teresa Lynch,
"Technology Problems and Student Achievement Gaps"
https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0093650218796366
and the Inside Higher Education Report by Lindsay McKenzie, provides further background:
"Bridging the Digital Divide: Lessons from COVID-19"
https://www.insidehighered.com/content/bridging-digital-divide-lessons-covid-19]

What We Can Do to Help with Digital Equity

Not having full Internet access or functioning devices to go online in the first place, being "underconnected" as it's sometimes termed, is clearly detrimental to course learning and performance. It costs time, energy, effort, and stress to strive to problem-solve or find workarounds. There are, however, steps we can take to prevent or mitigate technological or connectivity obstacles to learning, as well as assist students with less technological proficiency.

Getting Students Off to a Good Start

In the course syllabus, instructors can list all technology needed for the class, so that students can check to see what they have and what they need before the start of the term. It's also helpful to make clear where to find any technological items for students in need, such as campus services offering loans of laptops, web cams, and headsets, and wi-fi hot spots. Some faculty also include a technology statement in their syllabus, inviting students to reach out at any time with technological questions, concerns, or struggles, in order to work together with the campus to problem-solve so the student can be successful in the course. Key campus resources to share:

IRT Laptop and Equipment Checkout
https://www.csus.edu/information-resources-technology/teaching-learning/laptop-checkout.html
IRT Technology Support & Consultation
https://www.csus.edu/information-resources-technology/get-support-consultation/

In the online course, some faculty like to create a "Getting Started Module" to help get students situated in the class, and here you can include what technology students need and what campus tech services have to offer. It's also helpful to make campus tech help easy to find—listed on that online course homepage, for example, or linked to assignments and exam instructions.

Additionally, you can give students a survey asking about their technological equipment, Internet access, and what they know or don't know how to do in using technology. This type of survey is fairly easy to create or find online and can be administered to students through such means as a Google, Qualtrics, or other online survey tool or a Canvas quiz (when creating a quiz, under "Quiz Type" where we usually see "Graded Quiz," you can choose "Ungraded Survey" or "Graded Survey," should you want students to earn points for completion). Their responses might show which students really need even more practical assistance going into the course—but keep in mind that some students may not want to disclose less technological know-how, and digital skills resources should always be made widely available to all.

Being Tech Friendly

There are further steps we can take for students with equipment or Internet difficulties, or who have lower technological familiarity coming into our classes.

Course Materials

- Choosing online textbooks with the option to download chapters, rather than viewing only through a website platform, can help students with lower wi-fi speeds.
- Keeping file sizes smaller for course materials, reading, and lesson recordings helps students with less download storage space or wi-fi connectivity. To limit file sizes, you can record lectures in shorter 10 to 15 minute increments and convert image-based (scanned) information into text-based PDFs (which also makes the documents accessible) through resources such as: RoboBraille: Convert a File https://www.robobraille.org/
- For special apps or software, try to make sure they are widely available in different app stores, work with various operating systems, and are as low in cost as possible.
- It should also be noted that some students, such as international students or students visiting or now living in other countries, may not have access to or may experience difficulties in accessing some of the websites you tie to course learning or interactions, such as Google, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Skype, or even Zoom.

Course Set Up

- Because faculty all set up their classes differently, any student may become confused when entering an online course, but students with less technological savvy may feel especially lost or overwhelmed. Creating an organized, meaningful layout of the online learning experience can give students confidence in coming into the class.
- Giving directions for how to proceed and where to find things in the course in your welcome email/announcement, course homepage, or "Getting Started" module is also helpful.

Course Assignments

- Completing academic tasks can be hard enough, without the added task of figuring out how to do these online, if you have less tech know-how. Giving clear step-by-step directions for how to submit that first assignment, post a discussion board response, record and upload a video, and what to expect in online quizzes and exams (including any use of proctoring systems) gets all students better squared away.
- For bigger assignments using more advanced technology, scaffolding tasks from smaller to larger work is helpful or giving a separate, lower-stakes assignments first, for the purpose of making sure students are set up with any software and understand how to use it. For example, if a student presentation recording is the big assignment, then having students do a low-stakes informal live Zoom speech using screenshare or a short video recording of some kind as a small assignment in point value, extra credit, or as a part of a discussion board might be a good way for students to do a run-through ahead of a bigger assigned presentation, work out any kinks, and become more comfortable with the technology.
- Reformulating "no late work accepted" syllabus policies to better adapt to this difficult time, or allowing for grace for technological difficulties or the opportunity to turn in work late with low or no penalty may be very much appreciated for students struggling with technological equipment, skill, or Internet service.

Being Mobile Friendly

Students who cannot always access a laptop or whose device is lost, stolen, borrowed, or is broken may have no choice but to use their phone. And some students with budgets that only allow purchase of one device, typically go with a phone due to cost and convenience. Students trying to complete coursework on cell phones may not find this conducive to optimal learning or performance. We can remind students that they may be able to borrow a laptop from the campus, instead of relying on their phone for schoolwork, but not all will or can. To minimize difficulties, we can strive to make our classes as mobile friendly as possible in a few key ways:

Canvas and Course Content

- Be aware that some things on Canvas or in course material or correspondence can work or appear differently on a mobile phone—or not at all. For example: Canvas navigation can be different on a mobile device (something to keep in mind when giving instructions for how to access Canvas or find their way in the course in your welcome email or announcement, Getting Started Module, or assistance to a student). Some tools on Canvas may not function on a cellphone, such as Conferences and Collaborations. Sometimes larger images or tables the student is trying to see on the smaller screen of their phone may require scrolling through to see these in their entirety.
- Remember that PDFs and Word documents don't always open at all or easily on a phone. Putting course information or an assignment on a Canvas page instead may be best, when you can. You can also share that Microsoft and Adobe both have some really good, accessible, and free mobile apps for students who need to download and open PDFs and Word docs:

  Microsoft Office Mobile App
  https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/microsoft-365/mobile

  Adobe Acrobat Reader Mobile App
  https://acrobat.adobe.com/us/en/mobile/acrobat-reader.html

- Keeping file sizes smaller for course materials, readings, and lesson recordings is also a helpful practice for cell phone users in online learning.
- Students may also be using the Canvas app on their phones. For an overview, see:

  Canvas Student App
  https://community.canvaslms.com/t5/Video-Guide/Canvas-Student-App/ta-p/384213

Zoom

- Sharing this resource may be helpful for students using their phone for Zoom:

  Zoom Mobile Support
  https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/sections/200305413-Mobile

- Keep in mind that Zoom may be harder or even not possible to access from a cell phone, at least visually, in terms of a student's webcam use. A student can call in to at least listen, however, if the Zoom invitation with link also includes the list of telephone numbers of different locations for students to choose the one closest.
- When teaching in a recorded lesson or Zoom, describing what you are displaying on any slides, handouts, or other material is helpful to students trying to view on the small cellphone screen or who are listening via phone solely, and this is just good practice for accessibility purposes, as well.

Being Internet Connection Friendly

Wi-fi use can glitch at any time, but can be especially problematic for students with slower or spotty service. Here are some things we can do to help out:

- When you can, choosing online textbooks with the option to download, rather than viewing only through a website platform, can help students with slower wi-fi speeds.
- Longer recordings, such as those of a Zoom class or pre-recorded class lesson, require greater Internet bandwidth to view and to download. Lessons recorded in shorter segments (say, a handful of ten minute videos rather than an hour-long one) would be helpful in this regard.
- Slower Internet connectivity could cause an online exam to crash, and online exam proctoring services require greater bandwidth, too. To prevent or mitigate problems, provide clear instructions on how to find campus wi-fi hotspots to take exams and what to do if a student experiences difficulties due to connectivity. It would also be helpful to let students know Canvas will continue to keep the exam open until the time set for the exam runs out—so any students kicked out of an exam due to patchy Internet service, for example, can still go back in to finish the exam within the time frame.

Video conferencing systems, as well, necessitate good Internet connectivity, which is why the discussion will now move to the biggest of these, Zoom.

Being Zoom Friendly

Coming to Zoom class or meetings requires greater Internet bandwidth, which means that not all students may be able to easily Zoom on in. Here are some things we can do to help out:

- Being mindful of Internet difficulties in class attendance policies and reminding students of where they can find information on campus wi-fi hot spots can give students peace of mind and options.
- For instructors using Zoom to hold lessons with a discussion component: Also offering students asynchronous opportunities to collaborate with their peers is helpful to students with difficulty attending Zoom (e.g., Canvas discussion boards, pair or group projects).
- For instructors using Zoom to hold class sessions with a lecture component: Letting students know that recorded Zoom lectures are available and where to find these is helpful to students wanting to go back for the material they missed due to wi-fi problems or technological difficulties or were absent or couldn't attend the whole lesson.
- Longer Zoom lecture recordings require greater Internet bandwidth for a student to view, but there are ways to limit the length of your Zoom class recording: Don't start the recording until class has officially started, pause the recording when not lecturing (e.g., when students are in breakout rooms), and then remember to hit the record button again when resuming the lesson. When lecture content and any class announcements have officially ended or the class is over, stop the record button so you aren't recording student one-on-one questions to you or anything personal being disclosed after the end of class.
- Encouraging student collaboration with class note-taking helps students to fill in the holes in their notes and making available Zoom class recordings can be helpful to students with poor wi-fi connection or with difficult life-circumstances hindering their ability to fully attend or pay attention to class lessons. Google Docs, Microsoft Word Online, or a Canvas discussion board are good places for students to share notes on an ongoing basis.

- The Zoom default for higher quality resolution isn't needed for most of our Zoom instruction, yet requires greater Internet connectivity. Turning off the HD video is easy to do: On the Zoom toolbar, to the right of "Stop/Start Video" is an arrow to click on, taking you to a menu where you will find "Video Settings," and then just uncheck the "HD Video" right there under your picture.

Poor Internet service means that some students may not be able to hear or see everything you might be showing in a lesson. Here are a few things to be aware of:

- Phoning in to hear a Zoom lesson doesn't require Internet service. Some students may choose to Zoom in twice, using their laptop to see and phone to better hear, and other students may choose to solely use their phone because their Internet service is working poorly or not at all. To help students wanting to attend Zoom by listening via their phone, you can provide more of the Zoom invitation for students—with the Zoom link, but also any passcode and the list of phone numbers for students to call in from the location closest to them.
- A little slower pacing of instruction (e.g., slide changes, vocal speed with material, questions to students, or activity directions) can help students with time delay from poor wi-fi to catch up.
- Anything you display through Zoom screen-share—slides, handouts, websites, and more—is not viewable to the students using their phones solely to hear the lesson, due to no webcam or stable Internet. The same is true for the Zoom annotation and whiteboard features. And, of course, what you're screen-sharing won't be as clear to students using smaller cellphones to view Zoom lessons. This makes saying what you are showing appreciated—and asking any guest presenters or student presenters who plan on screen-sharing to do likewise. Providing all documents you or other presenters plan to screen-share, ideally beforehand in Canvas or via email, is helpful, too, so students can attend Zoom and know ahead of time what you're displaying while they listen to the lesson.

And a few more things to be aware of:

- Zoom Chat is not viewable to the student listening to the Zoom lesson by phone, so reading the Chat comments out loud keeps all students included. Documents or weblinks provided in the Chat are not accessible to students listening solely by phone, so providing these before or after the Zoom class or meeting will help all students to obtain the material.
- Polls, too, may not always be accessible to students with slow/weak wi-fi or students attending Zoom via just listening on their phones. When launching a Zoom poll, read the question and the answer choices, and let students know they are welcome to put their responses in the Chat or to say them aloud, if they don't mind the lack of anonymity. Reading aloud the poll results for all, rather than just visually sharing them, helps students phoning into the Zoom class or meeting who cannot see how the class voted.
- Joining Zoom breakout rooms can be hindered by lower connectivity, as well as glitches. Let students know to wait a little longer for the invite to join a breakout room, and then, if they cannot join or try to join and are kicked out of Zoom due to that low connectivity, to simply come back into Zoom class again, and the second time you put them in a breakout room usually works (or after a few more tries).

