

Diversity Statement

Lucy Britt

Teaching

Understanding that the lived experiences of students can enrich rather than distract from learning, I use pedagogical techniques that create an inclusive classroom and encourage students from a diversity of backgrounds to participate. These techniques include putting at the center both writers from outside the canon and topics related to identity and oppression, using active and participatory learning, and encouraging students to connect course material to their own political and social lives.

In my syllabi, I highlight writers from outside the canon and topics of identity, equity, and justice. In my introductory U.S. politics classes, this includes assigning readings about race and politics, gender, and social inequality throughout the semester's discussions of political institutions and behavior. In my feminist political theory class, this includes highlighting subjects and authors often excluded from the Western canon, like trans feminists and political theorists of color. Comments from my student evaluations indicate that the diversity of the reading assignments and the inclusivity of the classroom environment facilitated learning. One student wrote: "Ms Britt did a fantastic job including diverse (queer, women of color, trans) authors and perspectives in the class. She made it very welcoming and unintimidating [sic] to speak in class, even when topics were controversial."

With the support of a course development grant, my co-instructor and I designed and taught a new service-learning course. The class, "Race and the Right to Vote," incorporates course material about race and politics with hands-on community service with a local nonprofit. This course's main focus is racial justice in the U.S. political system, and it engages students in their local community through volunteer work at an organization that serves a historically Black neighborhood or a nonpartisan group that works against voter disenfranchisement.

In all my classes, I work to take down barriers to participation by incorporating active learning, a subject on which I also publish research. All lectures are short and interactive, with pauses for questions to check student understanding or to ask students to evaluate the material. In every class meeting, I incorporate at least one small group discussion, think-pair-share exercise, simulation, or individual reflection writing in order to encourage participation from students who are less comfortable in large group discussions. I developed several simulations for my American politics class, dividing students up into chambers of Congress, interest groups, or Supreme Courts in order to apply general course themes to specific topics like lobbying or civil liberties. Students have responded positively to these simulations; in a midterm course evaluation, a majority of students listed activities and simulations as their favorite part of the class. One student wrote: "Atmosphere of discussion and critical analysis of readings is very helpful in understanding the authors. Very involved classroom atmosphere, much preferred to that of a lecture hall." I see active learning as a way to allow students from a diversity of backgrounds to bring their lived experience to the table. It gives students with differing levels of comfort a structured opportunity to speak up in class, whereas large group discussions are sometimes dominated by more privileged students.

I have worked with a wide diversity of students, including graduates of well-funded, primarily white high schools; students of color coming from high schools with fewer resources; “gifted” high school students in the Duke TIP summer program; and student athletes at UNC who are learning how to navigate a syllabus for the first time. I see personal background as a potential resource rather than a distraction from the “real” course material. For that reason, I design assignments and activities that encourage students to connect course material to the “real world” and their own lives. In my feminist theory class, short “pop feminism papers” require students to connect theories to a piece of contemporary pop culture such as a music video or opinion piece. For example, one student analyzed the 2017 *Wonder Woman* film through Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* and another read #MeToo backlash against singer R. Kelly through the writings of Audre Lorde. In my race and politics class, students create hands-on projects on a topic of their choosing, ranging from oral history podcasts about the intergenerational transfer of attitudes about voting among Black North Carolinians to GIS mapping projects documenting racial gerrymandering. One student wrote, “Lucy also connected real-world events and current issues in the sociopolitical scene to the works, which enabled me to understand these dense, complicated theories better.”

In order to better serve my students, I have sought out opportunities for professional development related to equity and inclusion. I have participated in the LGBTQIA+ Safe Zone training, and I worked with the UNC School of Social Work to bring a Mental Health First Aid training to my department to train faculty, staff, and graduate students on basic mental health issues so we can better support our students.

Research

My research agenda highlights marginalized voices and theorists from outside the canon. My dissertation and current book project focuses on how political societies remember historical violence through their physical environments. It engages rich literatures across disciplines such as African American political thought, postcolonial theory, and Indigenous theory. It considers case studies from Australia, Rwanda, and the United States. As such, it takes a comparative political theory methodological approach and includes voices from a variety of theoretical backgrounds – not as foils to mainstream theorists from the Western canon but as creators of theory deserving of scholarly attention and scrutiny in their own right. This project has important implications for political theorists interested in how political values manifest in the visual environment; for scholars and practitioners of history, public history, material culture, and urban planning; and for the public, whose deep interest in the political implications of monuments and memorials has recently become apparent.

In my broader research agenda, I work on empirical research projects on Confederate monuments’ disparate impacts on people by race (a paper published in the *Du Bois Review*) and on white people’s political attitudes, constructions of whiteness, and possibilities for cross-racial solidarity in the United States. This research stream focuses on the possibilities and limitations of white anti-racism and the political effects of political and historical symbols on different racial groups in the United States.