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Diversifying Planning Education through Course Readings

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Abstract
We investigate diversity in urban planning education by analyzing the gender and race/ethnicity of authors who are assigned on reading lists for urban sustainability courses. Using a sample of 772 readings from thirty-two syllabi, we find that assigned authors are even less diverse than planning faculty. Female authors account for 28 percent of assigned readings on the syllabi, and authors of color for 20 percent. Wide variation between courses suggests that a paucity of potential readings is not the main constraint. We urge instructors to revisit or "decolonize" their course syllabi and think critically about whose voices students are taught to hear.

Keywords
diversity, planning education, course syllabi

Abstract
Investigamos la diversidad en la educación en planificación urbana mediante el análisis del género y la raza / etnia de los autores asignados en las listas de lectura para los cursos de sostenibilidad urbana. Utilizando una muestra de 772 lecturas de 32 programas de estudios, encontramos que los autores asignados son aún menos diversos que los profesores de planificación. Las autoras representan el 28% de las lecturas asignadas en los programas y las autoras de color el 20%. La amplia variación entre cursos sugiere que la escasez de lecturas potenciales no es la principal limitación. Instamos a los instructores a que revisen o "descolonicen" los programas de sus cursos y piensen críticamente sobre las voces que enseñan los estudiantes a escuchar.

Keywords
diversidad, planificación de la educación, programas de estudios

摘要
我们通过分析在城市可持续发展课程阅读列表中， 分配的作者的性别和种族/民族来调查城市规划教育中的多样性。使用来自32个教学大纲的772个读数样本，我们发现指定作者的多样性甚至不及计划教师。女作家占教学大纲中指定读物的28%，有色人种作家占20%。课程之间的巨大差异表明，潜在的阅读不足并不是主要的限制因素。我们敦促讲师重新审视或"取消殖民"他们的课程大纲，并认真考虑教给学生聆听不同的声音。

关键词
多样性; 计划教育; 课程大纲

Introduction

Diversity and social justice are critical issues for urban planning education. The cultural competency to collaborate with community members across many dimensions of difference is a core skill for professional planners (Agyeman and Erickson 2012), and the American Planning Association (2018, 1) commits itself to "promote more inclusive, just, and equitable communities through a planning profession as diverse as the communities we serve."

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Within planning schools themselves, however, students of color are often alienated and tokenized (García et al. 2021). At the same time, higher education and society more generally have sought to grapple with legacies of misogyny and white supremacy, reflected most visibly through police brutality against African Americans, and seen through a history of violence and oppression of women and people of color as well.

In response, a range of proposals and initiatives have sought to diversify planning education (see Sweet and Etienne 2011, for a full discussion). The Planning Accreditation Board (PAB) requires programs to strive to recruit and retain more diverse students and faculty, following detailed analysis and recommendations from the Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning (ACSP) Diversity Task Force (2011) and ACSP Diversity Committee (2014b). The PAB also requires planning curricula to incorporate diversity and social justice, with this mandate reflected in an expanding breadth and depth of courses that have considered issues of exclusion and inequality in topic areas ranging from planning theory to transportation, sustainability, and economic development (Sen et al. 2017).

Increasing the diversity of the authors whose works are assigned on course syllabi is another channel that planning educators could pursue in support of diversity and social justice goals. As discussed in the following section, reorienting assigned readings toward works by women, people of color, LGBTQ+ people, and persons with disabilities, and by authors with more than one of these identities, can help move beyond diversity as content (i.e., a topic such as queer geographies, racial segregation, or environmental justice) and make it an inherent part of the learning process. For example, Jane Jacobs' understanding of the city and the initially hostile reception to her work are both inseparable from her gender (Rowe 2016). In environmental planning, the different lived experiences of Black and White ecologists shape fundamentally different understandings of environmental problems (Mock 2014). More generally, qualitative scholars have long known that a researcher's findings are influenced by their positionality (e.g., Matthews, Poyner, and Kjellgren 2019; Umemoto 2001).

