

Seven Principles for A Culturally Responsive, Inclusive and Anti-Racist Curriculum at John Jay College of Criminal Justice

John Jay curriculum and teaching should reflect the following principles:

1. We center **Critical Engagement**
by forming learning communities that engage in critical (self) reflection, alongside empirical analysis, about how Anti-Black racism, institutional racism, and all forms of racism inform the subject matter of our courses and the interactions of members of our learning communities.
2. We grapple with evolving perspectives about **Criminal Justice Education**
by interrogating the origins, facts, and effects of institutional racism and individual acts of discrimination in the criminal justice system.
3. We normalize discussions about **Complex Social Challenges**
by anticipating and addressing the challenges of engaging with racism, institutional racism and exploitation, as well as social justice and racial equity in a diverse classroom through dialogue and reflection.
4. We practice **Embodied Learning**
by using trauma-informed pedagogy and strategies to incorporate the lived experiences of students and faculty, promote cultural competence, and increase social and emotional intelligence.
5. We use **Diverse Content**
throughout the learning experience through incorporating course materials that are diverse by author identity, form, medium, and/or voice.
6. We design for **Equitable Assessment**
by employing varied opportunities for students to demonstrate learning and self-assess their progress.
7. We promote **Democratic Education**
which affirms that education is participatory and non-hierarchical and that student learning is experiential, characterized by an on-going collaborative process of problem solving grounded in discussion, consultation, research, and debate as ways to engage in informed decision-making by people with diverse interests.

Adopted by the College Council April 2021

RATIONALE:

The curriculum is the fulcrum of the college – it is why students come to John Jay and what they take with them when they leave. To achieve our values of equity, diversity and inclusion and to educate for justice, John Jay faculty of all racial and ethnic backgrounds need to be explicit about developing a curriculum that acknowledges that anti-Black racist beliefs and structures are pervasive in all aspects of our lives—from education to criminal justice to climate change—and that it will take active and intentional work to tear down those beliefs and structures. To make our college mission real to the students we serve, we must first achieve equity and inclusion in their learning experiences at our institution.

A critical step toward this is building a set of shared principles for a Culturally Responsive, Inclusive, and Anti-Racist Curriculum so that we can share a common understanding of the goals and techniques to educating for justice.

INSTITUTIONAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT FOR FRAMEWORK:

As an institution, John Jay College of Criminal Justice was founded in 1964 to educate criminal justice professionals, and by doing so, to create a fairer criminal justice system. If we are to be true to that mission, we must grapple with data that document the ways that the criminal justice system in the United States unfairly targets Black and Latinx and LGBTQ+ people, disproportionately uses deadly force on Black, Latinx and LGBTQ+ people, and routinely awards lengthier sentences for Black, Latinx and LGBTQ+ people, amongst many other documented indignities. It is clear that if we are a liberal arts college centered around criminal and social justice and which educates a justice-oriented student body, all faculty have a responsibility to create an educational experience that fully reflects the histories, the stories, and the concerns with the criminal justice system and the world at large.

Our student body of primarily Black and Brown students is richly diverse. But to fully center their experiences and knowledges we must depart from legacies of education in our country. To do this at all, we need to share a common understanding of what has long been experienced and known by non-whites: that U.S. culture and its institutions have been guided by a belief in white supremacy. White supremacy is not individual actions based in hate, but rather it is the ideological bedrock of U.S history—the assumed superiority of people defined and perceived as white and the beliefs, practices, and laws that have resulted from that belief.

As the only justice-focused college in the United States, we have a duty to reimagine public higher education, one that is not based in an unequal valuing of lives. To live up to this, a John Jay education will need to engage the lived and historical experiences of our students in order to help them become criminal justice leaders *AND* advocates for justice. What our students consistently tell us is that they still believe we can be both, not just one or the other. It should be our educational mission to show them how.