And Then There's Webcams…

As faculty and staff, we are used to seeing our students in front of us in our classes or across from our office desks or service counters, and in Zoom classes and meetings, may want and need this more than ever—the face and not just the name. Being able to actually see the students can create a greater sense of the classroom, student connections, and class community.

But there are significant reasons for students choosing not to use their webcams related to access, privacy, and equity.

- Not everyone has a webcam that works well or at all or Internet connectivity to support webcam use and "show video" in Zoom.
- And some may simply not want to display themselves or their surroundings: They may not want to show what's behind them in the background—where they live or are while attending Zoom class. They may be protective of young children or other household members coming into the picture, or worry about revealing location of family members who are undocumented or they are themselves. They may feel embarrassment of home-life circumstances or living environment differences in socioeconomic status, including even homelessness. Creating a virtual Zoom background would solve some of these problems, but some lower-cost newer devices as well as some older ones don't have that capability, and not every student has the technological know-how to do so.
- Still further reasons students might not want to show themselves to maintain privacy include: Fears of safety should their names or locations be revealed, worry of invasion of privacy in recordings available to others in the class or more widely, anxiety in viewing themselves recorded, or not wanting to reveal a medical condition or disability, or their race, ethnicity, or religion.

For all such reasons, institutions of higher education around the nation are adopting a "cameras optional" approach as much as possible, when webcam use is not tied to audio or visual participation or outcomes in course learning, including our own campus. On-ground classrooms are neutral spaces, but student homes are not, and that is why mandating camera-entry into one's personal home space is problematic, with certain course exceptions.

We might equate student participation with seeing them, but we know from on-ground classes this isn't always true. Students can be sitting right in front with their eyes on you teaching while having zoned out or texting under their desks—and sometimes it's the student who was the quietest and the least visually responsive who showed in their eventual thoughts expressed in class discussion or assignments how highly engaged they actually were.

We can encourage the use of web cams and state the benefits of doing so in Zoom. But also acknowledging that there are many significant reasons a student may choose not to do so may be helpful for all:

> The students who might feel uncomfortable because they don't want to or cannot show themselves on camera.
>
> The students who do show themselves on camera and wonder why others won't—or even come to doubt the degree of attention, competency, and dedication to coursework of the peers whose faces they cannot see in class.

And Testing…

Accessibility, equity, and privacy may become concerns in online testing, as well.

Those without sufficiently working equipment and slow or unstable Internet are at risk of online exams not working or even crashing, adding to the stress of taking an exam. Students with lower technological skill and comfort level may feel especially anxious in an online exam situation.

There are further concerns regarding online exam proctoring in higher education. These services typically enable the student's camera to record themself, the exam, and the exam environment, monitoring sights, sounds, computer keystrokes, and more to flag anything deemed suspicious for the instructor to then review. In addition to potential financial costs to students, legal considerations, accessibility problems, and concerns regarding online security and privacy, these proctoring services can disadvantage and discriminate against students with disabilities, student parents, LGBT students, students of color, and more, depending on the type of proctoring application and the settings chosen by the instructor within it.

For example:

- Online proctoring services are not always compatible with every technological device or can be used at all on mobile devices. The set up may add a layer of stress or anxiety for students with less technological access or proficiency to install the software or add the app or secure the proper Internet browser needed. Not all students will have a webcam or strong Internet to use the proctoring system, or even administrative access to the device they are using to install it. In all of these ways, students with less technological skill, equipment, and/or good Internet connectivity are disadvantaged.
- To make sure it is the enrolled student taking the exam and that the student does not leave the exam area, many automated proctoring companies rely on facial recognition and detection systems—but these are geared more to white colored skin, and have significant reported difficulties with identifying darker toned faces or distinguishing between Asian faces. Insufficient lighting, a lower quality web cam, and slower Internet can be factors, as well. Consequently, students of color have been asked to shine more light on themselves or were falsely flagged for suspicious behavior (because if not detected by the camera at all or sufficiently, the student may be suspected of trading places with another student to take the exam or going off camera to cheat). There have been reports of some students not able to take their exams at all or only after delay and the stress of the student trying to figure out what was going on and how to proceed.
- Prior to taking an exam, students may be asked to show themselves on camera and a picture of their ID, for comparison. They may also be asked to pan the room for a 360-shot of their surroundings and sign a privacy agreement. Their web IP addresses and living situations can provide cues about their location, and the recordings of themselves and photo IDs could feel intrusive, intimidating, or alarm any student, but particularly students who are themselves or who live with people of undocumented status. They may feel they are being asked to jeopardize themselves or the people they love to complete the exam and succeed in the course.
- Students may be flagged for suspicious behavior if there is any noise heard or someone comes into camera range while the student is taking the exam. Imagine how stressful this

may be for students with larger family households, which is, culturally, the living situation of many students of color. Note this would also be stressful for any student with a difficult home-life, or who have children or roommates.

For these and other reasons, colleges and universities across the nation are examining issues inherent to online proctoring services, and formulating policies for their use with equity in mind.

(To learn more about the concerns of online exam proctoring systems, please see
Shea Swauger's "Our Bodies Encoded: Algorithmic Test Proctoring in Higher Education"
https://hybridpedagogy.org/our-bodies-encoded-algorithmic-test-proctoring-in-higher-education/

and for further information regarding online exam proctoring and students with disabilities, please see:
The Center for Democracy and Technology discussion by Lydia X. Z. Brown,
"How Automated Test Proctoring Software Discriminates Against Disabled Students"
https://cdt.org/insights/how-automated-test-proctoring-software-discriminates-against-disabled-students/)

Here, Sacramento State doesn't offer technological or financial support for any online proctoring services that automatically enable use of a student's camera or track their movements, as described prior. Sac State currently uses Respondus Lockdown Browser (RLB), which locks down the student's computer from leaving the test site or any other potential activity that may lead to cheating. There are still disadvantages here, with regard to the digital divide: RLB at this time does not work on all devices and requires some skill and comfort level with technology in using it, at first.

When it comes to learning assessment, faculty may decide to administer exams without use of online proctoring systems or to use online exam security and proctoring systems in ways mindful of these concerns. Alternatively, faculty members across the nation are turning to assessments other than testing (such as papers, projects, and presentations), for the reasons described prior and/or the belief that testing, in itself, is not the best way for most students to demonstrate fully their learning in our classes.

Testing without Online Exam Security and Proctoring Systems

Faculty choosing to forego online proctoring systems, but still concerned about the integrity of their exams, might consider the following:

- Use different question formats for online exams (e.g., short answer questions, short essay questions, or multiple choice questions where students explain their choices) and switch the order of questions or the order of possible answers to choose from, as well.
- Make online exams open-book/open-notes.
- Give essay exams rather than multiple choice or true/false question testing.
- Schedule quizzes or exams in Zoom class times to proctor exams themselves, much as faculty would do in on-ground classes.

Testing with Online Exam Security and Proctoring Services

Faculty choosing to use online proctoring services are often advised to:

- Familiarize yourself with the proctoring system first and use the least restrictive settings when implementing the system in order to prevent some of the problems described previously.
- Provide good guidance to students about what to expect and what they need in terms of technology in order to be ready.

- Administer a no-grade or low-stakes practice-run quiz, just so that students can work out any kinks ahead of time and get more comfortable with the proctoring system first before taking a larger exam. In Canvas, when you create a quiz, under "Quiz Type," you will see an option for "Practice Quiz."
- Consider allowing students to opt out of the proctored exam and have ready an alternative means for assessment for those choosing to do so, just as is our campus protocol for students with disabilities whose conditions or accommodations preclude using the online security and proctoring systems.
- If using other proctoring systems that enable the students' camera use and flag behavior deemed suspicious, try to set students more at ease by discussing what flagging means, how to avoid this, and the fact that being flagged doesn't necessarily mean the student was cheating at all. The proctoring services were designed with set criteria and protocols to flag what is deemed out-of-the-norm student test-taking behavior, which are things that could be happening for any number of reasons outside of cheating on the exam.

More Suggestions for Online Testing

With or without online exam security and proctoring services, there are a few more things we can do to make online testing more conducive to students doing their best:

- Give a series of smaller quizzes or chapter tests, rather than a few larger exams, with more at stake. Because so much can go wrong with technology, smaller point value tests might cause less stress on the student.
- Make available an exam for taking over a range of time, when possible (for example, students have one attempt to take an exam to be completed in one hour, but can choose to take that exam any time over a few days, a weekend, and so on). Then the student can choose the time to take the test that works best for them in terms of technological access, as well as work schedule and family homelife.
- Make one of the days an exam is open for students to take a scheduled day of your class, for those teaching via Zoom. Scheduling an online exam in your Zoom class just like you would an on-ground exam would typically mean no instruction, so that the students could take the exam. This would free the time for students who want to take the exam during this period, because they already have scheduled this time for Zoom class in terms of technological and Internet availability.
- Create a short practice exam to help students to work out some of the kinks ahead of time and feel more at ease in terms of what to expect. In Canvas, when you create a quiz, under "Quiz Type," you will see an option for "Practice Quiz."
- Remember that slower Internet connectivity could cause an exam to crash, and exam proctoring services require greater bandwidth, too. To prevent or mitigate problems, provide clear instructions on how to find campus wi-fi hotspots to take exams.
- Provide clear instructions about what to do if a student experiences difficulties due to connectivity or any technology issues while taking the exam.
- Let students know Canvas will continue to keep the exam open until the time set for the exam runs out—so students who may have been kicked out of an exam due to patchy Internet service or some other technological difficulties can still go back in to finish the exam within the time frame.

Less Academic Preparedness

Minority underrepresented students of color are more likely to come to college with less academic preparedness, research shows. Contributing factors include: Lower socioeconomic backgrounds putting them in schools with less funding and less experienced teachers and counselors; being taught and assisted by school staff with cultural norms or languages that may be different than their own; less assistance with their homework from parents who may be working long hours to pay bills and put food on the table; and less time for school work as the student may have to work more around the house or in caregiving with siblings or working outside the home to help with household income. Many, too, are first generation college students, moving into the world of college often all on their own. Some will be English-as-a second-language learners, as well, who may at times struggle with academic reading or writing.

Levels of academic learning and preparedness will now likely be lower for all students, due to the pandemic and emergency shift to online learning in K-12 education the past few years. All students have incurred loss to their education, but more so for students of color, due to a number of barriers, including those described above and earlier in this document, in terms of technology access and use, that Digital Divide.

In short, we have had in our classes the past few years minority underrepresented students of color who tend to come with lower academic preparation, and we are now receiving and will be receiving for the indeterminant future students even less prepared for their college education.

And now they are in the world of online higher education, where research tells us academically under-prepared students and socioeconomically disadvantaged students typically struggle even more.

Lower academic preparedness often goes hand-in-hand with lower academic self-confidence or self-efficacy in their studies—and online learning very likely adds to the sense of overwhelm or uncertainty.

There often comes a sense of not belonging in academia, as well. This feeling can deepen for a first generation college student, going it alone in higher education, or for a minority underrepresented student of color, who may have been treated as if or told they weren't cut out for college by others in their lives, including teachers and school staff in prior schooling or higher education.

These feelings can also deepen in our shift to remote learning, which can feel…remote. Asynchronous classes mean no live instructor or classmates, and even Zoom class lessons can still leave a learner feeling separate from their faculty and peers and distant from their studies.