In this paper, we investigate the gender and racial/ethnic diversity of readings assigned in urban sustainability courses in North America. We analyze how the gender and race/ethnicity of assigned authors varies between courses, and how it compares with the demographics of planning faculty. Our initial motivation was to inform a systematic revision of the reading list for the Green Cities course at UC Santa Cruz, which accounts for our focus on urban sustainability courses. One of us, a White male, was the course instructor, and two of us, a woman of color and a White woman, participated as students; thus, we bring different positionalities and perspectives to this effort. Through conducting a systematic analysis and sharing our findings, we aim to contribute to the broader discussion on the need for diversity in planning education.

While our empirical findings are specific to urban sustainability education, the implications are relevant to any field of planning study. Our broader hope is that our results provide the impetus for instructors in other fields of planning to reconsider their own syllabi. Such changes can be made very quickly, in a timescale of weeks rather than the years or decades it may take for other diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives to take full effect.

Why Decolonize the Syllabus?

Scholars, student groups, and institutions have recently championed initiatives across a range of disciplines to increase the diversity of reading lists. In the United Kingdom, students at University College London launched a "Why is my curriculum white?" campaign to challenge the predominance of "white ideas by white authors" (Peters 2018, 254). University teaching and learning centers, such as those at Tufts and Kansas, encourage instructors to feature the voices of more people of color in course materials, often as part of a wider set of anti-racist teaching practices. Institutions such as SOAS University of London, meanwhile, have set up initiatives to help faculty audit their own syllabi and revise reading lists to improve the representation of women and people of color (e.g., Decolonising SOAS Working Group 2018). Within the transportation planning field, an ongoing initiative by Jennifer Dill, Kendra Levine, and Jesus Barajas has compiled a list of resources about transportation, race, and equity, and by Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) scholars, that instructors can draw on when diversifying their courses (Dill, Levine, and Barajas 2020).

Indeed, the discipline of Literature has long recognized the value of assigning more works by writers of color and women (Anderson 2019), even if such calls have been heeded only sporadically. Calling for Literature faculty to "decolonize the syllabus," DeChavez (2018) notes, "When you teach mostly white men, you perpetuate the falsehood that only their voices matter, that only their voices shape America." International Relations (IR) is another discipline where the traditional canon is rooted in colonial origins and a Western-centric worldview, prompting similar calls for decolonization (Andrews 2020). Even in disciplines without such an established canon of White male authors, however, there is likely to be value in diversifying the authors featured on reading lists. In planning, for example, Indigenous feminist perspectives can help planners address challenges such as community safety and gender violence (Dorries and Harjo 2020).

While there is little in the way of empirical research that explicitly links syllabus diversity to student success, there are numerous plausible and intuitive benefits. Seeing diverse kinds of names on the syllabus may help women

and students of color see themselves as belonging in the scholarly traditions being taught (Gannon 2020, Ch. 4; McNair, Bensimon, and Malcom-Piqueux 2020)—the privilege long held, if unconsciously, by White men. A diverse faculty improves learning outcomes for all students (García et al. 2021, 111) and helps provide role models and mentors (ACSP Diversity Task Force 2011; Bettinger and Long 2005; Jackson et al. 2018, 591); thus, increasing the diversity of the authors whose works are assigned on course syllabi could be expected to yield benefits through similar mechanisms. Indeed, the University of Kansas Center for Teaching Excellence (n.d.) guide, Creating an Inclusive Syllabus, suggests making this connection in the classroom as well:

> When covering a theory or research by a member of a marginalized group, explicitly state this information and perhaps even show an image of the person; students in the same group benefit from seeing examples they can clearly identify with, just as in traditionally dominant groups do in their own lives.

Importantly, highlighting the positive contributions of women and people of color to the field of planning helps move beyond the "damage-centered narratives" that focus on the pain, loss, and injustices that often accompany discussions of race and ethnicity, and "make it difficult for communities to think of themselves as other than broken" (Dorries and Harjo 2020, 215).[1]

More broadly, a lack of diversity in course syllabi contributes to the "sheer weight of whiteness" in the academy (Back 2004, cited in Mirza 2018, 11). In the words of education professors Shaun R. Harper and Charles H. F. Davis III (2006), "Put plainly, students of color are tired of reading one-dimensional literatures that exclude their cultural histories and fail to acknowledge their humanity." Beyond the classroom, Skitka et al. (2020) suggest that overrepresentation of male academics on reading lists, particularly in graduate courses, can be one of a constellation of factors that increase the gender gap in citations and professional eminence. As Phull, Ciflikli, and Meibauer (2019, 402) note, "Reading lists are situated at the centre of the taught discipline: they help to delineate the boundaries of the discipline and its subfields, and shape how knowledge is reproduced."

