

Social Justice Framework

Context - Institutional Dynamics of Oppression

The University of Denver is rooted in colonialist values. Originally founded in 1864 as the Colorado Seminary by former governor John Evans, this very man was largely responsible for the Sand Creek Massacre. He instigated the violence that ensued by denying chiefs of the Cheyenne tribe the possibility to negotiate peace. The massacre was carried out directly by colonel John Chivington, who later went on to be a member of the University's original board of directors.

Although the institution has a land acknowledgement statement in the syllabi for all its courses, this could be construed as performative allyship. In order to make a concrete effort to make amends to the Native communities harmed by the founders of this wealthy, private institution—outside of financial reparations— the school will enact a framework that centers around restorative justice principles. This framework is to be applied in the University's myriad repositories, in classes pertaining to any subject within the humanities, and adapted as part of an institutional DEI statement. The DEI statement is a living document that not only impacts teaching philosophy, but engages faculty and staff to keep doing the work around systems of oppression, power and privilege.

Frames

Restorative justice

The practices associated with the concept of Restorative Justice reflect the belief that socially responsible actions are best learned in a relationship culture where individuals are both respected and well-integrated into a social network (Morrison, 2001). It is centered on repairing the harm caused by crime, bringing together offenders, victims, and the community that often sanction community service or some other form of restitution rather than punitive consequences (Macready, 2009). The focus is on relationship building, as social connection greatly decreases the likelihood of recidivism.



(Juvenile Justice, 2022)

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See the above image, taken from Alaska's Department of Family and Community Services Juvenile Justice website.

Restorative justice will be adopted as the teaching philosophy of the Morgridge College of Education. Any students passing through its doors will be required to complete a course on the Prison Industrial Complex (specifically how it is a form of modern-day slavery against the Black/Brown Body), the criminalization of poverty/addiction/sex work, and how this facet of the American System is a stark manifestation of Fascism. By requiring students to learn about this often invisible Institution (Correctional Centers, Jails, Prisons, Refugee Camps, etc) the University can begin to recompense some of the systems of oppression with which it is complicit.

Queer theory

While the relevance of this frame may not be forthcoming, its objective is to create a critical disruption of purportedly objective classification systems. It is predicated on the assumption that gender is purely a social construct. Following this, queer theory provides a useful theoretical frame for rethinking the stable, fixed categories and systems of naming that characterize library knowledge organization schemes and strategies for helping users navigate them. A queer approach to library classification suggests disrupting the system altogether.

In defining the act of cataloging queerly, "the solutions themselves must be queer: built to highlight and exploit the ruptures in our classification structures and subject vocabularies, inviting resistance to rather than extension of the coherent library systems that a critical cataloging movement for correctness upholds" (Drabinski, 2005, p. 97). Library professionals can teach users to engage with catalog systems as a complex and biased text. Encouraging users to take a critical approach that doesn't attempt to correct a fundamentally biased organization structure solves the problem in a way that empowers the user to see the Library of Congress Subject Headings for the imperfect, subjective, white supremacist values they embody.

Ethical Archiving/ Critical Archival Studies

Archives as memory institutions are collectively mandated to create, maintain, use, and make available records of a shared national history (Sutherland, 2017) This scholar points out how images of violence against the Black Body are missing from American Archives, creating a selective erasure that spares many (particularly people of the Academy) white guilt. [In this selective omission, Institutions] "extend amnesty to perpetrators of [violence, domination and] hate by refusing to document human rights abuses" (Sutherland, 2017, p. 2).

The objectives of Michelle's Caswell's critical archival studies are threefold: to explain what is wrong with the current state or archival and record keeping practices and research, and identify who can change it and how; to suggest reasonable goals for how these practices can and should change; and to provide strategies in place for forming such critique (Caswell, 2016). These principles must be applied to the many archives of the University of Denver to advance a truly equitable collection policy, as well as create space to critique and alter current practices.

Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit)

Coined by Brian McKinley Jones Brayboy, Indigenous Education and Justice scholar and member of the Lumbee Tribe, Tribal Crit has 9 tenets. The first one is similar to Critical Race Theory's argument that

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racism is endemic to society, it acknowledges that colonization is endemic to society (and recognizes the role played by racism.) Framing it with colonization rather than racism emphasizes that European American thought, knowledge, and power structures dominate American society today.

TribalCrit Tennets:

1. Colonization is endemic to society.
2. U.S. policies toward Indigenous peoples are rooted in imperialism, White supremacy, and a desire for material gain.
3. Indigenous peoples occupy a liminal space that accounts for both the political and racialized natures of our identities.
4. Indigenous peoples have a desire to obtain and forge tribal sovereignty, tribal autonomy, self-determination, and self-identification.
5. The concepts of culture, knowledge, and power take on new meaning when examined through an Indigenous lens.
6. Governmental policies and educational policies toward Indigenous peoples are intimately linked around the problematic goal of assimilation.
7. Tribal philosophies, beliefs, customs, traditions, and visions for the future are central to understanding the lived realities of Indigenous peoples, but they also illustrate the differences and adaptability among individuals and groups.
8. Stories are not separate from theory; they make up theory and are, therefore, real and legitimate sources of data and ways of being.
9. Theory and practice are connected in deep and explicit ways such that scholars must work towards social change. (Brayboy, 2005).

Largely centered around viewing big picture concepts through an Indigenous lens, advocating for tribal autonomy, disrupting governmental and educational structures that impose assimilation, and validation of stories as legitimate ways of knowing, TribalCrit ultimately disrupts a Western information paradigm. Adopting this as the final framework is critical to ameliorating the racist, white supremacist legacy of the University of Denver. There are no easy fixes, it's a process, but these frames are designed to facilitate growth, self-awareness, accountability and healing.

Potential Issues

- Community criticism; potential backlash about requiring an additional course/trainings outside the scope of the program or department
- Institutional resistance to adopting new pedagogies, theories and frameworks
- Challenge of creating a living document (DEI statement) that affiliates of the University actually read and accept
- DU faculty and staff (particularly older/tenured) refusing to learn "new" or "far left" theories
- If required courses are established, it's difficult to track whether the professor assigned to teach them will encourage meaningful student engagement with the material

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