And, for some, they may even wonder if they should even be in college at this time, given the financial costs, their family or work responsibilities, the increased stress and struggles of online learning in a pandemic, and the uncertainty of passing college classes in which they may well feel wholly unprepared.

What We Can Do to Help Less Academically Prepared Students in Online Learning

Much has been written on how to make our courses more conducive to all students feeling comfortable and achieving success. To follow in this section are considerations and suggestions applicable to this newer era of greater online learning.

Online Course Learning

Being less academically prepared means the student not always knowing how to effectively take notes, read a textbook, take a test, or complete an assignment in class. And now it is all online, with complex learning management systems such as Canvas to learn, in addition to course material.

- Being very clear, consistent, and user-friendly in your Canvas online course design in terms of class structure, progression of learning materials and activities, and how to find and submit assignments, due date times, and so on can help all students to feel more comfortable and capable in your class.
- Reminders and redundancy might be helpful for all our students during this sometimes confusing time in society and online learning.
- In the "Getting Started" learning module that many faculty like to put first to prepare their students for the course, you can include helpful information for students to know, such as effective strategies for textbook reading, note-taking, test-taking, researching, citing sources, and structuring a paper, and campus resources for students in need of academic assistance.

Reading

There is much more reading in the pivot online, from you, their instructor, and every other instructor they have, in terms of course information, assignment descriptions, discussion boards, and class announcements and emails to students. Numerous items to read and/or lengthy walls of text can feel overwhelming to any student, but may be especially so for a student less academically prepared for college. This may also be especially time consuming and exhausting for an English-learning student. To help out, faculty can:

- Add images, compelling headings, and color to visually break things up in the readings and spark greater engagement and enjoyment.
- Replace written material with video or audio course information, when possible, including recorded lessons and podcasts to see and hear, rather than solely written lessons to read.
- Break up the reading with good discussion questions and interactive exercises.

Learning Assessments

In the sudden pivot online, we may be relying primarily on writing assignments and tests, which may not be the types of assessment most conductive to all students showing you their learning. Papers require proficiency in academic preparation in such things as basic essay format, research, source citation, and ease of English vocabulary. Tests require experience and confidence in study skills and test taking ability, and comfort level with English vocabulary. Now make it an online exam: Those with lower academic preparedness may find the online test to be especially intimidating and students without good Internet access, technological devices or

proficiency may be especially anxious. Faculty may prefer to use alternative assessments to solely papers and testing in order to allow students to demonstrate their best learning, such as:

- Students creating products, pitches, proposals, posters, presentations, performances, video recordings, plays, music, art, poetry, creative writing, newspaper articles, letters, dance, events, and acts of service, activism, civic engagement, or social justice.
- Students devising their own course assessment(s), with guidance and input (and possibly final decision making) from you.
- Students showing their learning through journaling, portfolios, and reflective essays asking students to identify the points or principles most valuable to them in their course learning and explain why, and then discuss how they will put that learning to good use in their futures.

Assignments

In the emergency pivot to online learning, many scrambled just to get their courses up. A year-plus into online education and with the future likely to include much more of it, we may now want to go back to see what we can do in our courses for greater student success. Faculty can help students to feel clear and confident in completing assignments through long established practices for helping students to perform their best:

- Formulating clear assignment descriptions and rubrics gives all students a foundation for success, but especially the students who may already be feeling a little lost or shaky in academic life. It's also helpful to include frequently asked questions with answers, samples of student work to see, and past student common mistakes or difficulties shared in order to prevent such problems for current students. Please note, too, that while we may want to rely on the written description of the assignment to suffice, many students really need that spoken "going over of the assignment," too. Doing so in Zoom class or a quick video of the instructor discussing the assignment in terms of directions and grading criteria may be a real source of clarity, inspiration, and reassurance that the student knows what to do and how to do it. This also lowers the number of student inquiries and issues in doing the assignment.
- Crafting larger, longer-term assignments using scaffolding is also helpful, so that smaller steps (assignment given in chunks, with separate due dates, if possible) lead to bigger steps in end-assignment completion. This can be a great way to help students achieve a lot in terms of course outcomes, while also decreasing anxiety (by taking it one step at a time) and room for error (by allowing the instructor to see if the students are on track with the bigger assignment).
- Allowing students to choose their own topics, when possible, for assignments can help with comfort level (they will likely have some knowledge of a topic they have chosen), motivation (they will probably pick something of interest to them), and learning (they can focus on learning new skills or information the assignment was designed to accomplish).
- Inviting students to submit a rough draft of their work prior to the due date for you to review or arranging for peer review opportunities helps students stay on track with due dates and assignment requirements and gain confidence in the work they have done. This may also prevent failure to do the assignment correctly or at all.
- It should also be said that, as instructors, we may have course policies regarding late work, cheating and plagiarism, a list of "don'ts" for assignments, and so on, which may well be necessary, but can feel intimidating if we aren't mindful of tone.

Due Dates

- Faculty may be used to relying on the traditional syllabus course calendar, but this may not be what all students are using to keep them on track in the class. In the online setting, many students rely on their Canvas notifications or "To Do" list on the course homepage to see what needs to be completed for the day or week, and that list only holds seven items, including class announcements, Zoom meetings, and course assignments. This can result in lack of longer-term planning and the student feeling taken by surprise with exam or assignment due dates that have been scheduled since day one of the course, especially if these weren't published in Canvas until closer to the due for the student to see. Reminders for students to regularly check their Course Calendar for greater longer-range planning would be helpful, as would reminders of upcoming assignment due dates said in Zoom or via online announcement or message to the class. Some faculty like to include at the end of each Canvas learning module or page a "Looking Ahead" section that reminds students of reading, assignments, exams, and other important things coming.
- We used to primarily schedule assignment or exam due dates during class times and when the campus was open, but now may be in the custom of making deadlines for Friday or Sunday night. Students may well prefer these weekend due dates, until they have last minute questions or difficulties and their instructors are (understandably) less available. This can derail students into incompletion, if they are fighting for motivation, energy, and/or study space or computer use to complete assignments and exams. One remedy to consider may be setting due dates for larger assignments and exams during time frames when we know we will be available for addressing student inquiries or struggles, when possible. Scheduling due dates around the times you have Zoom office hours or can check email to answer questions, clarify points of confusion, look at a draft, point a student in the right direction, or offer encouragement might be the difference between a student completing or not completing an assignment or exam.
- When setting due dates, it is also important to note that students may be in different time zones in the nation or world, and you may want to remind them of this fact.

Grading

When it comes to grading written assignments, faculty may encounter greater errors in grammar, spelling, or punctuation, from students in general, who may be experiencing the greater cognitive load of figuring how to navigate online learning and assessments, as well as students less academically prepared for college, in terms of experience and skill in research, citation, and paper organization. Deadlines and assignment requirements may get lost or confused for just about any student, and especially students less academically prepared, who may have less skill in prioritizing higher point tasks, assessing the time needed to do them, and managing time to completion of coursework. For just about any student, too, it should be noted, the in-class pressure of talking about assignments coming due from the professor or with their peers could really keep a student on track with coursework—but remote learning makes this less likely.

- All of this, and the extenuating circumstances of the times, too, may be such that some flexibility and grace is needed with grading and due dates.
- Alternatively, many instructors also use options such as having one extra quiz/exam and then eliminating the course quiz/exam with the lowest score or offering extra credit learning opportunities. Allowing an assignment "re-do" is also a good way to help a student salvage a grade, as well as increase learning.

Feedback

Our feedback when grading, as well, can help students to improve moving forward and give them greater confidence, and this one-to-one communication can help build connections online.

- Giving specific, constructive feedback on assignments can be highly beneficial for students, because oftentimes they don't understand what mistakes they made on an assignment or how to improve and are hesitant to ask—especially now in the online setting. The result may be that they continue to make the same mistakes in that class and their other classes, too.
- Complimenting strengths in assignment feedback can help students to capitalize upon these skills in future coursework, as well as gain greater confidence in their academic abilities. For some students, your praise can be that sometimes badly needed reassurance that they are capable, that they do belong here in academia and online learning.
- Using the audio or video function in Canvas assignment grading can increase connection with the student and their understanding of the feedback received.

Course Grades

When it comes to overall course grades, a student with less familiarity with academia, in general, or Canvas, in particular, may over-estimate or under-estimate how well they are doing in the class. We often show student grades as a percentage of the points of assignments graded. This can result in some students doing well on smaller assignments earlier in the course, who think their grade may be high enough to not complete a larger-point assignment coming. Some students may have missed a low-stakes quiz or not done well on an assignment early in the course or on a lower point-value assignment, and then see that low course percentage and think there is no hope—not realizing that the bigger assignments are coming, with the potential to improve their grades greatly. Here are a few things we can do:

- Remind students that the course percentage is calculated based only on the assignments graded and are not reflective of completed assignments not yet graded or later assignments yet to come in the course.
- Remind students of the "What If?" feature they have available to them in Canvas to calculate how many points they would need on one or more assignments to achieve a desired grade in the course.
- Look over student grades periodically and reach out to a student with a lower percentage. You can reassure the student that future assignments, if done well, will raise the grade significantly and you are happy to work with them or look over a draft. You can offset dismay or disappointment with course progress with the prospect of extra credit or an assignment re-do opportunity. Even simply encouraging the student to keep going in the class, that their college education is important to their future and the future of their families and generations to come, will often transform their mindset.

Asking Questions and Getting Assistance

Research tells us that students of color are less likely to ask for help from faculty or student services, due to lower comfort level and worry of invoking stereotypes. Many young men of color, as well, grew up with the socialization of hypermasculinity, where asking for help is seen as weakness. And now in virtual courses, students with questions may not be able to easily ask you or another student sitting next to them in the classroom as they once could, and Zoom appointments with faculty and staff can seem even more imposing or awkward for them. But in

this difficult time, the likelihood is most of our students could benefit from assistance in some way at least once, in the course or with regard to campus services. Here are a few things we can do to make asking for and receiving help easier for them:

Office Hours

- In the syllabus and Canvas course home page, clearly posted office hours, with both the Zoom link and phone number provided (and any password), and a warmly worded encouragement or invitation for students to come, sets a good tone.
- Some instructors add their Zoom office hour times and link to their email signature line, for ease of reference and reminder to students they are available for assistance.

Online Course

- Having a "Q & A" Discussion Board where students can ask questions of you or their classmates, or offer answers or advice in response, can help everyone—you included, with less emails to answer of students who often have the same types of questions.

Zoom Class

- More invitations for questions or comments and time built into the lesson allow you to discover where you may have confused or lost students. In on-ground teaching, we could see from the students' body language or tell from the energy of the room when something was needed, but have far less access to these cues now in online classes.
- It's also good to show up early to Zoom and stay a few minutes after, whenever possible, because just as in teaching on-ground, some students are more likely to approach you with questions in the class setting, than come to office hours.

In General

Being proactive and persistent is essential, experts tell us—giving students everything they need in advance and then reminding and following up, as needed (e.g., campus resources for technology, academics, psychological counseling, financial aid). Sometimes called "high touch" practice in teaching or services, this can include:

- Promoting campus resources at the start of the term in the syllabus, welcome email, or Getting Started learning module, and throughout the course, as well, in reminder messages to the class, academic campus resources linked to assignments, or campus counseling and support group information given in the midpoint and end of the semester (typically difficult times for students) or in the wake of stressful events in the community or country.
- Reaching out to individual students with the specific campus resource they appear to need. Having the contact information (e.g., weblink, phone number) would be key to increasing the likelihood the student actually accesses the campus service you're recommending.
- Letting students know that you and the campus care about their well-being and success, and we are here for them. Mentioning any times that you may have sought campus help when you were a student may be especially impactful for students, too.
- Acknowledging to students that online learning is difficult for most, and this is a particularly hard time in our society for anyone, especially a college student striving to achieve their college education under such circumstances. This is something we, faculty and staff, have never had to go through ourselves. *Students need to hear this.*

Culture

Students of color include Asian Americans, Black and African Americans, Indigenous Peoples, Latinx, Middle Eastern Americans, and Pacific Islanders.