Recent analyses have highlighted the extent to which course readings privilege male voices (to our knowledge, similar quantitative analyses by race are not available). At the London School of Economics, 79 percent of assigned texts in IR courses are authored exclusively by men (Phull, Ciflikli, and Meibauer 2019). Across a broader sample of core IR graduate courses at forty-two U.S. universities, the proportion of all-male readings is 76 percent, with male instructors even more likely to assign male authors (Colgan 2017). In graduate-level psychology courses, meanwhile, more than 70 percent of readings have a male first author (Skitka et al. 2020).

Methods

We consider thirty-two syllabi from undergraduate and graduate courses on urban sustainability. We included courses titled Environmental Planning, Green Cities, and Urban Sustainability, along with variations on these names such as Green Communities, Sustainable Urbanism, and Planning for Sustainability. While these courses focus on the environment, they are normally broad in terms of topics, covering issues such as transportation, land use, history, equity and justice, food, and energy. We exclude single-topic courses such as Sustainable Transportation Planning.

The syllabi were obtained from examining course catalogs at ACSP-certified planning schools to identify all relevant courses. We searched for each syllabus online, and if not publicly available, requested it from the instructor. Four out of twelve such requests were successful. We supplemented this list through web searches for syllabi using the course titles noted above. With the exception of one in Canada, all courses were taught at U.S. universities. Most courses are offered in research-intensive (Carnegie R1) universities (87%) and in non–Land Grant institutions (77%), with none in Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Seven courses were graduate level, twenty-two undergraduate level, and three mixed level. Reading lists were extracted from each syllabus and categorized by topic. First names were added manually from web searches where only initials were given in the syllabus. Overall, our sample consists of 772 readings, of which 698 remain after excluding institutional authors (e.g., United Nations or Brookings Institution).

We used two Python packages—*gender_guesser* v0.4.0 and *ethnicolr* v0.4.0—to estimate the race/ethnicity and gender based on an individual's name. *Gender_guesser* is based on a dictionary of more than 45,000 names and performs well in benchmark tests, misclassifying few (2.6%) of names compared with alternate packages (Santamaría and Mihaljević 2018). *Ethnicolr* uses voting registration data from Florida to provide probabilities that the name is of a given ethnicity and race.

We assign "male" to an author if *gender_guesser* returns "male" or "mostly_male," and we assign "female" in the corresponding way. The probability thresholds are undocumented, but Santamaría and Mihaljević (2018) assume that "mostly" implies a probability of .75. We assign "unknown" to names that are not included in the *gender_guesser* dictionary, or where the probabilities are similar. Note that we have no way to estimate non-binary genders. We handle race and ethnicity, in contrast, in a probabilistic fashion, reflecting the greater uncertainty in estimating them from an author's name. For each author, we estimate the probability that they fall into one of four race and ethnicity categories: Hispanic/Latinx, and non-Hispanic Asian, Black, and White. Unfortunately, *ethnicolr* does not provide probabilities for other racial categories such as Native American

