

Final Report, 2022 Faculty Initiative Fund Tier II Grant Award

Culturally Responsive Writing Pedagogy as a Strategy for Closing Equity Gaps for Alaska Native and Other Racially and Ethnically Minoritized Students

Investigators

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Co-I: Michele Yatchmeneff, Executive Director of Alaska Native Education & Outreach of UAA

Project Activities

Upon receipt of the Tier II grant award in Dec. 2021, investigators began developing the Culturally Responsive Writing Pedagogy project. PI Andrew Harnish communicated with Alaska Native tech comm scholar, Dr. Cana Uluak Itchuaqiyag, and identified dates for her training on antiracist writing pedagogy at UAA. Co-PI Shane Castle worked with Facilities Management to secure a venue with technology suitable for sharing with partners and stakeholders. Jacqueline Cason, Harnish, and Castle communicated with UA faculty about the events and promoted the training via email blasts, social media posts, and print posters. The investigators made a special effort to reach out to adjunct faculty members, who are seldom afforded paid professional development opportunities. Carrie Aldrich, Martha Amore, and Jennifer McClung created and distributed a pre-workshop survey to gauge attendees' pre-workshop knowledge of antiracist writing pedagogy. Harnish coordinated with Dr. Itchuaqiyag, helping with her travel schedule and on-campus agenda.

Dr. Itchuaqiyag visited UAA from April 7-8, 2022. On the 7th, she met with Alaska Native and Indigenous UA students in a hybrid-format meeting. Executive Director of Alaska Native Education & Outreach at UAA, Michele Yatchmeneff, facilitated that meeting. Following the meeting, Dr. Itchuaqiyag presented a hybrid-format public-facing talk, "An Inuk in the Institution: Centering Clanwork & Community as a Matter of Course."

On April 8th, Dr. Itchuaqiyag led a hybrid-format training in antiracist pedagogy for UA writing instructors, with a focus on Alaska Native student inclusion. In the afternoon, instructors in the UAA Dept. of Writing shared their approaches to antiracist and culturally inclusive pedagogy. Workshop attendees were invited to submit an educational artifact to a shared drive, and Carrie Aldrich, Martha Amore, and Jennifer McClung created and distributed a post-workshop survey to assess how attendees' knowledge of antiracist and culturally inclusive pedagogy had changed.

Project Outcomes

20 Alaska Native and Indigenous students attended the hybrid student meeting with Yatchmeneff and Dr. Itchuaqiyaq. More than 100 people attended Dr. Itchuaqiyaq's public facing talk, with attendees in person and logging into Zoom all over the state. The hybrid-format pedagogy workshop included over 20 participants, 52% from UAA, 36% from UAF, and 12% from UAS. This included 13 adjunct faculty members.

Sixteen workshop attendees completed the post-workshop survey.

Summary of Post- Survey Responses:

A number of respondents noted that the training affirmed their understanding of antiracism. Several noted that the training expanded their understanding of how antiracism can be applied in the context of writing instruction and assessment.

Most respondents noted that they'll incorporate antiracist practices into future courses through course design, content selection, and community building. All but one respondent stated they plan to incorporate antiracist assessment methods into future courses, suggesting that the workshop (further) persuaded most attendees of the value of labor-based and student-driven assessment practices.

Survey respondents stated they plan to implement the following pedagogical activities and practices:

- Employing labor-based grading models;
- Encouraging students to draw on their community resources;
- Making tribal sovereignty an explicit part of instruction.

Project Challenges

The project unfolded as it was proposed, with no deviations from the proposal timeline. The complex logistics of hybrid-format public and departmental events presented one challenge. During the public-facing talk, Harnish and Castle both lost laptop power, preventing them from moderating the Zoom interface. Fortunately, there were no disruptions. During the workshop, a few attendees had difficulty logging in – once the workshops were underway, the waiting room went unmonitored at times. Only a few attendees noted sustained difficulties with this aspect of the training.

Another challenge had to do with audience misunderstandings of Dr. Itchuaqiyaq's recommendations. Misunderstandings included the assumption that culturally inclusive writing classes should be pass/fail and that antiracist writing pedagogy should move away from teaching students to value evidence-based writing and argumentation. In a follow-up email sent to participants, Harnish and Castle offered corrections in response to these points of confusion.

Audience anxiety about training recommendations presented another challenge. Sometimes, this anxiety verged on hostility. Several survey respondents expressed concerns about negative reactions from students resistant to expressly antiracist grading methods and/or lessons/assignments with multicultural themes. Another respondent admitted to worrying they might not be able to manage difficult conversations or student responses. A number of respondents also voiced concerns about the lack of overall institutional support for antiracist / culturally responsive / equitable instructional practices. In their follow-up email, Harnish and Castle addressed each of these concerns and reminded participants of the value of engaging in challenging, emotionally demanding pedagogical labor in order to help all students feel welcome in the writing classroom.

The final challenge concerned the pedagogical artifacts / deliverables that workshop participants produced. While they worked well as tools for reflection, most remained in need of some fine tuning. Rather than share unpolished work, Harnish and Castle created an “Instructional Resources” section in shared document, entitled “[Alaska Native Composition Pedagogy Resources](#),” which they transmitted to all workshop participants.

Future Plans

Dr. Itchuaqiyaq’s public talk and training further catalyzed culturally responsive and antiracist writing pedagogy in the UAA Department of Writing and in departments across UA. The ideas shared at the workshop informed the language in the job description for the new tenure-track faculty position in the UAA Department of Writing. They also affirmed the investigators’ plans to discuss antiracist writing pedagogy with faculty outside of English and Writing. In Spring ‘23, the investigators plan to offer a training in antiracist writing pedagogy open to all UAA faculty. In sum, the project strengthened, and continues to strengthen, writing instruction at UAA and across the UA system.