With these backgrounds come rich, vibrant cultures, unique perspectives and practices, and beautiful languages and communication norms. With these skin colors also come bias, inequity, and adversity.

The following sections discuss culture and race, with regard to students in online learning right now.

Cultural Identity and Inclusion

Students who embrace their cultural backgrounds tend to have greater well-being and academic success, research tells us. We know, too, that many students rely ever more on their cultural groups and backgrounds for strength and resilience in periods of adversity.

Yet this may not be as easy to do now: Some of our students may not be able to see their families or easily return to their cultural way of life in this age of pandemic, travel restrictions, social distancing, and quarantines. Students no longer can walk right into on-campus cultural organizations, clubs, spaces, and events. While you could once see students of diverse cultural backgrounds moving about the campus and in class, there is far less likelihood now in online learning, with often just names on Canvas profiles or in Zoom. Now students' primary sense of college becomes the reading, slides, and lecture recordings in Canvas shells or Zoom lessons, which may have little cultural inclusion.

Studies have long shown that students of color find classroom and campus climates lacking in a sense of belonging and inclusion, and curriculum not culturally representative—which likely worsens in the sudden shift to remote learning. Now consider the impact this may have on our students' learning and sense of place in academia.

Cultural Capital

There is sometimes a tendency to only see deficits of culture in minority underrepresented students—and not see the strengths.

Students of color bring with them many significant assets from their cultural backgrounds and forged from their experience with adversity and challenge. Traditionally, however, minority underrepresented students have been viewed from what has been termed a "deficit view," where those in academia may have all not been able to see the special "cultural capital" they bring, including the ability to overcome tremendous hardships and persevere in an academic world not designed for them.

Educational reformers note that students bring valuable experience, perspectives, and skills from those backgrounds of challenge and historical marginalization that educators should recognize as such—as assets—and strive to draw upon and support, because students are empowered with these forms of cultural capital and connect better to college learning and the campus. We need to do this more than ever in this difficult time for our students.

What We Can Do to Make Online Education More Culturally Responsive

As faculty and staff, ensuring cultural diversity in our online course content and campus materials becomes ever more important in our various spheres of campus life.

- In general, we can weave into what we say and the materials we create compelling facts, quotes, practices and customs, values and beliefs, and accurate, as well as positive, imagery of diverse cultures. Some faculty and staff also like to include with their email signature cultural sayings and the words of famous members of cultures in the history of our country or world. These are practices that benefit all. Our students have a real love of learning about diversity, and when a student sees that their own culture is being represented, it creates a greater sense of connection and place in their studies.
- In teaching, we can incorporate more culturally diverse subject matter, references, and examples in what we teach, clips or slides shown, assignments given, test questions created, and reading assigned, and include more of the work of diverse contributors, those scholars of color of the field we teach. No matter what the subject is, there will be ways to be more culturally inclusive of different groups. Such use of culturally diverse material is also better representative of the world and a more accurate account of most subject areas, which benefits the instruction of all students.
- In classrooms and campus groups, we can create that space and extend that invitation to all students to offer their own cultural perspective or "take" on the topic at hand. All student voices are important, and diverse voices, in particular, need be heard.
- With regard to campus events, we can do our best to continue to hold presentations and celebrations of diverse cultures for all to learn and enjoy virtually, and remember to share information about these with students, as well as show up ourselves and lend our presence, whenever possible.

Diversity on campus sets our students up for success, strengthens the institution, and enhances our understanding of society. Experience as educators tells us that cultural differences enrich and enliven academic discourse, and help students to develop the cultural competency skills necessary to successfully working with and serving different people and groups in our nation and global economy. Research shows that diverse groups and organizations show greater critical thinking and creativity, and more effective problem solving and decision making, with good communication between the different members. And wisdom tells us that diverse perspectives are essential to full and accurate knowledge of the world in which we live.

The engines of societal knowledge, however, have been fueled at far less than full capacity. Traditionally, higher education is Eurocentric, with the great bulk of research and theory so, the many disciplines for centuries built and taught from the perspective and power interests of European Caucasians. That means there are so many histories to expand and rewrite, theories to formulate, concepts to name and explicate, ways of knowing and doing to utilize, and research to conduct that asks better questions and uses better methodology in keeping with race and culture. Greater understanding of diversity helps to more ably achieve these goals and create better knowledge and practices for all. We see environmental studies looking to Native Americans for land sustainability practices and Pacific Islander cultures for ocean conservancy, for example, and there is so much more to learn and use in other fields.

Cultural Values

Being culturally responsive also means learning the different norms, values, and practices of the various cultures of our students. Awareness of such differences can prevent misperception and misunderstanding, and allow us to teach and interact with students more effectively.

One of the most significant differences in cultures is termed collectivism and individualism. Collectivism is an emphasis on one's groups over the self, placing a premium on putting the collective's needs and goals before that of the individual. The collectivistic "we before me" mindset stands in direct contrast to American individualism, which reverses the order, placing a premium on self-autonomy, independence, and personal needs and goals. Collectivism is a cultural value shared by the great bulk of the world—the majority of South America, Africa, Asia, and the Pacific Islands—including these many cultural groups within the United States, as well as Native Americans.

With collectivism, family, as a central group, becomes the most important thing in life. This means immediate family, as well as all extended family members: Grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and more. Collectivism often results in family households being larger, as extended family members may live in the home, too, when in need of residence or assistance, or who help care for children and, in turn, are cared for when age sets in. With larger family households may come larger support systems right there for the student, so especially needed in this grave time of social distancing away from friends, classmates, workgroups, sports teams, and more. But there may be disadvantages, as well: With bigger, often multigenerational family households may come greater fear of loved ones and/or oneself getting COVID. There may also be less quiet, private study space to focus on learning, write research papers, critically analyze, retain information, and the other cognitive tasks of academia. And if they are at home, studying, they are more visible and may be asked to help out with family chores or errands more than when they were at school learning, because the parents see the student there, "sitting around." In addition to their studies and other responsibilities, they may also be taking care of younger siblings or older grandparents, or they are parents themselves taking care of their own children or grandchildren, and/or taking care of their own parents or grandparents.

With collectivism, it is family first—always—and especially in a crisis, such as a global pandemic and economic downturn. You help out with working more to contribute financially, caretaking of younger, older, or ill family members, and myriad other forms of assistance. To not do so would be unthinkable. This means students may have less time to study for exams or write papers, and they will sometimes need to drop everything to help out family, including attending class or finishing assignments due.

With collectivism comes greater emphasis on connections and cooperation with those in our groups, in addition to family, and these cultural values have key implications for students:

We have long known that connection to faculty and classmates is important to college persistence and retention. Students will likely do better in a course when they feel closer to you and their peers.

Cooperative learning is also tied to the collectivistic cultural value. Working together is the preferred method of learning for many groups, and especially African American, Latinx, and Native American students, research shows, rather than solitary study or sole lecture-listening.

What We Can Do to Create Greater Connection and Cooperative Learning Online

Student connections to faculty, staff, and classmates are pivotal to their staying and succeeding in college. This is true for all students, decades of research show, and especially for minority underrepresented students of color.

Creating connection in remote learning may be a little harder, but there are steps we can take:

Getting to Know Students

The student feeling known is essential.

- We often have student introductions at the start of the semester, and are told that in online teaching this is even more essential to student comfort level, retention, and success in the class. You can do this live in Zoom class or by asking students to create a slide, video, or written introduction of themselves to post to a class Introductions discussion board, sharing their name, major, career goal, hometown or place of residence, hobbies and interests, and perhaps picture.
- Icebreakers also help everyone to learn who we have in our class or campus group, in terms of personal interests, career goals, academic courses, family life, and more. In Zoom class, you can put a question to the class at the start of the session and go around and get answers or ask students to put them into the Chat, and then highlight a few responses, before moving into the lesson at hand. This makes students more comfortable with each other, sparks connections between them, and also warms up the class for participating in the lesson when the focus moves to that. You can also choose or create icebreakers that lead right into the lesson topic.
- Getting names right is important, too, in terms of the name preferred by the student and the correct pronunciation. In online teaching, when students say their names in a Zoom class session or their own posted video self-introduction, you can go back to the recording to make note of the name the student uses (if different than the name stated on Canvas) and the proper pronunciation. Using those names helps the other students to use their classmates' names and with proper pronunciation, too, in Zoom. Alternatively, some instructors provide their names, along with pronunciation cues, in Zoom (aloud or in writing), which allows students to feel comfortable following suit, should they like.
- If holding a Zoom class or meeting, getting there a little earlier and getting to know students through more personal conversation is a nice way to develop connection. In virtual office hours, as well, taking the time for more personal conversation than solely the inquiry at hand can pave the way to those more personal connections.
- Some instructors like to make note of student identities and interests. In the Canvas course "Gradebook" page, you can click on "View" and then "Notes" to make note there of student names and pronunciation, preferred pronouns, and other aspects of identity they may have shared (e.g., veteran, first generation college student, parent), for ease of reference (and viewable to you only). You can also simply make note, by hand, on printed roll sheets.
- Setting up an informal discussion board or social network site for students to post such things as memes, humor, music, and more can also be a great way for students to share who they are and get to know each other.

Students Getting to Know You

Students also need to connect with you, but getting to know faculty and staff can be much harder in remote learning, especially if teaching solely via written course material, narrated slides, and curated videos without you in view.

Sharing Who You Are

This is important to students feeling comfortable with you and connecting.

- We can share who we are at the beginning of the term in welcome emails or welcome videos to students, introducing ourselves and course on the Canvas homepage, and in Zoom introductions.
- Throughout the semester, you can continue to share who you are, as a person, outside of the classroom or office in terms of family background, hobbies you have, your own past experiences as a student, or your current experiences now, living in this difficult time. Humanizing yourself in this way can help the student feel more comfortable and better relate to you. Our backgrounds we display in our Zoom class or recorded lessons can also be a great way to show other sides of ourselves (e.g., objects, pictures, décor), as can the errant cute pet coming into camera view!

Showing That You Care

One thing students need to know about you is that you care. Faculty and staff members' heartfelt, caring attitude is one of the most important factors in student retention and success, research tells us, and especially for students of color, who may come from a background of lower trust or rapport with educators, and for first generation students, who may feel especially isolated in college life. While we wouldn't be doing this job if we didn't care, we may not always say or show it enough in remote learning, as we would in the classroom. And much more of our communication with students is likely in the form of writing, which may sometimes come across as more severe or terse than we intend, or our meaning misinterpreted. For these reasons, we may need to work extra hard to show we care.

- We can share our passion for education, love for the act of teaching, enthusiasm for our field, and belief in our students, compassion for their struggles, and warmth, humanity and heart in announcements to the class, course materials, and what we say or show in lesson recordings or in Zoom.
- We can also show caring in our one-on-one interactions with students in email, assignment feedback, Canvas messaging, Zoom conversation or Chat, or virtual office hours. Offering encouragement to the student who feels overwhelmed, conveying concern for the student who is going through something, validating a student who has expressed self-doubt regarding academic ability, reaching out to the student who appears lost or disengaged, or finding services for the student who is clearly struggling, all can mean more than we ever realize.