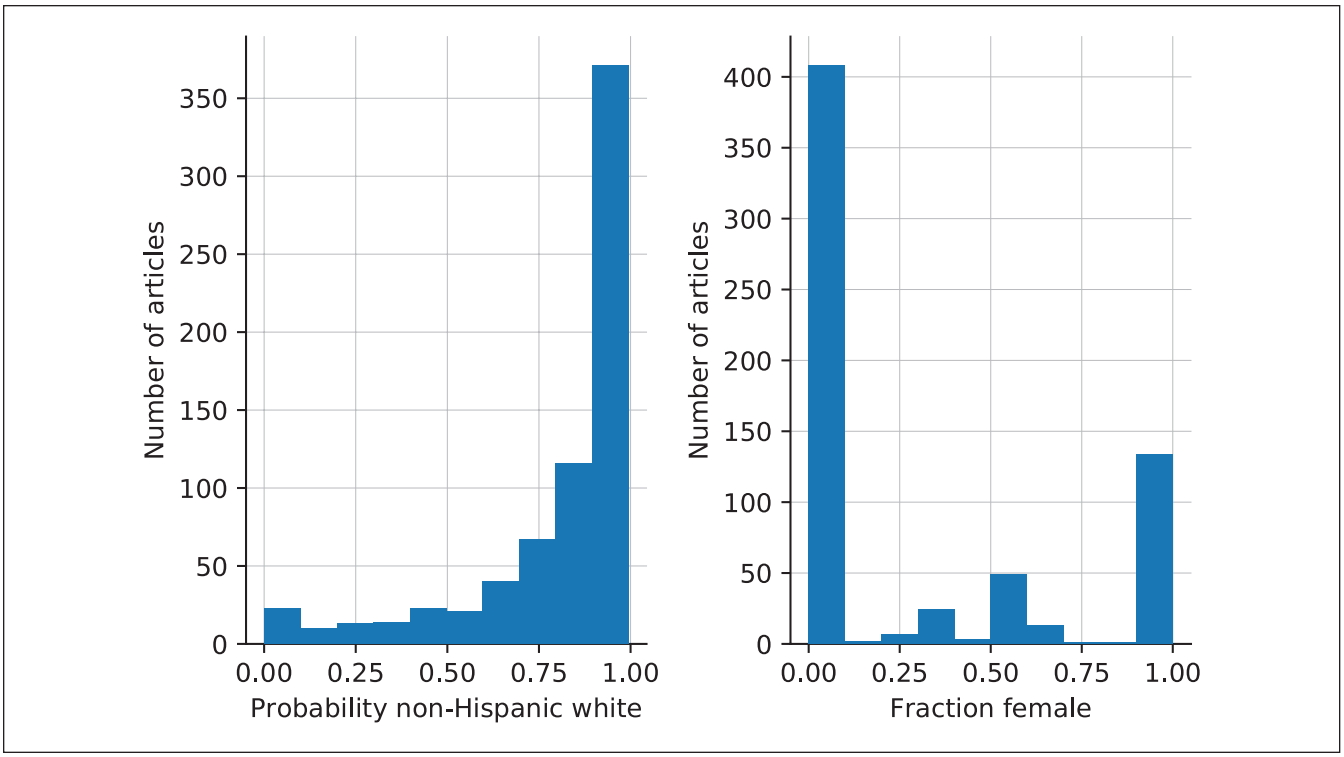

Figure 1. Race/ethnicity and gender of authors, aggregated by reading.

or Arab/Middle Eastern; nor does it disaggregate the four categories. A reading is then assigned a combined score with all authors weighted equally: the percentage of female authors (excluding unknowns), and the probabilities of the four race and ethnicity categories, averaged across authors. In other words, we treat gender deterministically (each author is male, female, or unknown) and race/ethnicity probabilistically. Python code is available at https://github.com/amillb/syllabus_diversity, and an online tool is at www.syllabusdiversity.org.

Studies of gender and race disparities in citation rates have typically inferred the gender of authors by manually reviewing first names, pronouns, and photographs in author biographies (Ferber 1988; Grossbard, Yilmazer, and Zhang 2018; Hengel and Moon 2020). Others used institutional databases compiled from members' self-reported gender and race (e.g., Merritt 2000; Smart and Waldfogel 1996). Skitka et al. (2020) use a similar method to our own. The major advantage of our automated approach is that we avoid the biases and other pitfalls of inferring race and gender from website photographs or biographical information. We can also include authors outside academia who may not have websites or be included in institutional databases and may not be contactable. While we have less confidence in the assignment of gender and race/ethnicity to any individual in our dataset, the probabilistic approach means that our results are meaningful in aggregate.

Results

The assigned readings in our sample of syllabi skew heavily White and male (Figure 1 and Table 1). Sixty-four percent of the course readings have no female authors compared to 21 percent which have no male authors, and 20 percent are by people of color. Of single-authored readings, three-quarters are by male authors. When considering the intersection of race/ethnicity and gender, just 4 percent of readings have a greater than 50 percent probability of both female and non-white, non-Hispanic authors.

