

**Decolonising SOAS
Learning and Teaching Toolkit
for
Programme and Module Convenors**

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This toolkit is intended to act as a briefing for programme and module convenors, on what ‘decolonising’ learning and teaching might entail. At its root it is about making what we teach and how we teach it more responsive to the problems of colonial and racialised privilege and discrimination within our teaching practice.

This is not a set of prescriptions but a set of suggestions and ideas for colleagues and students to think through, individually and collectively. It is animated by a spirit of critical dialogue within education, and is also connected to wider institutional questions about the principles and practices of good teaching – in particular work on racialised attainment and inclusive pedagogy. Its aim is to stimulate reflection, dialogue and changes in teaching practice that reflect our values as an intellectual community and as an institution.

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Decolonising SOAS: A short background

The Decolonising SOAS Working Group was established in 2016 in response to strong [student interest in 'Decolonising the Curriculum'](#), led by student sabbatical officers and the student-run [Decolonising Our Minds Society](#), embedded in a wider history of anti-racist activity at SOAS. The Working Group comprises a range of staff and students from around the School, including Student Union sabbatical officers and other postgraduate and undergraduate students, colleagues from Student Advice and Wellbeing, academic colleagues from different fields, GTAs, colleagues working on Quality Assurance and Learning and Teaching matters and the Pro-Director for Learning and Teaching.

It has since been working on what this wider agenda might mean at SOAS and has introduced the issues to a number of School committees and audiences of staff and students. Significantly, the [Decolonising SOAS Vision](#) and Action Plan was approved by SOAS Academic Board in November 2017, and is included here as an Appendix.

This toolkit was circulated around the School in draft form at the end of January 2018, after which five meetings were held to get feedback and discussion in February. The Working Group has met to discuss and confirm edits, and it will be put to Academic Board for its approval on 6th June 2018.

Why Decolonise? Assumptions underpinning the toolkit

In this section, we identify the background working assumptions of this project in order to inform this work on what it means to 'decolonise' curricula and pedagogy. For the purposes of this toolkit these are stated and outlined rather than extensively evidenced, but it is an important form of accountability for the project that we make them explicit. We however encourage a dialogue about these assumptions and the extent to which they can be understood as shared.

What is meant by 'Decolonising SOAS'

1. Whilst 'decolonisation' is a concept that can be understood in different ways: in our usage, it connects contemporary racialised disadvantages with wider historical processes of colonialism, seeks to expose and transform them through forms of collective reflection and action. *'Decolonising SOAS' therefore refers to thought and action within the university to redress forms of disadvantage associated with racism and colonialism.*¹
2. A background assumption for us is that global histories of Western domination have had the effect of limiting what counts as authoritative knowledge, whose knowledge is recognised, what universities teach and how they teach it.²

¹ NB The School has a number of policies relevant to racial discrimination, including the [Respect at SOAS](#) Policy and codes of student and staff conduct. However, these tend to be oriented toward instances of explicit and direct verbal or physical abuse.

² Clearly, Western empires are not the only empires with presence and significance in world history. Whilst they are the most relevance reference point for the context of the work we are doing, in other contexts there will be multiple legacies to contend with. 'Decolonisation' as a project is something that is necessarily context-specific in terms of its aims and practices, as evidenced by the variety of

3. In SOAS's case, these hierarchies are also entwined with, and highlighted by, the colonial roots of the institution and the various disciplines it teaches.³
4. In the most recent Students' Union all-student survey on Strategic Priorities, 'Decolonising the Curriculum' came top.
5. Staff and students at SOAS and elsewhere have been aware of these dynamics to different degrees for some years, and some have already taken steps to rework their research, teaching and outreach practices in order to address them.
6. The global dominance of written English as the central shared language for academic communication is a significant factor in producing inequalities in the access to and production of academic knowledge.
7. There is a particular opportunity to work with SOAS' specialisms in linguistic and regional expertise in order to promote decolonising principles in higher education

Race and racism

8. A significant element of the Decolonising SOAS agenda is to challenge and overturn forms of racialised disadvantage in higher education.
9. *Racialisation is a political phenomenon*, underpinned by specific historical processes including colonialism and imperialism, resulting in the production of multiple hierarchies (material, political, epistemic) based on ascribed identity. We understand the category of 'race' as socially constructed and an effect of racism.
10. Racism is broadly understood as forms of discrimination and/or disadvantage accruing from processes of racialisation, i.e. not just interpersonal forms of verbal abuse. Structural racism is understood as the patterned production of hierarchical entitlements and life-chances between racially-identified groups, based on forms of social control. These are often reproduced in public institutions such as the criminal justice system, the health system and education.
11. Many of these patterns are reproduced unconsciously or impersonally rather than consciously and personally, but are equally damaging and in need of redress.
12. Racialised bias is not only demonstrated by people racialised as white.
13. Islamophobia and anti-Semitism are understood as forms of racism.⁴