Immediacy is the term for showing approachability, warmth, and caring through what we say and what we do in our body language and actions. Immediacy has been extensively studied in higher education, as well as more generally in other spheres of life, and found beneficial. Instructor immediacy leads to increased student attendance, engagement, motivation, learning, enjoyment, and persistence. Immediacy is harder to achieve in remote learning unless we are especially mindful—but those benefits make our efforts well-worth it.

Students Getting to Know and Work with Students

Introductions, icebreakers, Zoom conversations, and informal class sites for students to share, all discussed prior, help students get to know and become comfortable with each other. Getting students learning together and working together is important, too.

With asynchronous learning (such as self-guided modules and lessons, course material pages and documents, lecture recordings, and online discussion boards), there are advantages, including the flexibility allowed for students to work at the times and the pace best for their work and family schedule and their access to technological devices and Internet service. But in terms of relational building, the learner is typically pressing on alone, with less engagement with others, unless the instructor strives to include such cooperative learning opportunities as discussion boards, peer review, pair or group projects, or opportunities within the course to meet with the class occasionally in Zoom.

Discussion Boards are one of the easiest ways to create online community and cooperative learning, as we have likely learned these past few years, if having never used these before with our on-ground classes.

Peer Review assignments can also be tremendously valuable in both learning and students building connections, we know from on-ground teaching, and can be set up through the Canvas "Peer Review" feature or through Discussion Boards set to student groups, rather than the whole class.

Group Projects that instructors may have once assigned can now seem more difficult in this online era, but that doesn't have to be the case at all. And students may need these collaborative learning opportunities now more than ever, in this age of social distancing and remote education, as a great way to build greater class connection, support, and learning, and keep everyone together and progressing to course completion. Setting up a group for success is what is key, especially in the online realm. To follow are some best practices for optimal group work that you can implement or feel free to adapt and share directly with your students:

Group Structure

- Having each group or the class as a whole formulate group rules regarding contribution and communication (including clear steps to take should a group member not perform positively and productively with regard to assignment completion and group relations) gets the group off to a strong start.
- Setting timelines for rough draft or work completion (each group or the faculty member doing this) can keep students on track with the task.
- Establishing group member roles and responsibilities that match the group members' interests and strengths can get everyone feeling comfortable to contribute and actively involved.

Group Meetings

- Meeting face-to-face (in Zoom, for example) for at least some of the group discussions is better than solely online written collaboration (such as Google Docs, for example).
- If the instructor is holding Zoom class sessions, allocating class time for group meetings

is helpful. Faculty can also offer extra credit to students who meet up on their own and provide a record of group member attendance.

- Having an agenda of items to be discussed ahead of the meeting allows group members to best prepare, and taking notes during the meeting is helpful to keep everyone on the same page moving forward in terms of what was discussed and decided, including the group members who could not attend.

Group Discussion

- Getting to know each other as people first, in the group, rather than jumping straight into the task at hand, helps everyone to feel more comfortable with each other, the group to start building cohesion, and the team to work best together.
- Creating a supportive climate through good verbal and nonverbal communication and listening will allow everyone to contribute their best to discussions and the group tasks.
- Establishing clear and frequent communication between group members can help to prevent miscommunication or things following through the cracks.

Value of Working with Groups

- Reminding students of the benefits may be motivating: Group projects create one of the best opportunities for deeper, active learning about the topic or task, as well as development of skills in communication, team membership, leadership, perspectives, and experience working with diverse individuals who bring a range of knowledge, skills, experience. Employers urge institutions of higher education to utilize greater group work for just those reasons in order to best prepare them for the working world.
- Getting students to reflect on their group membership and processes may be beneficial to greater learning and performance. Having a related discussion board or assignment, such as journaling or analyzing the group experience, can be helpful for group members to reflect and improve group processes and maximize their learning and performance.

Zoom lessons can help to build more of a sense of community and connection than solely asynchronous learning, as we know, because it is easier when we can see and hear and talk to each other. But even in Zoom, we still may do more to create greater community.

We know from research and experience that class discussions create more active learning and greater engagement and interaction with the material and the class. However, faculty or staff may find student talk is sometimes harder to create or sustain online, and begin limiting it more in our Zoom class lessons or meetings. But talking in pairs or groups in breakout rooms or having whole class discussions with their peers can help students to build a sense of connection with others and belonging in academia, and create that collaboration needed. And Zoom sure can be a lot of fun and do things that on-ground discussion cannot!

Zoom Class Discussion Participation

Much has been written on the ways to increase Zoom class engagement, including these:

- Pose a question to the class and be comfortable giving even longer wait time for students to check that they won't be interrupting another student speaking first and then unmute themselves to speak, or for students to write answers into the Chat. Some now call this the extra-long awkward Zoom pause, a term students can appreciate.

- For some questions, you can announce you will be giving a few minutes for all students to write their responses into the Chat. You will often find that you get greater contribution than in the on-ground class, because those quieter students may feel more comfortable when they don't have to speak up in the public setting.
- You can also launch the anonymous Zoom poll for students to answer questions, and having students use the Zoom Reactions is fun, too—the thumbs up, heart, crying face, and so on.
- Some instructors like to randomly call upon students using fun tactics such as popsicle sticks with the students' names to select to respond or the higher tech version of this, the "Wheel of Names." Giving students the option to "pass" this one time asked and answer the next time might be appreciated, especially when students cannot always control their background surroundings and may not hear or have time to think of a response to the question asked.
- The Whiteboard feature in Zoom can allow class brainstorming sessions that students really enjoy.
- If you put students into a breakout room to work on a task and then were visiting a room and heard an especially insightful contribution from a student, you can ask that student then or send a private Chat message to see if they're comfortable sharing that insight with the whole class upon return.
- You can also assign students to teaching a portion of the class (as an individual, pair, or group assignment), and have them build discussion questions and interaction into their presentation. Students almost always participate more with students leading the lesson.

Zoom Breakout Room Participation

Students will tell you that breakout rooms can be really great for active discussion and student interaction, which many really need in this time of social distancing, quarantining, and remote learning. Students will also say that breakout rooms only work if their classmates are actually participating, which requires thoughtful set up:

- Make the task clear, by typing it into the Chat or having a document posted or sent to students that they can refer to in the breakout room, and let students know that they can summon you to the breakout room if they have any questions about their task. Checking in with each breakout room to make sure the groups are doing well and on track is helpful, too.
- Let students know that each group will be asked to report back when the class returns to the main Zoom room or will contribute to an online discussion board (a good alternative for larger classes or when time doesn't allow a class debrief).
- You can also have students actively work together on a document, slides, or other learning outcome product to share in the main Zoom room later.
- Some like to give students a choice in more active roles to take on in breakout rooms, such as: Discussion Facilitator, Note-Taker, Time-Keeper/Task Progress Monitor, Devil's Advocate, Conflict Mediator, Group Spokesperson, and so on.

(For a broader look at creating community and engagement in online learning, see the Faculty Focus article by Jenae Cohn and Courtney Plotts: "How to Structure Your Online Class for Inclusion: Two Principles for Engagement, Part 2" https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/online-education/online-student-engagement/how-to-structure-your-online-class-for-inclusion-two-principles-for-fostering-engagement-part-2/]

Race

We live in a time of real racial unrest. Racial tensions are heightened at the same time that psychological well-being is lower due to the Coronavirus; work identities, connections, and income may be devasted by economic downturn; and sometimes relationships, freedoms, or dreams seem very much at risk in this era of social distancing and pandemic. Stress, anger, and frustration levels are higher, while resilience, coping, and patience lower for most people. And scholars fear this contributes ever more to racial divide and discrimination.

Scholars, too, worry that the struggles of race students of color experienced pre-pandemic—implicit bias, microaggressions, and more—carry over into and are even exacerbated in virtual learning. This section will discuss these barriers to students of color in online education.

Implicit Bias

Implicit bias refers to the attitudes and associations that we hold regarding groups of people, such as those based on race, that operate below our awareness. Unlike explicit acts of prejudice and discrimination, implicit bias is unconscious, deep-seated within us and activated automatically without intent or control. We all have implicit bias, we know from research. The Kirwan Institute's *State of the Science: Implicit Bias Review* notes: Even when we completely disagree with a stereotype of a group, we can still hold unconscious biases in relation to that stereotype. Even when we sincerely believe we are and strive to be "color-blind," we can still hold unconscious bias. Even when assessed for implicit biases against one's own race, people can still hold negative assumptions, meaning that people can hold unconscious bias against their own cultural group, as well as other cultural groups. And even the experts in this field of study, researchers and scholars, will tell you that they, too, hold implicit biases.

We know from myriad studies that implicit bias is prevalent in our society, including in job and employment disparities, healthcare access and treatment, law enforcement and the judicial system, housing and the banking industry, and in the school systems K-12 on up to post-secondary education.

We also know from research that implicit bias increases with stress, uncertainty, distraction, controversy, emotion, pressure, and time urgency—making this terribly difficult, chaotic time ripe for it. *Implicit bias, already so pervasive, is heightened now.*

Our implicit biases shape what we see, think, say, do, and decide. In online learning, this means that we may see a student on their webcam or profile picture, and unconsciously associate stereotypes, or harbor doubts about their academic abilities or motivation or questions regarding their character or qualities. In this way, implicit bias can result in less expectation for academic success and, thus, less assistance and encouragement from faculty and staff; greater suspicion of cheating or plagiarism in the class or of not belonging or being up to no good by campus security; and less likelihood of being chosen for mentoring, internships, or research projects with faculty. Even simply having a name regarded as that of a person of color (as opposed to a name perceived as more Caucasian) results in the student having their online discussion board posts responded to less by their instructors and their email inquiries or requests regarding advising, counseling, or mentoring answered less positively or not at all by faculty, research shows.

What We Can Do to Lower Implicit Bias

With time and practice, implicit bias can be unlearned.

General Guidelines

When interacting with others, key guidelines include:

- Try to guard against first impressions when meeting with others, rather than "go with your gut." Wait, re-think, ask yourself why you see or feel as you do.
- Having a multicultural perspective, taking the time to actively think, appreciate, and talk about the value of diversity, can prime your unconscious mind to follow your conscious thoughts and words.
- It's also important that we don't try to be color blind. Research shows that trying to ignore racial differences and repress stereotypes can actually make these loom larger in your mind. Instead, openly acknowledging biases and then telling yourself why they are incorrect or unjust is the better way to counteract them.

Decision Making Situations

Decision making in academia typically include such things as whom to add or drop from a class, hire for campus employment, or what grade to give, determination to make with regard to a request for due date extension or question of plagiarism, or type of career or academic advising to give to a student. Key guidelines include:

- Make "blind" decisions by removing any indicators of race when making decisions about a person, such as names or pictures shown. This is why some faculty like to grade assignments without looking at the student names or profile pictures or use the Canvas anonymous grading feature to remove student names from assignments before grading.
- You can also establish a set of criteria before going into decision making situations. In teaching, this is where clear grading rubrics and policies for late or missed assignments that we consistently apply to all students are helpful in lowering likelihood of implicit biases at work.
- You could also check your decision making by articulating the reasoning process for the decisions made, if only to yourself, to prevent going with your gut or intuition. Another way is to ask yourself how you would evaluate the person in question or make a decision if they belonged to a different social group (e.g., Caucasian or other race different than your own).

The prior suggestions are helpful, but temporary, the experts caution. Enduring change requires strong and persistent work. It is work we need to do to live up to the fullest ideals upon which this nation is founded. While there are laws in place to protect against the explicit acts of discrimination and racism, there are no such protections for the implicit biases we all hold.

