

This week I found the concept of Structured Ignorance very interesting. This is because I had never really thought about the distribution of knowledge across society. Some concepts (such as basic arithmetic in the American education system) are taught to almost all of our students so you would expect everyone in this country to have a basic grasp on arithmetic. However, some concepts are distributed unevenly, for example, understanding calculus is something you would expect senior STEM majors to know but not necessarily all of society because being in a STEM major at Purdue influences what those students learn. After learning this concept I thought about how this may apply to my life. Like the example you gave in class, I did not know you had to water Christmas trees and this is because I'm not a Christian and never really celebrated Christmas. This is because I'm influenced by the people around me (in this case my family) who did not celebrate Christmas vs a vast majority in the United States who celebrate this holiday.

To teach this concept to another person I would try to apply this structure at a more national level. I would give an example of the United States education particularly how all of us in the school system must learn United States history. I would ask them if they thought that an average American would know basic American history (such as who Abraham Lincoln was) and I would assume that the person would say yes. Next, I would ask if you would expect everyone from China to know who Abraham Lincoln was and they would most likely say no. I then explain to them this is because of a concept called Structured Ignorance. That "knowledge about any given topic is not distributed evenly across any society" and "What we know is partially a product of our location in the social culture". In this case, our social culture was being educated

in the United States which influenced our understanding of who Lincoln was; however, overseas such an important figure in our perspective may not have been covered in depth and vice versa.