Experiences of racialisation and racism

14. In the UK today, racialisation *produces different experiences of social life*, which intersect with structures of class, gender, religion, disability, sexuality and so on; such experiences are diverse in form.
15. BME staff and students are most likely to identify these hierarchies explicitly and as affecting them negatively, a view often based on personal experiences and those of others around them.
16. Conversely, part of the experience of racialised differentiation is the possibility of *not* identifying as being racialised if racialised as white.

thought and action taking place in the UK, South Africa, South America, Australia and former Soviet Republics.

³ Brown, Ian (2016). *The School of Oriental and African Studies: Imperial Training and the Expansion of Learning*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁴ We are attentive to the debates around religious freedom, racism and freedom of speech generated by these terms; in both cases we mean prejudice against people based on their assumed religious affiliation rather than critical inquiry or criticism of religious ideas themselves.

17. It can be difficult to trace explicitly how a particular characteristic leads to a specific disadvantage for a named individual but this does not mean it has not happened. Our endeavour is based on a willingness and openness to understand and examine these mechanisms.

Racialised inequalities in Higher Education and at SOAS

18. There are well-documented inequalities within Higher Education for BME students at all stages, but most notably evidenced in admissions to university and in degree attainment.
19. Within SOAS, we have quantitative evidence of the following racialised inequalities:
- White/BME attainment gap for students in module and degree outcomes⁵
 - White/BME promotion / seniority in staff
 - Differential career pathways for jobs in which White/BME workers predominate
20. We also have qualitative evidence of the following aspects of BME student experiences⁶:
- Sense of exclusion / being differently racialised in classroom and out-of-classroom settings
 - Sense that academic content of courses asymmetrically objectifies groups / peoples not racialised as white
 - Sense that knowledge / perspectives presented on issue are predominantly limited to those produced by/consonant with a specific group
 - Sense that pedagogies reproduce forms of privilege and depend on existing forms of confidence / entitlement
 - Sense that support systems / personnel may be unsympathetic to specific personal issues or people
21. These inequalities are not acceptable to us as an institution and we wish to address them.

Transformation through higher education

22. Transforming society in order to eradicate forms of racialised disadvantage is an enormous task; whilst we must aim to transform that over which we have control, there are a number of factors which are also not within the control of the institution.
23. The perspective offered here begins from the premise that both the 'assimilationist' model and the 'multicultural' model for dealing with racialised inequalities are inadequate. The 'assimilationist' model tends to assume that HE is fundamentally colour-blind / meritocratic, and that colonialism is over. The 'multiculturalist' model tends to assume that knowledges, cultures, groups are fundamentally *separate*, and that the job of decolonisation is the re-discovery of 'authentic' or 'traditional' cultures.
24. We argue instead for a 'transformational' model, which recognises the necessarily political character of higher education, the political character of racialisation and the interconnected character of various knowledges and cultures. A liberation-oriented

⁵ More detail on this is available in the report on the [BME Attainment Gap approved by Academic Board on 15th June 2017](#)

⁶ These are documented in the recent Students' Union [Degrees of Racism](#) report and further developed in conversation with BME students.

education is one which offers all students and teachers the tools and opportunities to work against forms of structural oppression.

25. The ultimate goal of Decolonising SOAS, as well as wider work on Inclusion, is about finding a way to make the educational environment as equal and just as possible, as well as making it liveable, welcoming and supportive for a wide array of students whilst fulfilling our academic mission of cultivating knowledge, ideas and skills.
26. Whilst this specific project may only have a limited effect on wider societal drivers of racism we hope to generate greater reflexivity and awareness of what might be done to challenge it.

Decolonising Curricula and Pedagogies

As teachers, we want to think about how to overcome the intellectual limits and structural disadvantages embedded in current curricula and pedagogies. These two elements are connected, but they are not the same. By 'curriculum' we mean the content of modules and programmes; by 'pedagogy' we mean the methods we use for teaching, assessment and academic support. We have to be frank and say that we are experimenting here on both fronts, that we offer no straightforward 'solutions' to these problems, and that there is often conflicting evidence over 'what works' for a particular end. In this sense it is important to remain open-minded about what we consider useful or effective.