[This discussion of implicit bias is based primarily on:
State of the Science: Implicit Bias Review, by the Kirwan Institute of Ohio State University, 2014, 2015, 2016, and 2017, with the last one found here: *State of the Science: Implicit Bias Review 2017 (PDF)*
http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/implicit-bias-training/resources/2017-implicit-bias-review.pdf

To try some of the quick and easy online tests offered by the Harvard researchers on implicit bias regarding race, ethnicity, skin color, and more, go to: Harvard's Project Implicit
https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/]

Microaggressions

With implicit bias can come microaggressions. Microaggressions are things said or done in daily interaction that demean or diminish a person on the basis of demographic factors. While a number of different demographic groups face microaggressions, some of the leading work on the topic was done in terms of race. Psychologist Derald Wing Sue, author of the book, *Racial Microaggressions in Everyday Life*, offers this definition: "Racial microaggressions are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities…that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative slights or insults toward people of color."

Common microaggressions in academic life include: Inappropriate names of cultural groups or other terminology in reference; invoking of stereotypes regarding a student's upbringing, family life, interests, and cultural practices; undue doubts about academic fit, competency, or cheating; and questions or assumptions about citizenship and immigration status, cultural heritage or background, and English-speaking ability.

Microaggressions are very often unintentional, making each of us likely guilty one or more times in our lives, as we all learn in an increasingly diverse nation.

Sometimes a person may say or do something without realizing the potential underlying message sent. For example:

- Telling an Asian American, *"You speak (or write) English so well,"* can carry the assumption that all people of Asian descent are recent immigrants to the country and learning the language, when many have been in the country for generations and may not know any other language than English. For those who are immigrants, compliments on language proficiency may be seen by some as "othering," being relegated to a group other than, even less than, the societal group held as the norm.
- Asking a Latino "*What are you?"* may offend, as the word "what" may be seen as objectifying and the question itself "othering," especially if the person asking is white (because the inquiry may be seen as implying that the person being asked has ethnicity but the questioner does not, perpetuating the white as normative standard when Caucasian is itself a race).
- Telling a Pacific Islander, *"You don't look like an Islander or Hawaiian,"* may make the person feel that their cultural identity is being called into question and found deficient, as well as perpetuate stereotypes.
- Asking an African American *"How did you get that…(job, promotion, award, internship, etc.)?"* may carry the implication that the person got that due to affirmative action, quotas, or tokenism, rather than from individual merit, talent, hard work, or expertise.
- Telling Native Americans that *"Racial injustices are a thing of the past"* may be seen as dismissive of the discrimination and prejudice ongoing in our country and centuries of violence on indigenous peoples and the monumental effects thereof documented to this day.
- Asking a Middle Eastern American *"Where are you from?"* can carry the assumption that all must be foreigners, negating any American heritage or citizenship, making someone feel like a stranger in their own country, not belonging.

Microaggressions may also be visual, shown without a word, as in the cases of inappropriate or offensive imagery, clips, or memes seen in class or profile pictures or backgrounds in Zoom class or recorded presentations. In some cases, microaggressions may be what is not shown or said. For example, not treating a student of color the same way verbally or nonverbally as a white student or not having a more culturally representative and responsive course, which can create a sense of invisibility for a student of color or erasure of the contributions of scholars of color in course curriculum or materials.

Microaggressions are pervasive and harmful in the lives of people of color living in this country, akin to what some scholars have called "death by a thousand daily cuts." Microaggressions singly or in accumulation adversely impact mental and physical well-being, quality of social experience, and performance in academia and the working world.

For all of these reasons, some take exception to the term "microaggression" for obscuring the enormity of their effect on an individual and on our society, as well, in perpetuating bias and inequity, hindering interactions and relationships, and doing harm to places and spaces.

What We Can Do to Combat Microaggressions

Microaggressions are more likely than ever to occur. We live now in this era of so much more virtual and text communication, where people often say things that they wouldn't say the exact same way in person. Most of us are much more aware of how we are coming across with someone standing in front of us, and we can also read the room or the reactions of others to what we're saying and adjust accordingly to clarify or correct. In written communication, we lose the greater context of what else might have been said aloud that wasn't included in a shorter written post and the nonverbal cues that could have shaped the message more clearly or constructively. And in remote learning, we likely don't have as soon or as much a foundation of ongoing relationships, connection, and goodwill with others for them to better understand where we may be coming from and what our intent may be.

Moreover, in the shift to everything now online, personal life may blend with academic life without the physical demarcation of different physical locales, resulting in students sometimes typing things into Zoom Chat or an online discussion board in the manner they would a social media post to friends, not realizing their words or phrasing may be inappropriate to the college classroom or interpreted differently than they had intended. And with specific regard to race, some may say things in a way that they would have worded more mindfully in the presence of a person of a race different than their own, but the online venue means they may sometimes only see the name of classmates, and not the visual of the student on webcam or in their profile picture. For all of these reasons and more, mistakes can be made.

Guard Against Microaggressions

Microaggressions occur in all spheres of life, including higher education, because we are all still learning. But our classes, office times, and campus events, on-ground and online, need to be safe spaces for all students, especially now.

Being Mindful of Ourselves

- We can guard against microaggressions by being ever more mindful of what we say, do, and show in our courses and office spaces: Spoken comments, written information or correspondence, imagery and clips, and our nonverbal body language and actions.
- We can also proactively learn more about the many types of microaggressions frequently encountered by cultural groups different than our own in order to educate ourselves before the student has to "educate the educator."
- We can let our students know that we may well mistakes, as none of us are experts in all of the different cultures and dynamic, changing understandings, and that we genuinely would like to know when we may have unintentionally microaggressed. Higher education is the first, best place to teach all about microaggressions, and that begins with our own learning, as educators.

Being Mindful of Others

- We also need be mindful of what other others say, do, and show in our course and office spaces, including guest presenters and students. In this regard, we can set up our courses with clear rules on cordial and civil communication and stated campus policy, and ensure students realize this pertains to Zoom class, Chat, and breakout rooms, in Canvas discussion boards, Wikis, student recorded presentations, and in peer review, pair work, or group projects. We can show presence in those Zoom breakout rooms and on Canvas discussion boards, especially when the topics relate to matters of race or culture or we have a student who has shown, from their past comments, that they may need an especially watchful eye. It would also be helpful to give students directions for editing or deleting their posts on Canvas discussion boards when they see fit (in a Canvas discussion board "Reply" box, it is in the upper right hand corner, with the three dots, where you can click to edit or delete).
- More broadly, we can also be sure to set up our Zoom classes so that we are protected from Zoom Bombing, which often includes racist threats, attacks, or imagery (often termed a racial microassault).

Address Microaggressions Constructively

As faculty and staff, we may either unintentionally commit microaggressions ourselves (again, because we are all still learning), or we can be on the receiving end or bear witness to microaggressions said to others.

When We Commit Microaggressions

Try to address our mistakes constructively:

- Apologize once you realize or another takes note and take steps to repair any damage to the climate in that space and the person(s) affected.
- When appropriate, take the opportunity to maximize the learning opportunity of the situation by helping all involved to understand why what was said or done

could be taken offensively and to set an example for how to address such situations in the future. Students learn so much from all we do, and perhaps never more so than when we err and then address our mistakes honestly and constructively.

When We Encounter Microaggressions in Class or Out on Campus

Try to address the situation beneficially. Depending on the situation, tactics may include:

- Explaining why a comment may be hurtful to a person or group ("What you said may be interpreted as….") or why you feel uncomfortable with their statements ("I feel troubled/saddened/offended when you say/do….").
- Asking the person for elaboration to help unpack the assumptions underlying the microaggression ("What leads you to say/ask/think/believe that?") or offering a hypothetical to create perspective-taking ("Would you feel the same way if the positions were reversed, or it was someone you love in that situation?").
- Seeing if anyone else would like to weigh in on the matter ("Let's open this up to others…would anyone like to offer their thoughts?") or consider alternative perspectives ("What are other ways to look at this?").

These strategies, of course, will work best with sincerity of intent to constructively address the microaggression. Anything less could create defensiveness, when true learning is the goal.

It should also be noted that microaggressions left unaddressed can cause just as much harm as the microaggression itself, research shows. This makes going back to get it right important ("I'd like to go back and talk about…," in relation to something said or done a minute, day, or week ago). If ill-advised in that setting, then going back to the person on the receiving end to acknowledge the microaggression in private may be helpful ("I wanted to check to see how you are/let you know that I don't feel that comment was appropriate/constructive"). Addressing it later is better than not addressing it at all.

When others are silent in reaction to a microaggression witnessed, this may be seen as tacit endorsement or feel like a high wall of blank ignorance.

This also leaves the person on the receiving end to bear the burden of speaking out against the microaggression, and this when they may feel shock, distress, anger, a sense of injustice, the need to shut down in order to protect themselves, or the futility and exhaustion of yet another microaggression against their personhood and cultural identity.

This makes it vital that more people speak out more often, in the spirit of allyship and education, to root out microaggressions from common discourse. In the words of one of the principal scholars in this field: "The first step in eliminating microaggressions is to make the 'invisible' visible."

[For further information, please see Derald Wing Sue's "Racial Microaggressions in Everyday Life"
https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/microaggressions-in-everyday-life/201010/racial-microaggressions-in-everyday-life.

Further examples of, and strategies to address constructively instances of, microaggressions may also be found in
"Tool: Interrupting Microaggressions" (PDF)
http://academicaffairs.ucsc.edu/events/documents/Microaggressions_InterruptHO_2014_11_182v5.pdf
provided by the University of California, Santa Cruz,

as well as "How to Interrupt Racial Microaggressions When They Occur,"
https://diverseeducation.com/article/176397/
by J. Luke Wood and Frank Harris III]

Racelighting

When faced with implicit or explicit bias or microaggressions, a person of color may question their interpretation of the other person's words or actions or second guess their own, or begin to question their own competence, character, judgement, or intelligence. San Diego University professors and educational reformers J. Luke Wood and Frank Harris III term this "racelighting," in their recent brief, "Racelighting in the Normal Realities of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color." Racelighting can cause tremendous uncertainty, self-doubt, and stress.

Racial Battle Fatigue

Implicit bias, unintentional microaggressions, racelighting, and deliberate racism and discrimination may cause bewilderment, sadness, hurt, frustration, anguish, offense, fear, or sense of injustice. The student may really struggle with this distress, all the while trying to learn in their classes, which can hinder academic success. "Racial battle fatigue" is the term some have used for the experience of dealing with racial bias and the aftermath. Influenced by the terms "combat stress" and "post-traumatic stress disorder," the name is telling. Racial battle fatigue is the heightened stress of ongoing racism encountered, where one must fight, fend off, or otherwise cope with stereotypes and stigma in daily life, all of which can take a terrible toll, adversely affecting physical and mental health and taking chunks of selfhood and soul. William A. Smith, a professor at the University of Utah, proposed the term some years back, and argues that this term is occurring now more than ever.

And More

In this past section there has been much discussion of racial bias and microaggressions more generally. However, it should be acknowledged that the struggles of people of color in our nation can vary greatly, from cultural group to cultural group (and from individual to individual within each cultural group) due to societal ignorance and prejudice of differences in cultural norms, customs, spiritual views, clothing, skin color, and other central aspects of who we are as human beings.

BIPOC is a term being used more and more to note that not all groups have had or currently have the same experiences of racism and bias. Pronounced "by-pock," the acronym stands for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, to emphasize the fact that African American and Indigenous people have endured hundreds of years of systemic racism and bias that continue to this day in the nation.

Historical trauma is a term that acknowledges the grave costs of centuries of systemic racism and profound loss and violence on a culture, such as those African American and Native American. The repercussions of that history—grief, anger, hopelessness, and despair—carry through the generations to this day, scholars have noted, manifesting in myriad physiological, psychological, and socioeconomic ways.