This framework has been in process for years and already exists in pockets across the college. The faculty in the departments of Africana Studies, Latin American and Latinx Studies, and SEEK have long

advocated publicly at the college for these changes. In 2012 the [Report of the Latino/a Retention Initiative Committee](#) made the argument that:

What curriculum bestows, at its best, is a symbolic endowment, an inheritance authorizing students to project themselves into a given field or career of interest. As student recognizes himself or herself within the frame of a discipline, a psychic, cultural and historic association is established. The student then enters the field not as a stranger or nomad, but as an agent accredited by past participation with an injection to learn and build upon the contribution of his predecessors. A curriculum that widely includes Latina/o subjects, in effect, grants students symbolic permission to immerse themselves in what they learn. (24)

Five years later, in 2017, faculty in the Department of Latin American and Latinx Studies authored “[A Position Paper: John Jay as a Hispanic-Serving Institution, Meeting the Challenges and the Opportunities](#),” which recommended that most departments at the college offer courses with Latinx-relevant content: “the ideal model for an HSI is not to concentrate all those courses in one small department, but to offer students a broader exposure to curricula that are relevant to their history and identity” (16). As part of its social justice and equity mission and in response to the above paper, the Teaching and Learning Center began a series of [faculty seminars on teaching at an HSI](#) and creating inclusive syllabi, as well as developing [teaching and learning resources for racial justice](#). Through TLC efforts, dozens of faculty have participated in short and long-term development efforts towards culturally relevant and inclusive teaching.

Critiques from BIPOC faculty, such as the [public letter posted by outgoing English and Gender Studies Professor Carmen Kynard in 2019](#), however, indicate that while some parts of the college and its curriculum are “decolonized,” there is a good deal of work to be done to make the college a place that educates students in a way that celebrates our students’ identities, promotes their excellence, and is critically reflective of an anti-racist approach to white supremacy.

In the community-led process of creating a [2020-2025 strategic plan](#) for the college during academic year 2019-20, we agreed that one of our four priorities would be to “Embody and promote our values of equity, diversity and inclusion.” As one of the objectives to achieving that goal, we committed to, “Develop a shared framework across the faculty that informs a culturally affirming, inclusive pedagogy and curriculum design.” This project took on new urgency with the events of summer 2020.

In June 2020 faculty from Africana Studies and Latin American and Latinx Studies issued a joint statement to the John Jay community in response to the killings of George Floyd and others, the COVID pandemic, and in support of the Movement for Black Lives; and in part concluded:

Our college and our university should remain cognizant that, with every economic downturn and every health crisis, communities of color endure disproportionate burdens and setbacks to whatever gains have made over time. John Jay College and CUNY must resolve and take action to maintain diversity among students, advance diversity among the ranks of faculty and administrators, and support a diverse curricula and educational equity on our campus and campuses across the university.

Shortly thereafter, the [Black Student Union wrote](#) to President Mason and to all academic department chairs and demanded a “curriculum that reflects an equal and fair justice system” and asked each

academic department adopt racial justice learning goals in their curriculum with measurable outcomes.” Further the statement made the case that John Jay is “the leading institution of police education,....[and] as a result, we have a responsibility to lead by making an impact. Which includes dismantling white supremacy, institutional racism and a curriculum that is anti-Black here at John Jay.” The BSU pointed out that with an education in racial injustice and institutional racism, John Jay students “would be able to analyze, understand, and intervene in systems of oppression in order to advance equity for all people.”