For comparison, Table 1 shows the race/ethnicity and gender of faculty in planning schools in North America, estimated using the same method as the syllabi analysis.[2] Asian people account for 15 percent of faculty members but only 5 percent of the assigned authors. A striking gap between assigned authors and planning faculty also exists in terms of gender, and to a lesser extent, Hispanic/Latinx faculty. Non-Hispanic White males are overrepresented on reading lists. Of course, course syllabi assign readings by journalists, activists, scholars in other disciplines, and other authors outside of North American planning academia, meaning that the demographics of authors might not be expected to precisely match those of planning faculty. However, given the lack of diversity among planning faculty in the first place, it is troubling that the problem is accentuated in terms of assigned readings.

Table 1. Race/Ethnicity and Gender of Authors, Summary Statistics.

Race and gender	Assigned authors[a] (%)	Planning faculty[b] (%)	All full-time faculty[c] (%)
Non-Hispanic Asian	4.8	14.5	10.3
Non-Hispanic Black	9.3	8.9	6.2
Non-Hispanic White	80.3	68.9	78.3
Hispanic/Latinx	5.6	7.7	5.2
Female	28.1	40.3	46.6

Note: Percentages exclude other races.
[a]Percentages are calculated by reading, with co-authors weighted equally.
[b]Faculty members in Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning (ACSP)-member schools, 2019, estimated based on names of faculty provided in http://www.scholarmetrics.com/about. See Sanchez (2017) for more discussion of inclusion criteria.
[c]Full-time instructional faculty in U.S. colleges and universities, 2017, from Chronicle of Higher Education (2019).

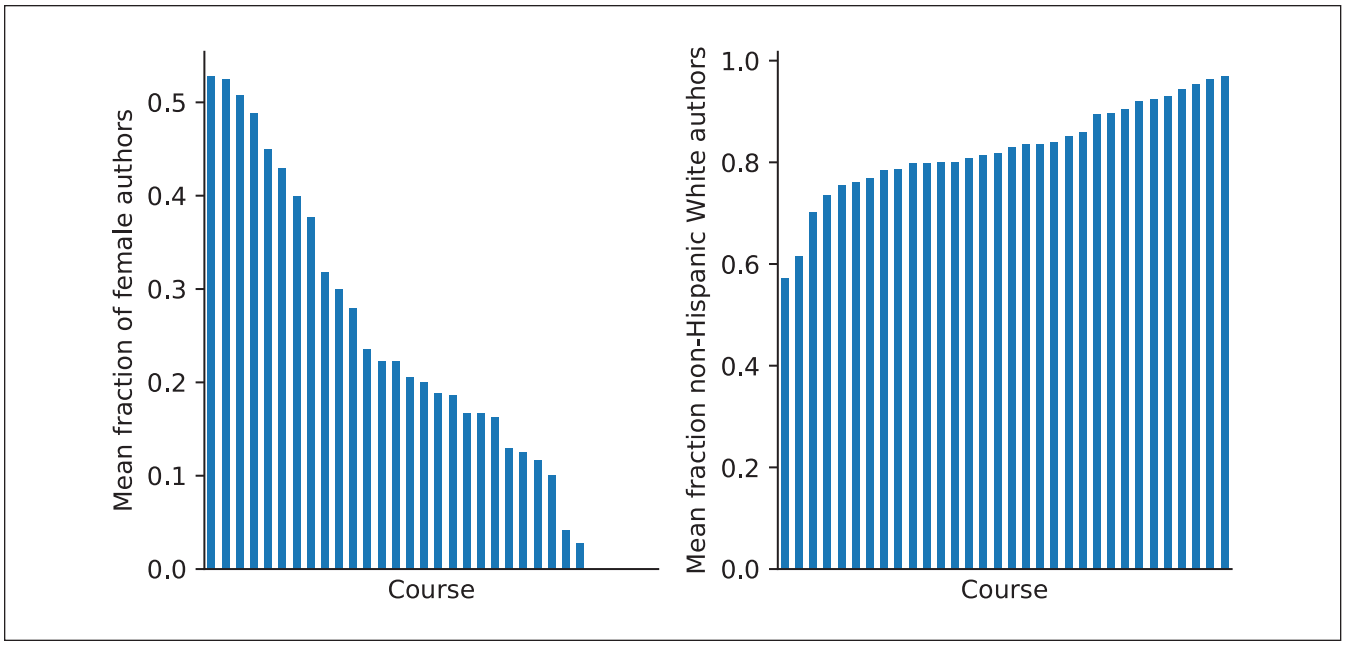

Figure 2. Distribution of race/ethnicity and gender, by course.