Many people of color in the nation, especially Asian Americans, Latinx, Middle Eastern Americans, and Pacific Islanders, may have experienced historically and continue to experience implicit and explicit bias regarding actual or assumed immigration background, citizenship status, and/or native language use and English-speaking. At its strongest, the term xenophobia may be the term used, a fear or hatred of foreigners.

Racial Tensions in Society

It has been an incredibly difficult time for all of our students, but even more so for people of color, given the grave spike in racial unrest from coast to coast in the nation the past few years.

No matter what one's political views, we should all be able to understand that: Hearing a pandemic called the "Kung Flu" and other names tied to region would be especially offensive as well as alarming to Asian Americans, due to the threat posed to your daily living and safety and the serious surge in anti-Asian American and Pacific Islander violence. Seeing the image of a black man begging for his life with an officer of the law kneeling on his neck for close to ten minutes could be especially horrifying to a Black person or any person of color living in our nation, and this in the context of grave atrocities before and after. Experiencing the rise in anti-immigrant sentiment in the nation and reading accounts of detention centers would especially cause stress, anxiety, or fear for students who they, themselves, or the people they love are immigrants or undocumented.

What We Can Do

Supporting Students During Incidence of Racial Unrest

When events or issues of race arise in our community, state, or nation, there are steps that we can take to help students to better cope:

- This begins with understanding just how deeply racial tensions and atrocities can affect a person of color. Students may need psychological time off, time away from others, time to process, *time.* The student may need extension of course deadlines, because taking an exam, writing a paper, or giving a presentation is just too much.

- Understand also that some students may choose activism as their way of trying to process and protest the conditions of their lives, a means of coping, a means of empowerment. Seeking social justice, protests and marches, takes time, energy, and emotional toll. They, too, may need time for the activism itself and time to recover from it, and extension of deadlines also may be helpful.

- We should also understand that students may react in different ways in class when racial unrest or issues arise in the nation or more locally. For some students, to proceed in a class as if things are normal after an incidence of racial strife or violence is jarring or unthinkable, and they may want and need spoken remarks or class discussion of some sort. For other students, they may not want to go there in a class discussion of what happened or the issue going on…it feels too raw.

- Reminding students of the campus support available, including psychological counseling services and cultural groups and organizations, would be helpful.

Discussing Race

Straight talk about race can be difficult, thorny, even feel like a minefield in some instances. It can leave people feeling guilty, confused, ashamed, saddened, hurting, angry, or exhausted. *But it is the way we open our eyes and hearts more fully to groups other than our own, and learn about the circumstances unique to each.*

Not all classes or campus spaces allow for such talk, of course, but we need more of this in short learning moments of talk or longer, sustained discussion on-ground or online in Zoom discussions or Canvas discussion boards.

When holding these types of discussions:

- ***It is helpful to establish some guidelines.*** Meaningful dialogue about diversity is most likely to occur when: A supportive climate is established, openness is encouraged, respect for others is emphasized, reminders of class ground rules and campus policy are given, no one person is singled out to speak as a representative of a certain type of group, and everyone understands that feeling uncomfortable during such discussions is sometimes a necessary part of the process of learning when it comes to the topic of race. It is also important to let everyone know: These are special discussions, requiring courage and honesty in sharing thoughts and experiences, as well as in asking questions and admitting what you don't know or understand. Truly listening is also essential, with open minds and hearts, and remembering that experiences disclosed are interpreted in different ways by different people, and helping someone to feel understood is impactful. Missteps will likely occur as we learn about and discuss cultures other than our own, and we have a responsibility to act at such times with grace and growth.
- ***It is helpful to understand some common reactions and constructive responses.*** Some students might not want to say a word in such discussions, for fear of being seen as ignorant, prejudiced, or offensive. But silence may feel disconcerting or disconfirming to those who are sharing their thoughts and experiences, and may be interpreted as tacit endorsement of the status quo in society or disagreement with what is being said, when, if this is the case, then open differences of opinion is typically much more beneficial, when constructively discussed. Silence may also come from some students who simply feel too raw to even participate, and we should understand and acknowledge this, as well. Some students, too, might want to simply say they are "colorblind" and leave it at that, that they don't see and therefore don't discriminate against people in terms of skin color. But not seeing race means not seeing the racial realities of people of color or the myriad inequities and injustices permeating our society and, therefore, shutting down the discussion, potential learning, and societal reform. And some people may feel that "talking won't solve the problems." But dialogue and discussion help us to explore more fully complex issues—and if not at an institution of higher education, then where?—and voicing our perspectives and experiences, as well as learning from others, is powerful.
- ***It is helpful to understand the different roles you may need to step into.*** During such discussions, you may need to be: Discussion Moderator, to balance participation and draw people out; Facilitator, to encourage thought and learning; Mediator, should differences of opinion arise; and sometimes Counselor, to support any student who may be struggling at the time or after.

In holding such discussions, you'll be showing through example the communication skills needed and teaching the value of talk about tough and important issues of race.

Being an Anti-Racist

Ibram X. Kendi, a professor and founding director of the Boston University Center for Antiracist Research, wrote the best-selling book *How to Be an Anti-Racist.* In his speaking engagements and writings, he notes that anybody can be racist in what they say or do, himself included, due to years of socialization and structures in place. But when we say or think the words, "I am not a racist," any needed self-reflection or discussion stops, and neutrality more generally (non-racism) precludes needed learning or reform. He therefore proposes the opposite of racist, explaining, "An anti-racist is someone who is willing to admit the times in which they are being racist, and who is willing to recognize the inequities and the racial problems in our society, and who is willing to challenge those racial inequities" and work for change and social justice.

We are anti-racist when we acknowledge racism, our own and in our society, and when we work to learn more about cultures and race, identify and challenge policies that disenfranchise or discriminate, and speak and do things to advance equality, equity, and reform.

In higher education and our own different spheres of responsibility on campus, being an anti-racist could include:

- Being culturally responsive in your work with students, by including diverse materials, imagery, and more in our teaching or campus work.
- Guarding against and speaking out against bias or microaggressions.
- Facilitating constructive dialogue in classrooms and campus spaces on matters of race and ethnicity.
- Learning ever more about the dynamic, everchanging, multi-faceted diversity of our nation, in terms of the myriad cultural groups other than our own and matters of race and privilege.
- Including in your syllabus, class, or other campus work, a written or spoken statement of anti-racism or allyship. This would be beneficial learning for all students, and especially needed by students of color.
- Creating opportunities in your courses, when possible, for students to speak out on and work on societal causes, in terms of discussions, papers, or projects.
- Considering culture in curriculum, programs, and services, by asking: What barriers or challenges might students of different cultures have in learning this area of study or completing these types of assignments we give? What barriers or challenges might students of different cultures have in awareness or accessing of this service?
- Looking at class policies, department policies, and campus policies to identify instances that in any way disadvantage students, faculty, and staff members of color.
- Supporting our students and colleagues engaged in the difficult, courageous work of activism.
- Showing up at campus or community cultural and social justice events to lend our presence and support.
- Starting or joining a social justice cause on campus or larger community or a work group in your department or service area, to model the skills and spirit of advocacy and reform.

Students watch and listen to all we say and do, and sometimes we forget just how well-positioned we are to teach by example. And being an agent of change helps to make our campus, community, and country a better place for all people.

Well-Being

In an Active Minds Student Mental Health Survey in the fall of 2020, 76% of college students said their mental health had worsened due to the pandemic. When asked about the ways COVID-19 had impacted their lives, students reported stress or anxiety (89%), disappointment or sadness (79%), loneliness or isolation (78%), financial setback (48%), relocation (34%), illness and/or having to self-quarantine (19%), loss of a loved one (8%), and taking care of a sick loved one (6%).

Students of color are even more adversely impacted. In a research review and synthesis, the Steve Fund Task Crisis Taskforce described some of the real threats and stressors and their consequences on the lives of students of color at this time:

> The COVID-19 pandemic has cast deeply-ingrained inequities in American society into stark view. Just as pre-existing conditions have made individuals more vulnerable to COVID-19, structural racism has made certain communities more vulnerable to the disease. For example, Black, Indigenous, Pacific Islander, and Latino populations are at least three times as likely to die from COVID-19 as their white neighbors. COVID-19 is disproportionately impacting people of color economically and psychologically as well. In the second quarter of 2020, the unemployment rate among Black and Latino people was more than 16%, compared to 12% for whites. With regard to psychological impacts, more than 30% of Asian-American adults say they have experienced interpersonal racism since the pandemic began, and Blacks and Latinos report higher rates of depression, anxiety, and trauma-related symptoms as a result of the pandemic than do whites.

Physical Health

The incidence and fatality of the Coronavirus disproportionately affects people of color, making these students more likely to know someone with the illness, have it themselves, need to go into quarantine or care for family members, and to grieve the loss of people they loved. Add to this the fact that some students of color may not have health insurance or may not want to seek testing or treatment due to language barriers or undocumented status. Many students of color, too, live in larger households, or may be those essential workers, increasing their risk of exposure, and increasing any worry they may feel about giving the virus to, or getting it from, their family members. Those losing employment hours or positions altogether may further be experiencing food and housing insecurity, with detrimental impact upon both physical and mental health.

Mental Health

In studying and surveying young adults a few years back, scholars deemed Generation Z the "loneliest generation," those born in the late 90s/2000 on up. Now we live in an age of social distancing, quarantining, stay-at-home orders, campus closures, and remote learning. This comes at a time when most young people traditionally expand their social connections and experiences in college life, and just when students need their social circles the most in all of the current societal upheaval.

Many of our college students pre-COVID may have had a real sense of family in the peers they knew on campus, in clubs or organizations to which they belonged, sports teams they played for, and campus offices in which they worked. They may have had a real sense of home in the dorms they lived in, campus venues they used to hang out in, or department spaces and faculty offices they frequented. Campus may have been the student's place to get away, may have been a place for food, shelter, stability, and structure. And the past few years and coming in the foreseeable future, joyous milestone events in students' lives and yearly celebrations may have been cancelled, postponed, or done remotely (birthdays, weddings, graduations, trips, and more), and the college experience many wanted or once had may feel largely lost to them.

Statistically, we have long known that young adulthood, where most of our students average (up to age 24 or 25), is the age of higher anxiety and depression. Mental health is more greatly threatened now in a global pandemic, with racial unrest, an economic downturn, and loss of daily life as they knew it, with possible changes to employment situations and homelife, as well, that cause further upset for the student. With job uncertainty and concerns may come greater anxiety or depression for the student, and we know that financial struggles impact any family with greater stress levels in the household. Family stress and strife are on the rise more generally as we cope with all being home under one roof much more this past year, and some students may have especially difficult and sometimes even dysfunctional home lives.

Heartbreakingly, the Centers for Disease Control reported that in a survey last fall, *one in four young adults, aged 18 to 24, reported that they had "seriously considered" suicide in the past month, with a disproportionately higher rate for some groups of people of color, such as Black and Hispanic.*

We know, too, that many of our students over age 25 may similarly be experiencing high stress, anxiety, and pain—while also more likely to have the added stressors of paying one's bills or providing for one's family, working longer hours, and taking care of and overseeing the teaching of one's children or older family members.

We also know that walking through life as a person of color means dealing with implicit bias, microaggressions, racism, and the threat of suspicion or harm, resulting in physiological and psychological costs that have been well-documented, including physical aches and pains, higher heart rate and blood pressure, nausea and ulcers, disturbances to eating and sleeping, and feelings of anxiety, depression, low self-worth, hopelessness, and helplessness.