Individual departments and programs responded to the Black Student Union letter in solidarity or with promises to change curriculum. At the same time, Associate Provosts Dara Byrne and Allison Pease invited the entire faculty to a conversation called “The Curriculum IS the Institution: An Open Conversation with Faculty about What a John Jay Education Is and Might Be.” We framed the discussion around the email exchanges between the BSU, individual departments or programs, and Chairs, calling for greater racial accountability in our curriculum. With 83 faculty attending, we agreed that understanding a critical history of policing in the United States, especially as it relates to Black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC), is crucial to our mission and the way we educate the primarily Black and Latinx students who attend John Jay. Many faculty offered that all courses should incorporate a critical lens on their discipline’s history with racist ideas, incorporate more authors/thinkers of color (but not simply in a representative way), and that the college should consider incorporating college-wide learning objectives to this effect. Faculty from the Africana Studies Department, in particular, emphasized that narratives about race and racism should stress resistance and agency over victimization.

Additionally, Provost Yi Li spoke with each department chair in summer 2020 about the need to change. Each chair was given an evaluation letter that reiterated Provost Li’s commitment to faculty diversity, revising the curriculum to address systemic racism in all disciplines, including non-traditional viewpoints, and disrupting racism in the criminal justice system.

DEFINING TERMS:

Curriculum and Pedagogy:

The term curriculum refers to institutionally approved educational goals, strategies and resources/content presented to inspire and support student learning experiences in any given course. Pedagogy is the principles and methods instructors use to foster student learning of the curriculum. While these two concepts are frequently treated as separate – content vs delivery – our framework blurs the boundaries between these two ideas, and for good reason. An excellent curriculum without a thought toward pedagogy is as ineffective as brilliant pedagogy without a quality curriculum. Curriculum is both the pathway and the frame for a variety of pedagogies. So many of us, faculty and students alike, articulate curriculum as not just content, but encompassing pedagogy, that the principles outlined below toggle between curriculum and pedagogy. While only the curriculum is formally approved, we also want to embrace and endorse the following pedagogical approaches to curriculum.

Culturally Responsive:

Foundations/Perspectives: Culturally responsive teaching uses the cultural characteristics, experiences and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively ([Gay, 2000](#)). Based on an extensive body of research by educational pioneer [Gloria Ladson-](#)

[Billings](#) in the 1990s, culturally responsive teaching has shown to improve the academic achievement of ethnically and racially diverse students of all socio-economic backgrounds, particularly when they are taught through their own cultural and experiential filters. The 2017 [LLS position paper](#) explains that as a department they implemented culturally “relevant” educational practices as a way to boost their students’ academic success (12). A culturally responsive curriculum recognizes that students arrive at college with cultural beliefs, expectations, and norms of behavior that are not identical to those of their professors or the college. Professors of a culturally diverse group of students have a responsibility to understand their own cultural beliefs and biases, to develop connections between students’ cultures and John Jay’s educational cultural norms and expectations. To succeed, professors must recognize the various tenets of their students’ cultural orientations so that they can develop bridges to learning that provide students an equal opportunity to learn.

In our [Fall 2020 podcast discussions](#) with faculty and students, this style of teaching was repeatedly referenced as the gold standard for meeting John Jay students where they are and taking them to the next level of learning. In [Episode 2 “What is a Culturally Affirming Curriculum”](#) Professor Henry Smart III noted the importance of students bringing their identities into course discussions and submitted work, without fear of repercussion, while also assigning materials that address the critical empowerment of marginalized groups who attend his courses (e.g., Black and Latinx feminists). Professor Nina Rose Fischer has students relate and map out their own lives in relation to the theories studied in a course, grounding the proliferation of ideas in plurality of experiences. Professor Lissette Delgado-Cruzata is mindful of how her STEM curriculum is frequently silent about issues of relevance to her students, so brings in culturally relevant materials that speak to the effects of biological research on Black and Latinx populations—a task she admits is difficult and requires a lot of work on her part as she is in part inventing curriculum. Professor Monika Son brings in work by authors who represent her Afro-Latina culture, and the cultures of her students; she is particularly alert to different ways that knowledge is produced outside of Western cultural and academic norms, and honors those different bodies of knowledge that students bring to their education, but may not recognize as knowledge. Allowing students to write reflective or personal pieces using their English dialect is another way that allows students’ cultural knowledge to be relevant to their learning. [Research confirms](#) that drawing on learners’ background knowledge boosts comprehension; learners process new information best when it is linked to what they already know.