One might expect the diversity of the planning literature to be increasing over time, given that senior scholars in urban planning are more likely to be White and male compared with more recently hired professors. Indeed, for readings published before 2000, the percentage of female authors is 15 percent, compared with 30 percent for more recently published work. However, there is no apparent difference over time when considering race.

We observe considerable variations across courses (Figure 2). Three of the thirty-two courses have slightly more than a 50 percent share of female authors, but five courses have not a single one. Several of the latter group rely on a single textbook, but one course has forty-six authors across thirty-one readings, of which *gender_guesser* classified forty-two as "male," four as "unknown," and none as "female." The share of non-Hispanic White authors, meanwhile, ranges from 57 to 97 percent.

The variation between courses is more pronounced than the variation between topics. In the boxplots in Figure 3, this is apparent through similarly shaped distributions within each topic (the shape of the bars), but elongated bars indicating a wide distribution of courses within each topic. Land Use and Development and Transportation are the topics with the lowest share of female authors, but within most topics, many syllabi assign no female authors while others have a relatively even gender ratio. The differences in race and ethnicity between topics are minimal, but there is a wide variation between how different courses handle the same topic.

Even the topic of "equity and justice" is dominated by White people, especially men. Certainly, many courses assign readings by high-profile Black scholars such as Julian Agyeman (2013), who is the most commonly assigned author on this topic, for example, through his *Introducing Just Sustainabilities: Policy, Planning, and Practice* book.