What we can say is that here are some questions which we think might be useful to us as teachers and learners in dealing with the problems identified above. We expect that many of us might already be incorporating these questions and insights, others will be working with materials and methods that we have not broached, and still others will be sceptical about the need to do any of this.

Academic Freedom and Teaching Responsibilities

Central to all work on curricula and pedagogies is the recognition that individual programme convenors and module convenors are both responsible for and knowledgeable about their areas of teaching; authoritatively so. We also recognise and value academic freedom as underpinned by the freedom to make academic judgements, challenge received wisdom or popular opinion and to teach according to pedagogical judgements. This principle remains central to module and programme design across the institution. However, this is also integrated into wider institutional standards about teaching and learning, which also respond to a set of nationally and internationally driven regulations and codes.

What follows are not a set of prescriptions for how one must design or teach a module or programme, but a structured set of questions which will be useful in provoking reflection on the extent to which our teaching reproduces structures of racialised disadvantage or exclusion. Ideally, these will stimulate dialogue, debate and collaboration amongst teachers and students around how to address specific subjects and pedagogical challenges. We anticipate that the challenges for specific modules, programmes, disciplines, research areas and Departments will vary in important ways. We recommend that colleagues take the time to generate their own questions relevant to their disciplines or areas of teaching.

Considering the above, we also encourage feedback and criticism of these prompts and questions. We recognise that the politics and practices of decolonising or anti-racism are neither singular nor fixed and constantly subject to reappraisal and contestation. We moreover acknowledge that programme and module convenors are best placed to assess how decolonising practices might play out in the design of teaching. We therefore hope that through the process of feedback and critical engagement with these proposals that they might be refined and strengthened.

Curricula

In this discussion, 'curricula' is taken to mean *what* we teach (the 'how' is covered below within pedagogy). The curriculum can be understood as both *informative* and *performative* in its functions. 'Informative' here means that it conveys specific content related to the subject of study; 'performative' means that it also defines the parameters of that topic and assigns some level of authoritative weight to whatever content is included within it. Put otherwise, we might say that every curriculum includes some elements (arguments, concepts, formulae, voices, perspectives, ideas) and leaves others out.

There are a range of reasons why academics might consciously choose to include some things and leave others out, including:

- Formally standardised components constitutive of the topic (e.g. grammar, mathematical functions, aspects of law or regulation)
- Traditions of knowledge in a particular field, acquired through prior learning or other authoritative sources
- Recent developments in a field or relevant current events
- Pedagogical reflections (individual or collective) on the needs of the subject/student body
- Research expertise of a particular scholar

It is also possible to claim that on average, however, the tendencies within academic knowledge (re)production have contributed in many instances to:

- *Informatively*, the content of syllabi employing concepts, ideas and perspectives that centre or normalise constructions of 'Westernness' or 'whiteness' as basic reference points for human society
- *Performatively*, a very significant presence for scholars racialised as white, gendered as male and located, often by virtue of class privileges, within a limited range of Western institutions or canons

These are, of course, entirely unsurprising if one recognises that the historical development of modern academic institutions and education systems has taken place in a world shaped by, amongst other things, empire, colonialism, patriarchy, capitalism and Anglo-American domination. One may further acknowledge that there is no 'view from nowhere' or Archimedean point from which to begin thinking about a subject. Nonetheless, if we recognise these historical realities, we may also recognise that these tendencies can be both intellectually limiting and aspirationally disempowering, and for some students more than others. Whilst we do not take the view that the origin, demographic profile or location of an individual author determines their views or insight on a particular topic, we do think that at an aggregate level these limits often occur.

Given the increasing diversity of resources we now have for teaching and learning about different subjects, however, it should be increasingly possible to diversify perspectives and representation within curricula on a range of subjects whilst maintaining core academic principles. This effort necessarily requires the application of both academic labour and expertise. However, it is also based on the cultivation of pedagogical empathy and imagination within the process of curriculum development.

Relatedly, with regard to material that may be considered discomfiting or prospectively offensive, we do not take the view that such material should always be excluded with regards to the subjects we teach. However, we ask teachers in particular to reflect on ways in which contentious material is used and presented, particularly through signalling or acknowledging this at the time of engagement. We also encourage teachers to solicit feedback from students about the teaching of such material.