These John Jay faculty agreed that culturally responsive teaching and learning in their classes is about co-creating knowledge with the students; it is a dialogic process. Several professors pointed out that creating one’s own class culture via a shared agreement on class norms of behavior, or a community agreement, that lists the rules for learning and behaving in the semester is a valuable and productive way to co-create a shared culture predisposed to learning.

As Professor Silvia Mazzula emphasized in [episode 3](#), all culturally responsive teaching starts with understanding one’s own culture and biases. For white-privileged faculty who have not been trained to see themselves as having a specific culture, this may require understanding the white privilege embedded in geographic, educational, historical and white cultural influences as leading to one’s assumptions and biases about the educational experience one delivers; these expectations may differ from the many and diversely experienced students in one’s courses. Further, as students pointed out in our discussions with them, if one is teaching something about a specific culture, one should not focus solely on negative examples and events (e.g., teaching the Holocaust as representative of Jewish experience, or slavery as representative of African American experience). Seeing one’s culture reflected

in a balanced way that emphasizes achievements and contributions instead of stereotypes and negative examples is important to having one's full humanity recognized.

Being seen and understood as fully human is critical to student success.

Central Elements of Culturally Responsive Curriculum:

- We understand ourselves as **culturally shaped humans** whose expectations may be grounded in cultural mores, and as such are **not inherently right or good**
 - We **develop a knowledge base** about the cultural tenets of our **students' national and ethnic groups** in our courses but do not presume to know more than students, and **ask appropriate open-ended** rather than leading questions when necessary
 - We see our students' backgrounds as **assets and opportunities** rather than deficits and barriers to their learning
 - Course materials include content by authors/creators of **multiple racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds** as well as sexual orientations and genders.
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Inclusive:

Foundations/Perspectives:

The idea of inclusive education comes out of the 1948 [Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 26](#), which proclaims the right of everyone to an education. This concept was broadened in the 1990 World Declaration on Education for All, which recognized that particular groups were excluded and that "an active commitment must be made to removing educational disparities...groups should not suffer any discrimination in access to learning opportunities" ([19](#)). Much of the literature on inclusive education addresses the needs of [learners with disabilities](#) as those frequently excluded from educational opportunities. Within the United States, research on inclusive education centers around K-12 schools. We believe, however, that enacting the principles of inclusive education is of primary relevance to John Jay. As a Minority-Serving and Hispanic-Serving college with students from economically and racially marginalized populations and a majority white faculty, fostering an inclusive environment is central to our success. This means recognizing that Western and white concepts of cultural superiority and a Western-oriented focus on individualism may be harmful to the students we serve. At John Jay, many students find that their experiences and the histories of people like them—such as transgender, international, Asian, Black, Jewish, Latinx, Muslim or disabled, and often intersectional—are not routinely found in their courses; students tell us that some professors demonstrate ignorance or blatant hostility towards their large group identities. This cannot be who we are: educating for justice means breaking barriers to equity that stand between our students and their success, and this may mean breaking down our own biases, white privilege, and assumptions in order to include experiences and ways of knowing that do not accord with how we have been taught.

In a group setting, there is a difference between being tolerated, passively left alone to make our way, and being included, actively sought out and celebrated because of who we are. The ideal is to make every John Jay student feel included in each of their courses. To do this, we need to be aware of differences that commonly trigger experiences of exclusion, such as learning or physical disabilities or

assumptions about gender/sexual/racial/cultural identity that alienate rather than include people. Equally, however, we should be aware that learning is an inherently social activity that itself *constructs* identities ([Wenger 2010](#)). What kinds of identities can our classes construct? The process of creating these positive learning identities depends on students' sense of belonging and inclusion. A sense of belonging and the experience of inclusion directly effects the very qualities we educators value in students: motivation, valuation of school work, effort, and academic achievement.