And we know that students of color are less likely to reach out for help. Seeking help can be hard to do for anyone due to the sense of vulnerability of reaching out and opening up, feeling embarrassment, guilt, or shame, or the belief you should handle problems on your own. People of color experience additional obstacles: There may be language barriers or cultural bias against mental health counseling. Some students of color may hold a distrust of school or medical professional personnel based on experiences in K-12 education or life more generally. Young men of color often develop a hyper-masculinity, whereby seeking help is seen as weakness. And now that counseling is typically done remotely, students may not have the privacy they need to openly discuss any of their troubles, and especially family stressors, due to some cultures frowning upon the sharing of family issues with outsiders.

A Newer Way of Looking at Teaching and Learning

Given the global pandemic, economic uncertainty, and racial unrest in the nation, some have called for a *"trauma informed pedagogy"* that realizes stress and survival will take precedence over learning and can comprise optimal academic performance for our students. The mental energy and resources needed for course learning and assignment completion are diverted to the more dire threat of mental and physical well-being and survival. Stress, illness, loss, and grief make it harder to be motivated, harder to pay attention, harder to learn, harder to write papers and takes tests. And as we socially distance and learn remotely, the safety nets and support system on campus of friends, classmates, staff and faculty able to readily observe and support students is no longer firmly in place.

What We Can Do

As faculty and staff, we can support our students in the following ways:

- Have in place clear and caring syllabus policies concerning absence from Zoom class or assignments not turned in on time due to illness or grief. Flexibility in course grading and deadlines allows students in need time to grieve, mourn, recover, or take a mental health day.
- Start the term with introductions to help students get to know each other, and utilize online discussion boards and Zoom class discussions throughout the course to increase the sense of community and connection students have in their online learning.
- Start virtual classes and meetings with students with "how-are-you?" check-ins that students can respond to out loud or via chat or polls. This allows students to share not-so-great days and receive support from the class, and shows all students, even the ones who choose not to share, that people care.
- Create a "How is the pandemic affecting you and what are you doing to cope?" discussion board to let students share, support each other, and offer advice for coping.
- Keep a watchful eye and reach out to students who appear to be struggling academically or psychologically.
- Share campus Counseling services information and other needed resources with students repeatedly (because you never know when a reminder may come at just the right time for a student), and state how we all may have need for help at this time, to de-stigmatize it.
- Remember that not all communication has to be academic in nature—more personal messages from the instructor open the door to students feeling more comfortable to sharing their struggles.
- Help students to see the positive sides of our current situation, to be grateful for what they can, and create or allow times for humor, wonder, play and delight in your class space. Even if not on topic, there is great benefit, including to the class learning to come.

[For a further look at college student mental well-being during this time, please see:
The Active Minds Student Mental Health Survey (Fall 2020)
https://www.activeminds.org/active-minds-student-mental-health-survey/
and the Steve Fund Task Crisis Taskforce (Fall 2020) report,
Adapting and Innovating to Promote Mental Health and Emotional Well-Being of Young People of Color (PDF)
https://www.stevefund.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/CRISIS-RESPONSE-TASK-FORCE-STEVE-FUND-REPORT.pdf

For further information regarding "trauma informed pedagogy" during this time, please see
"Leveraging the Neuroscience of Now," by Mays Imad, Inside Higher Ed,
https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2020/06/03/seven-recommendations-helping-students-thrive-times-trauma
and "What Does Trauma-Informed Teaching Look Like?" by Beth McMurtrie, *Teaching*, The Chronicle of Higher Education
https://www.chronicle.com/newsletter/teaching/2020-06-04]

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Campus Resources

Below are listed some of the many campus services specifically geared to students who face socioeconomic and cultural equity challenges to getting their college education.

College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP)—
Helps students from migrant and seasonal farm worker backgrounds to successfully transition from high school and graduate from the university through first year support services to develop the skills necessary to persist and graduate from college.

Email: camp@csus.edu
CAMP Website https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/centers-programs/college-assistance-migrant-program/

DEGREES Project (Dedicated to Educating, Graduating, and Retaining Educational Equity Students)—
Connects students, with a focus on underrepresented students, with a variety of resources to promote their success in college that may include: early intervention, academic advising, graduation support, mentoring, and referral to other valuable campus resources. Students and faculty may look on the website listed below to find DEGREES Project Advisors and Coaches and their contact information.

Email: degreesproject-01@csus.edu
DEGREES Website https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/centers-programs/degrees-project/

Dreamer Resource Center (DRC)—
Helps undocumented students and students with mixed-status families to overcome challenges that get in the way of academic, personal, and professional excellence. Services may include: financial and academic guidance, support, events, a free legal Immigration Clinic, a Dream Connections support group, the Dream Leader Internship Program, DRC Student Emergency Grant, a Dreamer Experience Seminar to help students navigate college life as an undocumented student, and more.

Email: drc@csus.edu
DRC Website https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/centers-programs/dreamer-resource-center/

Extended Opportunity Program (EOP)—
Supports incoming freshmen and transfer students from disadvantaged economic and/or educational backgrounds by providing services that may include: academic advising, personal counseling, tutoring, financial aid advising, course placement and planning, learning communities, and more.

Email: eop-01@csus.edu
EOP Website https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/centers-programs/educational-opportunity-program/

Faculty Student Mentor Program (FSMP)—
Offers academic and personal support to students from traditionally low-income communities through mentoring in the discipline of choice, as well as opportunities to meet other students with similar academic, cultural, and social interests. FSMP may also provide assistance with study skills, time and stress management, course and major selection, and more.

Email: chao.vang@csus.edu
FSMP Website https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/retention-academic-success/faculty-student-mentor.html

First Generation Institute (FGI)—
Offers workshops, speakers, and more to increase awareness and skills needed to progress from first generation students to first generation professionals, helping to increase academic success and degree-to-work readiness.

FGI Website https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/centers-programs/first-generation-students/first-generation-institute.html

Student Academic Success and Educational Equity Programs (SASEEP) Office—
Encourages and supports students in persisting toward their educational goals to ensure the success of all students on campus while closing the achievement gap.

Email: saseep-01@csus.edu
SASEEP Website https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/retention-academic-success/

Asian Pacific Islander Desi American (APIDA) Center—
Offers social, cultural, educational, and advocacy programming to APIDA students. Services include: assistance transitioning from high school or community college, help with campus and community resources, college skills coaching, internship/employment information and referrals, information on financial aid, scholarship search/application support, and referral to graduate school.

Email: apida.center@csus.edu
APIDA Website https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/centers-programs/asian-pacific-islander-desi-american-student-center/

The Biracial and Multiracial Institute of Achievement (BMIA)—
Supports students representing multiple racial identities to advance their degree attainment goals and to emerge as visionary leaders transforming their communities, hopes, and dreams into instruments of inspiration and educational and occupational empowerment. Services include: advising and peer support, support for student retention and graduation, workshops and seminars related to contemporary issues and multi-racial identities, professional mentorship to cultivate successful skill development for the working world, and help with academic, professional, and life planning beyond college.

Email: watsonml@csus.edu
BMIA Website https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/centers-programs/biracial-multi-racial-institute-achievement.html

Cooper-Woodson College Enhancement (CWC) Program—
Offers an Educational Equity, African American Student Retention Program. CWC helps to shape a nurturing learning environment for CWC students through faculty, staff, students, and community members who are committed to upholding the traditions represented in African American culture and creating an African-based support structure and educational experience.

Email: cwmentor@csus.edu
CWC Website https://www.csus.edu/college/social-sciences-interdisciplinary-studies/student-programs-services/cooper-woodson-college-enhancement-program/

Full Circle Project (FCP)—
Assists Asian American and Pacific Islander students through their college careers, with services that may include: First Year Experience courses and learning community courses, academic advising, personal counseling, tutoring, mentoring, leadership development and service learning opportunities, and cultural enrichment activities.

Email: fullcircleproject@csus.edu
FCP Website https://www.csus.edu/center/full-circle-project/

Martin Luther King, Jr. Scholars Center—
Offers a home base of support such as academic services, workshops, and events, to ensure the success of African American students or students with an interest in African American heritage in their quest toward a degree at Sac State.

MLK Scholars Website https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/centers-programs/mlk-scholars/

Native Scholars and Transition Program (NSTP)—
Offers a program to support Native scholars through the admissions process, and transitioning into and succeeding in college, through lower-and upper-division learning communities, social and student support gatherings, cultural events, and more.

Email: jmejia@csus.edu
NSTP Website https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/retention-academic-success/native-scholars-transition-program.html

Project HMONG (Helping Mentor Our Next Generation)—
Strives to ensure the academic, career, and life success for Hmong and other underrepresented students by building a community of mentors and peers, and offering support, guidance, and encouragement, while promoting positive character development.

Email: project.hmong@csus.edu
Project HMONG Website https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/retention-academic-success/project-hmong.html

Serna Center—
Sponsors programs and events with a focus on the social, political, economic, historical and cultural realities and needs of Chicanxs/Latinxs students and students from other underrepresented backgrounds at Sacramento State, to establish a strong foundation that enriches cultural identity and develops a sense of *familia* within the campus. Services include: first-year advising, financial aid and scholarship guidance, internship/job search assistance, career exploration and guidance, leadership and communication skill development, mentorship, and civic engagement and advocacy support.

Email: sernacenter@csus.edu
Serna Center Website https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/centers-programs/serna-center/

College of Education Equity Program Office—
Provides advising and resources for those interested in a career in education and who are from specific student groups, such as financial aid and work study candidates, Cal Grant recipients, individuals that are first in family college students, and multilingual/multicultural learners. Services may include: academic advising, mentoring, assistance with scholarships and applications, and more.

Educational Equity Program Website https://www.csus.edu/college/education/student-support/equity-office.html

CSU-Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation (CSU-LSAMP) at Sacramento State—
Strives to increase participation in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) majors and help students to advance their education to a graduate program with services that may include: one-on-one advising, research opportunities, graduate school preparation, workshops, guest speakers, and more. Students who apply must belong to an underrepresented group in STEM fields, including any of the following: African American, Latino, Native American, and South Pacific Islander students, and first generation college students, students with disabilities, and students whose families live below the poverty line.

Email: campos@csus.edu
CSU-LSAMP Website https://www.csus.edu/college/natural-sciences-mathematics/csu-lsamp/

MESA Engineering Program (MEP)—
Offers students from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds support to increase their success in their engineering or computer science studies. Services may include: counseling, academic advising, tutoring, workshops, mentoring, opportunities for community service, a network of peer support, and a study center.

Email: ecs-mep@csus.edu
MEP Website https://www.csus.edu/college/engineering-computer-science/mesa-engineering-program/

RISE Program (Research Initiative for Scientific Enhancement)—
Offers a research training program designed to cultivate talented undergraduate students interested in pursuing biomedical research careers, and help them become more competent in their scientific disciplines, confident in their laboratory skills, and resilient to adversity in the classroom and lab settings. Students who apply must belong to an underrepresented group, including any of the following: African American, Latino, Native American, and South Pacific Islander students, and first generation college or educationally disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, and students whose families live below the poverty line.

Email: see@csus.edu
RISE Website https://www.csus.edu/college/natural-sciences-mathematics/center-science-math-success/research-initiative-scientific-enhancement.html

Graduate Diversity Program—
Provides assistance in the form of financial, academic, and community support to disadvantaged and underrepresented students who want to pursue graduate level work.

Email: graddiversity@csus.edu
Graduate Diversity Program Website https://www.csus.edu/academic-affairs/graduate-diversity/

McNair Scholars Program—
Offers a two-year program designed to prepare students for doctoral program admission and study. Selected students must be juniors or seniors who are the first in their families to go to college, and who meet federal low-income guidelines or are a member of a traditional underrepresented group in graduate education (African American, Hispanic/Latino, Pacific Islander, or American Indian/Alaskan Native).

Email: mcnair@csus.edu
McNair Scholars Website https://www.csus.edu/academic-affairs/mcnair-scholars-program/