What follows are a set of very generic prompt questions and rationales around design and content which module and programme convenors may wish to think about. We ask convenors to read through these questions alongside their programme and module guides, and to be willing to discuss these elements with colleagues and students. What we hope is that departments, disciplines or other clusters within them might be able to refine the prompt questions or write supplementary ones for particular programmes.

Curricula: Questions for Module and Programme convenors

- To what extent does the content of my/our syllabus/programme presume a particular profile / mindset of student and their orientation to the world?
 - What are the characteristics of this profile?
 - Who is represented as an 'Other' in my teaching and how?
 - Is this potentially problematic and for whom?
 - Are there ways of thinking about the material or subject matter from different perspectives?
- To what extent does my/our syllabus/programme allow students to understand the origins and purposes of this field of study in its historical context?
 - Could such an understanding, if absent, be introduced into core or introductory material?
- To what extent does my/our syllabus/programme acknowledge / cultivate an appreciation for diverse entry points around a particular subject?
 - To the extent that it does so, are these an afterthought or more central to the mode of study?
- Does the syllabus/programme allow for/encourage a critical approach to received/authoritative texts as a central feature of study, and not just something supplementary?
- Could particular topics/modules or readings on my syllabus/programme be potentially traumatic or painful to students either in general or in particular?
 - Should this be examined / acknowledged / managed?
 - If so, how?
- What is the demographic profile of authors on the syllabus / programme?
 - What is the effect of this on the diversity of views with which the students are presented?
 - What is the effect of this on student engagement?

- Is the profile of authors acknowledged and examined as part of the learning aims and outcomes of the syllabus/ programme?
-
- To what extent does the programme design and delivery enable, encourage or require students to study non-European languages?
- Do programmes / modules enable the use of non-English sources in the curriculum?

Suggested adaptations

- Re-organise material in the syllabus to bring different issues to prominence; in particular through bringing various kinds of critical perspectives to the earlier sessions
- Consult a wider range of journals or textbooks for source materials, particularly journals located in the global South which may help capture different debates or perspectives
- Talk to colleagues in the discipline who specialise in different research areas to get recommendations
- Read articles about pedagogy in your field which speak to questions of diversity, coloniality, inclusion and critical thinking
- Talk to students about what kinds of content they would like to see addressed
- Keep open some spaces in the course to teach around topics identified by students in that year
- Teach 'controversies' around key issues in the field or think about how to engage topics dialogically
- Teach through the juxtaposition of material from different areas
- Contextualise the subject in its historical moment, making explicit the kinds of research programmes, assumptions and aspirations that generated it
- Facilitate students' engagement with language learning within programme design
- Diversify the kinds of source material that come into the classroom; intelligent writing or comment on particular issues might well be available online in non-academic form
- Signal / confront issues that may arise around potentially distressing topics

Case Study: Introduction to International Relations

Dr Kerem Nişancıoğlu⁷

In the module 'Introduction to International Relations (IR)', we were faced with problems common to the teaching of many disciplines. Intro to IR is a core, compulsory module delivered to first-year undergraduates over the course of a full academic year. This module is therefore very much foundational to the teaching of our entire IR programme and formative for students who are often engaging with the discipline for the first time.

As such, Intro to IR posed a series of challenges around navigating the teaching of 'the canon' alongside hitherto more marginalised perspectives (and especially those marginalised through practices of colonialism). The simple inclusion of topics such as postcolonialism, feminism and Marxism went some way to addressing this challenge. However, there remained a hierarchical ordering of topics, with the canon (realism and liberalism) opening the module and subsequently becoming the frame of reference or disciplinary norm against which marginal perspectives were presented and compared.

To navigate this issue, we redesigned the course so that it opened with 4 weeks of 'disciplinary framing.' This involved taking a general look at the study of international relations in four ways:

- 1. What are the historical origins of IR? Here we contextualised the emergence of the discipline in the histories of colonialism and empire, and examined how IR has been saturated by this context. This included, for example, how IR as a discipline emerges in an 'age of empires', to better manage relations between empires.*
- 2. How and why have the colonial context and authors discussing the colonial context been erased or ignored by 'the canon'? And what effects has this erasure had on the subsequent development of the discipline? This included exploring why IR talks about relations among states but not relations among empires and asking why do we not study W. E. B. Du Bois' theorisation of WWI.*
- 3. How has the methodological priority for positivist approaches in IR informed particular ideas of who are appropriate 'subjects' and 'objects' of research and knowledge? Or in other words, who has been considered 'knowers' and who has been designated as 'known' or 'knowable'?*
- 4. How have different spatial ontologies of IR – 'international', 'global', 'civilizational', 'colonial' – generated distinct disciplinary perspectives, research questions and political issues within the study of IR?*

Together, the idea was to teach students that relationships of power and hierarchy rooted in colonialism have informed the making of IR as a discipline and informed the creation of particular kinds of knowledge within the discipline. Doing so helped students critically engage with – rather than passively receive – the canon from the outset.