Inclusive courses involve students in meaning-making. As Professor Alexandra Moffet-Bateau expressed in [Episode 3](#) "What Is An Inclusive Curriculum?" an inclusive curriculum understands the complexity of the adult lives of her students and so designs an accessible curriculum that can support their growth. She spends the first two weeks making sure students understand their role as active participants in their learning and that what she teaches can and should be challenged. By doing so she shares in the meaning-making process with her students. By opening up the discipline and ideas for criticism, Professor Moffet-Bateau understands the goal to be that everyone feels seen and everyone has the capacity to break the ideas apart. Professor Silvia Mazzula (Episode 3) explains an inclusive curriculum as starting first from self-awareness, knowing where one is coming from, and understanding of the cultural context of one's educational expectations and then second, addressing the curriculum itself to be inclusive of students' identities. She distinguishes inclusion from "diversity work" which often sprinkles a curriculum with representative types from various group. Inclusion is broader and deeper and all professors we interviewed described this work as new and challenging, and that few have mastered it.

Central Elements of Inclusive Curriculum:

- We are **self-aware and engage** in critical self-reflection of ourselves as **raced and cultured beings**, understanding **pedagogy and education are grounded** in a culturally exclusive context, one that is predominantly Western, patriarchal, individualized and **based implicitly in white supremacy**.
 - We explicitly **share and explicate our identities** with our students. By doing so, we make room for other identities and **model difference and inclusion** as a norm.
 - We reframe how we understand and **include students as people** and how we reward their success; we are alert to, and **challenge, tendencies to reward** those who look like ourselves or replicate our behaviors.
 - We make clear **who is and who is not advantaged** and included by the systems at work in our world, including white supremacy. We **help students develop tools** to succeed in those systems while understanding those systems as constructs and not an essential reality or **reflection of their worth**.
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Anti-Racist:

Foundations/Perspectives:

The first step to eradicating racism is acknowledging that it lives in all of us. Anti-racist education is explicit about the fact that the presumed supremacy of those believed to be white has shaped at least the past four-hundred years of history, including educational institutions, of which John Jay is one. Some of the strongest early voices for anti-racist education, [James Baldwin](#) and [bell hooks](#), acknowledge

that the challenge of anti-racist teaching is how profoundly steeped in white supremacy we all are, such that education itself perpetuates untruths about Black history and Black genius. Anti-racist curriculum is not simply “not racist,” but actively challenges the theories, histories, and practices that have perpetuated these injustices. As with all forms of social justice education, a critical step for instructors and students alike is [reflexivity](#)—considering one’s own social location and racial socialization to become aware of biases. From there, we should acknowledge the ways that we have benefitted from, or been deprived by, the power and privileges of white supremacy.

As a Hispanic-Serving Institution, it is important that we focus on anti-Black racism. After all, anti-Black racism is both significant and critical to Latinx identity, and is of deep concern to Latinx communities both at the College and more generally in our society. Thus, it is specifically as a Hispanic-Serving Institution that we seek to address anti-Black racism, because these are overlapping concerns. Further, white supremacy creates a hierarchy of oppression at the bottom of which is Blackness. As a liberal arts college centered on criminal justice, we should have a shared understanding of the overwhelming evidence that the U.S. criminal justice system is unjust with regard to its treatment of Black and Latinx people. These problems are historically rooted, pervasive, and ongoing and will continue to be until we disrupt our own institutionalized ways of knowing and teaching, look for and interrogate racism in its many forms, and work to confront it.