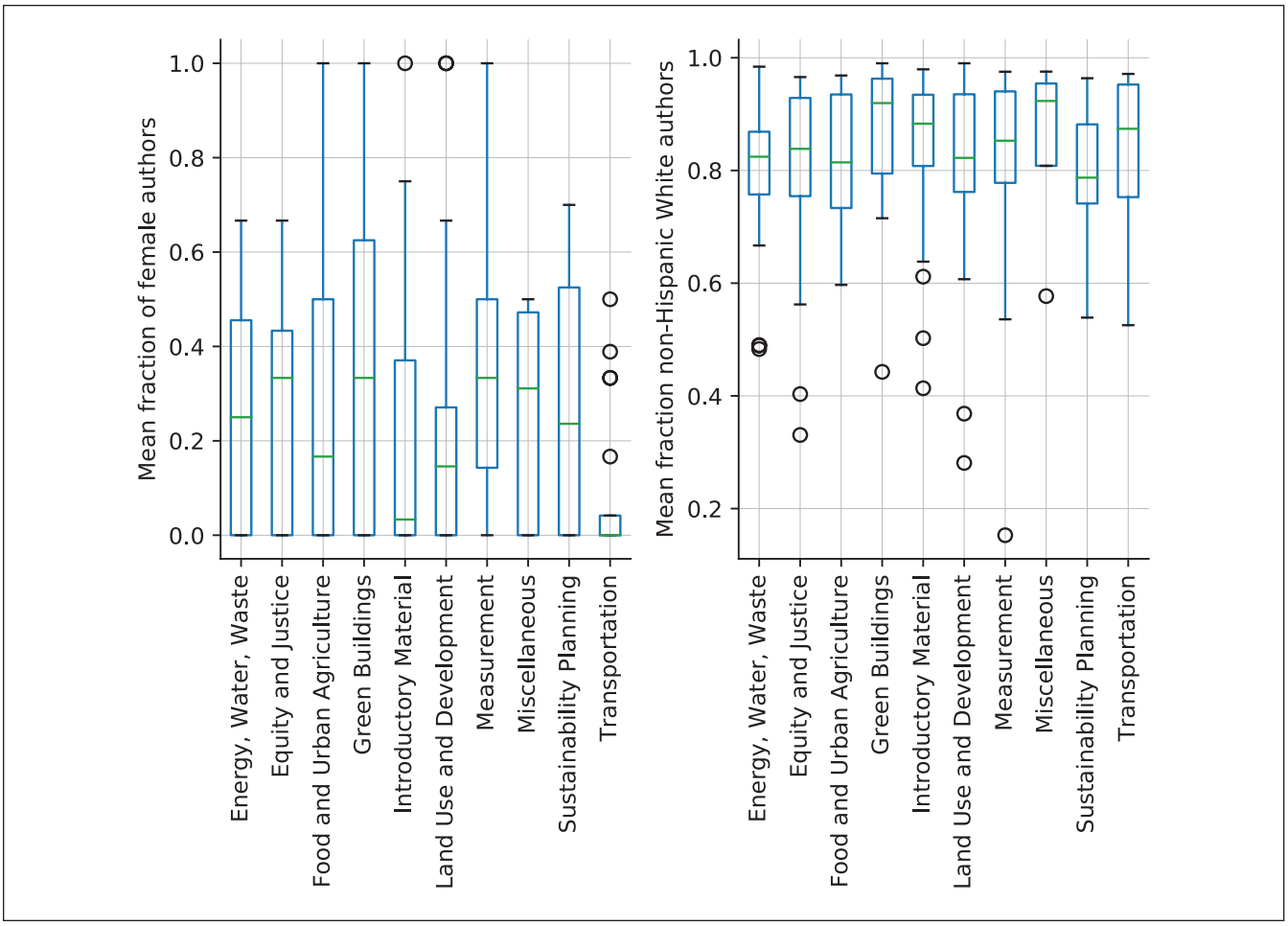

Figure 3. Between-course variation in diversity, by topic.

However, male and White authors still account for the majority of assigned authors on environmental justice, gentrification, environmental racism, and other themes within the "equity and justice" topic. This emphasizes our point that while planning curricula have good coverage of diversity-related *course content* (Sen et al. 2017), this content is being taught in a way that sidelines the writing of people of color.

Conclusion

Urban planning educators have increasingly recognized the importance of diversity among faculty and students in shaping the culture and climate of planning programs, and of teaching equity and justice across all parts of the curriculum. Sweet and Etienne (2011) identify diversity as central to the legitimacy of planning itself. In this paper, we highlight one critical area where planning education lags behind its aspirations: course syllabi. Readings for all subtopics within urban sustainability—even equity and justice—are dominated by White male authors, and some courses assign no female writers at all. Planning faculty are not representative of the communities that planners serve, and the readings they assign are even less so. Such a lack of diversity is likely to perpetuate white supremacy and male dominance, and impair learning for students in general, and women and students of color in particular.

The wide variation across courses has a silver lining: it suggests that changes are feasible and straightforward. In each topic area, some instructors use many more readings by women and people of color, suggesting that a paucity of potential articles is not a constraint. Instructors and programs can use our Python code or online tool at www.syllabusdiversity.org to benchmark the readings in their own courses—or they can send us their reading lists and we will do it for them. In qualitative terms, they can also critically review their syllabi to look for opportunities to foreground works by women and people of color. While the gender, racial, and ethnic identity of an individual can never be known with certainty short of asking them directly or a public self-identification,[3] informed guesses can often be made from the names alone, particularly for female-, Asian-, and Latinx-identified people. In some cases, instructors may know the authors personally. Otherwise, they can make use of resources such as the race, equity, and transportation readings compiled by

Dill, Levine, and Barajas (2020), or the list of prominent Black urbanists from Saunders (2017). One possible role for ACSP could be to formalize these efforts and provide a portal with suggested readings, videos, and other material from diverse voices in academia and planning practice that faculty could use in course development.[4]

We hope that this article spurs instructors to revisit their course syllabi and think more critically about whose voices are heard, moving beyond teaching diversity in terms of course content and incorporating diversity in terms of author identities and perspectives. Diversifying the faculty of a program may take decades, but course syllabi can be adjusted in a matter of weeks.

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Notes

1. We are grateful to one of the anonymous reviewers for suggesting this point.
2. The exercise also provides some validation for our method of inferring race. Our estimates are similar to the 2013 composition of full-time faculty in Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning (ACSP)-member schools, based on data supplied by the schools themselves and reported in ACSP Diversity Committee (2014a): 11 percent Asian, 8 percent Black/African American, 5 percent Hispanic/Latinx, and 67 percent White, plus 8 percent Foreign or other categories.
3. Such self-identification may occur in many ways, such as choice of pronouns on a personal webpage; discussing one's race, ethnicity, gender identity, or sexual orientation in a profile or interview; or stating one's positionality in a research paper.
4. We are grateful to one of the anonymous reviewers for suggesting this possibility.

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