⁷ We will collect and include a wider set of case studies around the institution on decolonising practice for both curriculum and pedagogical dimensions - please do volunteer examples to the group [decolonisation@soas.ac.uk]

Think-piece: Decolonisation Through Language**Dr Alena Rettová**

In May 2017, Dr Alena Rettová gave a lecture on the significance of language learning to the project of decolonisation, making a strong argument for why an English-only approach is an inadequate means of pursuing these goals. The whole lecture is highly recommended and can be watched in full [here](#). The key points made include:

- *Postcolonial thought can remain trapped in the relations between Europeans and their others, continuing a form of Eurocentrism*
- *Language learning is fundamental for expanding mental and epistemic horizons, particularly given limiting horizons of colonialism*
- *The learning of different languages activates different imaginaries, ways of being, temporal horizons and understandings of culture*
- *It also requires the cultivation of humility in order to learn languages, a key ethos within decolonisation, with the goal of ultimately transforming the Self*
- *Language learning, beyond its 'professional' value, is therefore fundamental to decolonising education*

Case Study: MA Students revise the Postcolonial Theory and Practice Syllabus**Suhaiymah Manzoor-Khan**

In 2016-17, a group of four students looked at their core syllabus in the MA Postcolonial Studies and began discussing how to further 'decolonise' the curriculum and pedagogical directions of the syllabus. They have been collaborating / crowdsourcing ideas online since 2017. Specific changes which have been suggested include:

- *Updating the course objectives to expand critical awareness of the conditions of knowledge production*
- *Widening the kinds of sources used as learning materials for students*
- *Working with different epistemic traditions within the classroom*
- *Diversifying assessment to include creative pieces in a variety of formats*
- *Integrating a trip week / community visit to examine questions of diaspora and race*

The syllabus, which is a work in progress, can be viewed [here](#).

Case Study: Introduction to Political Theory
Dr Manjeet Ramgotra⁸

This course is designed to give students an understanding of key concepts that are foundational to politics. It does so by examining theoretical texts that explore these ideas in depth as well as in context and across time and space. This is a foundational course taught across most undergraduate politics courses; it is organised either historically or conceptually according to ideologies or to concepts. It mainly surveys thinkers from the classical Greco-Roman world to the contemporary Anglo-American present and gives a particular understanding of history and of the development of ideas and politics over time notably in relation to the evolution of liberal democracy.

In decolonising this course, we have organised it according to key concepts and moments and have included a variety of voices to demonstrate how ideas are thought through different perspectives and positions. With Charles Mills, we begin by problematising the canon and invite students to think about which thinkers they would like to learn. Then we look at what politics is and its boundaries and juxtapose to contrasting views forwarded by Aristotle and bell hooks. This allows us within the first few weeks to present and critically consider classical constructions of political order, citizenship, race, gender, power, voice, oppression and silencing. From this point, we begin to look at how knowledge and power are constructed through the lens of Plato, Hobbes, Rousseau. After which we read feminist critiques of the principles on which social contract theory is built, such as consent, property and patriarchy.

The course then evolves into more critical thinking of Marxism, non-violent and violent resistance (Thoreau, Gandhi, Fanon), contemporary understandings of power/knowledge (Foucault, Arendt), subaltern critiques of post-modernity (Spivak). The course covers main ideas of classical, Enlightenment, modern, postmodern and postcolonial thought but does not organize these as either as a historical narrative of chronological progress or according to ideologies in which feminism and postcolonialism are added at the end. Rather it integrates these perspectives according to questions and concepts. The course moves back and forth across time to show how ideas evolve or are conserved and we draw attention to ruptures and change. This gives the course a dynamic that engages students and gets them to think of politics from a variety of angles.

⁸ See also Ramgotra, M (2015) 'On teaching political theory to undergraduates', *Political Studies Association Women and Politics Specialist Group* blog: <https://psawomenpolitics.com/2015/12/21/on-teaching-political-theory-to-undergraduates/>

Pedagogies

Pedagogy essentially refers to *how* we teach curricula. It refers to, for example:

- The design of modules, programmes and learning outcomes
- The mode of delivery / use of contact hours
- The classroom environment
- Student preparation work
- Assessment and feedback
- The wider institutional environment

In a wider sense, all of these elements should of course be informed by a sense of what we understand the purpose of education to be and our understanding of how education works in practice.