In [episode 4 of the podcast series](#), Professor Demis Glasford explains that racism is dynamic across time and place; it will be contextual and happen between people and groups in different ways. One way to approach our teaching and racism, he suggests, is to question what is considered normal. We should try to bring a variety of perspectives, not just one’s own, to the topic at hand. Equally, we should introduce content that acknowledges why people in one’s courses might bring a different perspective to a topic. Professor Shreya Subramani sees anti-racist work as practices, a way of making relations, rather than a static thing or form. If white supremacy is based on hierarchical oppression, what might a course and professor-student relationship not based similarly look like? Professor Virginia Diaz approaches anti-racist curriculum as what students identify as racist in current teaching practices: that students are missing from the curriculum. Thus she includes content that reflects the students she teaches. Professor Ray Patton emphasizes understanding the historical aspects of racism, how it changes over time, the ways it shapes and reforms societies. He says it is also important to tell the stories of those who struggled against oppression, triumphed, created alternatives and different ways of being. Critical histories are important to teach, but equally important are the intellectual traditions and histories of liberation struggles. The more specific and diverse histories we teach the better.

One of the challenges, Professor Ray Patton acknowledges, are the emotions that arise in discussions about racism, from all sides. Professor Alexandra Moffet-Bateau understands this as an attempt to push back against the ways that white supremacy has shaped both how we know and what we know. Here it may be helpful to normalize difficulty. It is hard to challenge previously held beliefs, and all parties, instructor included, may experience discomfort when addressing issues of race. Instructors may feel vulnerable and it can be useful to examine what fears of exposure one may have. For students, allowing time for self-reflective writing and peer-to-peer learning can be essential before opening up to class-wide discussion. Additionally, allowing for non-cognitive, non-text based forms of learning that are embodied and affective can be helpful. Finally, pre-established norms or course contracts can help support a positive classroom environment and reduce inappropriate behaviors.

Central Elements of Anti-Racist Curriculum:

- We **name race and racism**, and acknowledge that we are all raced subjects with specific histories and experiences, and that Western history, and the history of the United States is one in which the **ideology of white supremacy**, a belief that non-whites are inferior to whites, has enabled a **multitude of injustices** that continue to be perpetuated.
 - We allow **experiential knowledge** to destabilize established scholarship; our students know things that may **counter what we teach**, which can be productive, especially as a way to decolonize knowledge and to recognize multiple ways of knowing.
 - We provide a **multiplicity of perspectives** for any given topic and allow students to challenge them.
 - We teach **diverse histories and histories** of those who have been excluded from power and privilege **without demeaning them**.
 - We **accept our vulnerability and discomfort** in discussions about race, institutional racism and white supremacy.
 - We **hold up examples of resistance and agency** by those who are oppressed and their allies, and acknowledge their achievements despite oppression, the alternative systems, structures, and communities the oppressed build.
 - We respectfully acknowledge the **many emotions learning about race**, racism, and white supremacy can raise. We ask **non-judgmental questions** that can help students identify those emotions.
 - We share with students the understanding that **not one of us created or is responsible for the systems in which we exist**, but that we cannot change them without identifying and understanding them.
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FIRST STEPS, SELF-REFLECTION: A NOTE ABOUT OUR NAMESAKE, JOHN JAY

The foundational step to each of the curricular and pedagogical approaches outlined above is self-reflection. As an institution, we must grapple with the complicated legacy of our namesake, John Jay.

John Jay (1745-1829) was a slaveholder; he [owned at least 17 slaves](#). He also founded the New York State Society for Promoting the Manumission of Slaves, which entered lawsuits on behalf of slaves and organized boycotts. He was a fervent believer in the power of education to equalize and helped to found and support New York's African Free School in 1787. In a [letter written in 1785](#) he asserted, "I wish to see all unjust and unnecessary discriminations everywhere abolished, and that that time may soon come when all our inhabitants of every colour and denomination shall be free and equal partakers of our political liberty." Through the 1799 Gradual Abolition of Slavery Act, then Governor of New York John Jay ended slavery in New York State. John Jay was thus a privileged white man of his time who both benefitted from and awakened to the conditions in which he was living and fiercely advocated for more justice.