Questions of inclusive pedagogy can be difficult for academics in particular to grasp, given that many of them have been high-achievers academically, may experience the present systems to be broadly fair and meritocratic, traditionally fit a different kind of demographic profile, and are now so used to academic practices and language that most of it seems totally transparent and natural. Moreover, there is the wider impression that content may matter more than the form of delivery in terms of education.

However, this is not necessarily the starting point for many of our students, particularly those from non-traditional academic backgrounds. Transparency and fluency in various academic protocols, environments, and confidence in one's entitlement to be there cannot be taken for granted but need be cultivated through pedagogical practices. Moreover, these students may face ongoing forms of prejudice inside and outside the classroom that affects their journey. Recognising these inequalities is not to stigmatise the students themselves but to recognise that each experiences different social, educational, political and economic conditions prior to their entry into, and during their participation in, higher education. To the extent that inclusive pedagogies make a radical proposition, it is the proposition that higher education *should* seek to level the playing field for students from different backgrounds as far as possible, and that its responsibilities to all students should respond to different student needs. This is a political commitment as much as it is a pedagogical one.

Understood through a 'decolonising' lens, it is the proposition that students are part of a world in which relations of racialised colonial difference have significant effects in structuring life-chances unequally, and that higher education for students should respond by challenging and counteracting the structures that produce these inequalities. Also taking cues from critical pedagogical traditions, a 'decolonising' approach can be understood as empowering students both to navigate their environments and to cultivate their own critical thinking and practice.

A central question raised by the persistence of the BME attainment gap⁹ is about how existing pedagogical practice contributes to our current situation. The thinking and

⁹ There is increasing research on the BME attainment gap. An important report by Broecke and Nicholls (2007) demonstrates that the gap persists but is significantly reduced by controlling for other variables such as gender, social deprivation, disability and so on: Broecke, S. and Nicholls, T. (2007)

recommendations here closely overlap with work within SOAS on Inclusion in our pedagogy, and we make the working assumption that on the pedagogical front that the wider principles for inclusive pedagogy will be effective for BME students as well.¹⁰ This view reflects the input of BME students and student representatives within the working group, and corresponds to the findings that factors such as social class and prior educational experience are significant elements within the wider pattern of BME attainment, although research has demonstrated that it is not reducible to this. What follows below are questions addressed both to generic considerations for inclusions, as well as those which might be more specific to the experiences of BME students.

Pedagogies: Questions for teachers

- Is my/our pedagogy *transparent* in terms of a) what students are expected to learn, b) how they are expected to learn it and demonstrate their learning, and c) how it is assessed?
 - Are learning outcomes and objectives for the course clear, and are they followed in particular modules / topics?
 - Are learning materials provided in an accessible format and in a timely way?
 - Do teachers have/make the opportunity to assess where the students are upon arrival?
 - Perhaps especially for first year students, is support given on how to read and write for academic purposes, how to organise time, how to access resources and assistance?
 - Is this timetabled into regular teaching or added as an optional extra?
 - Does assessment clearly match the learning outcomes and the skills taught by the course?
 - To what extent does it also depend on or reward other skills and capacities not specifically taught by the course?
 - Is there a diversity of assessment methods?
 - Does feedback correspond to rubric and does it show students how to progress?
 - Are assessments recognised as an opportunity to develop skills as well as knowledge?
 - Is there an opportunity to negotiate assessment methods with the students?

Ethnicity and Degree Attainment. DfES Research Report No RW92. London: DIUS Accessed 22/12/2017 here <http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/6846/1/RW92.pdf> Another useful resource is a recent literature review conducted at the University of Sheffield: Miller, M. (2016) *The Ethnicity Attainment Gap: Literature Review*, University of Sheffield Widening Participation Research and Evaluation Unit. Accessed 22/12/2017 here: https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.661523!/file/BME_Attainment_Gap_Literature_Review_EXT_ERNAL_-_Miriam_Miller.pdf

¹⁰ Further resources for inclusive pedagogy can be found on the [School Sharepoint](#) pages.

- Are deadlines synchronised across programmes?
 - Does regular feedback from students and GTAs help to inform judgements around the clarity of pedagogy?
- Do the dynamics of the lecture / seminar / tutorial / office hour help to engage students who have been discouraged to actively participate or take risks in academic work as a result of structural and interpersonal racism?¹¹
 - To what extent are these patterns established from the outset?
 - Are GTAs supported in helping to manage these dynamics?
 - In what way do persisting racialised and other dynamics reinforce pattern of participation/withdrawal?
- To what extent are teachers and students aware of what might constitute racist or racialising behaviour in a learning context? These might include manifestations of personal disrespect, such as cutting students off, laughing at them or speaking over them; expecting someone to act as a 'spokesperson' for a particular group or view; the stigmatisation of different pathways into education or linguistic skills which may be associated with ethnicity; unconscious forms of bias in terms of recognition, expectations and personal interactions; as well as more obvious forms of discrimination and bias.
 - Is there an understanding of how these can be addressed?
 - Is space and time given in modules, lectures, seminars and office hours for students to to openly acknowledged and confront this?
 - Do students have a place to go to discuss these matters?
- Are programme and module convenors aware of patterns of racialised attainment in the programme / module?
 - Are there modules/programmes where gaps are smaller and from which best practice might be learned?
- Are there adequate means of giving feedback on modules and programmes that are open to students and staff on how teaching is delivered, in line with the questions raised above?
- Are students given opportunities in their learning to widen their circles of contact or experience?
- Are students trained in how to work with, challenge and synthesise different points of view?
- How are students' own challenges and aspirations factored into the kinds of pedagogy practiced? Do we know what they are?

¹¹ The assumption here is not that BME students are necessarily lacking in confidence but a recognition that prior experiences of racism can affect students' sense of ease/entitlement in various spaces, and conversely the sense of ease/entitlement experienced by those who have not experienced racism. NB Experiences of ease/unease can also be strongly linked to social class, gender, disability, sexuality and other social factors.

Suggested adaptations

- Ensure transparency and clarity around all aspects of the teaching and learning in terms of expectations, outcomes, opportunities
- Define learning outcomes in a way which allows students to engage in different ways with the material
- Teach the material in a way which allows students to make connections to their existing knowledges and experiences (and if these are not clear to you, ask the students)
- Manage the classroom in order to generate participation and confidence amongst all students; proactively disrupt patterns of dominance emergent in classroom discussions by restructuring the conversation or workflow
- Spend time with students individually wherever possible
- Train course convenors and tutorial teachers in techniques for classroom management
- Diversify assessment practices to recognise and cultivate different skill sets
- Particularly for first year classes, devise assessment that builds up skills iteratively
- Make time in core teaching to go through assessment expectations explicitly
- Schedule time for conversations with students about pedagogical matters and signal willingness to engage with issues related to inequalities and discrimination
- Have conversations about race and racism with colleagues and students
- Within the Department, identify someone who might act as an advisor or conduit for issues related to racism
- Find ways to give students a wider circle of contacts or experience within the programme design through visits, engagement with people outside university or new kinds of material

Close Up on a Module: The Story of African Film¹²

Dr Lindiwe Dovey

This case study hopes to stimulate further conversations and practical work at SOAS around the transformation of our curriculum, syllabi, and pedagogical practices in line with our mission to decolonise teaching and learning. Conceptualised through collaborative work with SOAS students who have taken my module “The Story of African Film”, the case study focuses on the reasons for and effects of several key changes I have made to the module, including: the module title; the core films in the syllabus; the core readings in the syllabus; and the pedagogical style.

In explaining the rationale for the changes I have made to the module, the case study draws on and foregrounds the words of theorists who have had a transformational impact on the way that I think about pedagogy in relation to decolonisation: Paulo Freire, bell hooks, Jill Carter, and Sara Ahmed. In particular I am concerned with what happens in what Jill Carter calls “intercultural classrooms”, and the necessity of changing our syllabi and pedagogical practices to create space for the diversity of life experiences, views and interpretations of students in such classrooms to influence how we think about what constitutes knowledge itself.

*My own response to this necessity involved foregrounding my own positionality and lived experience in relation to the module’s subject matter, making space for more African-made films, and transgressing disciplinary boundaries to include radical readings from beyond Film Studies. In the final analysis, I argue that teaching has to be seen not only as an intellectual activity, but also as a form of activism and healing in which we have to “respect” and “care for” the souls of our students so that “learning can most deeply and intimately begin” (hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 1994), and so that we can work together towards alternative, brighter futures.*

Student Experiences: Queer and Feminist Diaspora Studies

Yaşar Ohle (LLM Gender and Law) and Alia Schwelling (MA Migration and Diaspora Studies)

The class ‘Queer and Feminist Diaspora Studies’ taught by Dr Alyoxsa Tudor scrutinises the issues of migration, diaspora, sexism, racism and (post)colonialism from a queer and feminist perspective. It teaches complex theoretical frameworks dealing with the aforementioned issues in a manner that is not only accessible to the students but also spoke directly to their own lived experience. The students in this class represented various positionalities, coming from diverse backgrounds and communities. While this could have

¹² The full case study for ‘The Story of African Film’ can be accessed directly from Lindiwe at ld18@soas.ac.uk and on the Decolonising the University BLE site [here](#).

had the potential to make in-depth discussion of certain topics complicated as they affect students on a personal level, the group managed to have respectful discussions even when there was controversy. This was facilitated by the lecturer's approach to teaching. They managed to explicitly address power dynamics and issues arising from different positionalities through addressing the complexity of the issues and dissecting them in a manner that allowed for a nuanced but opinionated analysis.

The lecturer asked the students to treat the issues discussed with sensitivity due to their hurtful potential to some students. Furthermore, the lecturer addressed their own positionality and encouraged students to do the same, thereby shifting focus to the power dynamics at hand. The sharing of personal perspectives and experiences by the lecturer fostered an atmosphere where students felt safe enough to do the same. By doing so, the lecturer created a respectful and caring environment where the group could engage in fruitful exchanges of ideas and opinions. While this approach might seem common-sense at first, most students had never experienced an environment that felt as comfortable and safe to discuss such issues at a university before. Addressing power dynamics at play and emphasising the importance to treat the topics with sensitivity was enormously helpful in creating a rather safe space to discuss issues that deeply affect the students involved on a personal level.

Using the toolkit within Departments

Whilst this toolkit is designed to motivate discussion and action around teaching and learning, it is not intended to act as a disciplinary mechanism. We trust that many colleagues will want to engage with the issues raised and will do so in their own way. As a prompt / reminder, the Student Evaluation of Modules will include a question about diversity, inclusion and structural inequalities, and the Annual Programme Review will ask convenors whether this toolkit has been discussed. However, we also suggest the following forums as potential spaces to engage with the toolkit collectively:

- Department Meetings
- Teaching Away Days
- An annual forum on the issues raised by this toolkit for staff and students, potentially in the first term, with a view to asking second and third year students about their past experiences
- Smaller focus groups

Conclusion

This toolkit aims to promote awareness and reflection about forms of racialised disadvantage that can be potentially mitigated through revising approaches to curriculum and pedagogy. It is necessarily generic and we anticipate it will be possible to ask more pointed questions at the level of specific subjects or areas. We nonetheless encourage colleagues to engage with these issues proactively, to share their experiences and ideas, to challenge, debate and revise the ideas and to identify where their own teaching can be transformed. We also understand that this kind of work can be time-intensive and we encourage Departments to help facilitate this work by directing some collective resources towards the project.

Decolonising SOAS Working Group
May 2018

If you have comments or questions, or would like to be included in the Working Group please email decolonisation@soas.ac.uk

Appendix: Decolonising SOAS Vision

As agreed by Academic Board, November 2017

Vision

SOAS will continue to address the need for decolonisation by:

- Supporting further recognition and debate about the wide, complex and varied impacts of colonialism, imperialism and racism in shaping our university,
- Embedding within our policies and practices a deeper understanding that these impacts produce and reproduce injustices and inequalities within education,
- A stronger commitment to actively make redress for such impacts through ongoing collective dialogue within the university and through our public obligations,
- The provision of institution-level support to embed this understanding in SOAS's contribution as a public university in the service of the wider world.

This entails a commitment to:

- A curriculum review process that addresses the preceding bullet points, challenges Eurocentrism and develops a toolkit to support further critical, nuanced and ongoing review of our teaching.
- Student systems and pedagogy that seek to redress access, engagement and attainment gaps caused by structural inequalities at all levels of study.
- Human Resources policies which seek to redress pay, workload, status and career path differentials for groups of staff subject to structural inequalities.
- A research agenda which enables us to take forward a range of questions related to decolonisation.
- Practices of reflective intellectual collaboration with institutions and researchers from the Global South as co-producers of knowledge.
- Forms of public engagement within London, the UK and the world which support ongoing conversations about the past, present and future significance of imperialism and colonialism.