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The Civilized War within American Librarianship: Teaching Strategies for Battling Colorblindness in the LIS Classroom

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Abstract

Library and information science (LIS) has struggled to improve diversity, representation, and retention in the profession throughout the years. Yet, despite a broad range of efforts, the profession, particularly in the U.S., remains primarily white, which mirrors American higher education in general. This disparity makes it imperative for the field to recognize more subtle forms of racism, such as colorblindness or the belief that the U.S. has moved into a post-racial world. This work will present strategies that LIS educators and librarians can employ to battle colorblindness through specific interventions in the LIS classroom. We believe LIS educators and librarians are uniquely positioned in higher education to impact students' learning when it comes to navigating the issues of racism in modern-day society. Here, we use reflective practice to explore ways in which we, as LIS educators and professionals, have dealt with racism and various related topics in the LIS classroom without falling into the trap of colorblindness. Our goal is to advance conversations related to colorblindness in higher education to allow it to be tackled and appropriately managed to benefit both students and faculty.

Keywords: colorblindness; diversity; pedagogy; racism; reflective practice

Publication Type: research article

Introduction

Diversity is a word everyone claims to understand, but no one really defines. If the events of 2020, a year rife with social unrest triggered by the murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police officers, have shown us anything, it is that we are not the post-racial society as often claimed in America. Higher education is no different, and that extends to the library and information science (LIS) field. For the past two decades, LIS has struggled with improving diversity, representation, and retention in the profession, which despite various efforts to recruit ethnic and racial minorities, remains mostly white (Kung et al., 2020). This lack of representation is also prevalent in higher education, especially among faculty (Heilig et al., 2019). While topics of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) are explored in various forms in the LIS field, sustainable activism and engagement are still needed.

One aspect of the discourse about racism that needs further consideration when discussing DEI in higher education is the concept of colorblindness (Neville et al., 2016). This phenomenon refers to issues of race being ignored due to the belief that we live in a post-racial society where

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racial discrimination is no longer a social problem (Bonilla-Silva & Dietrich, 2011). This notion of colorblindness helps maintain systems of white supremacy and oppression by excluding racial minorities while maintaining a veneer of tolerance and "neutral" acceptance of all races.

This work will present strategies that educators and librarians can employ to battle colorblindness in higher education, especially through specific interventions in the college classroom. Educators and librarians are uniquely positioned in institutions of higher education in terms of their possible influence on the students' learning. Their versatility in teaching, helping design learning opportunities, and even collaborating on research give LIS educators and librarians an entry point into academia that not many groups have. Our goal with this discussion is to advance conversations related to colorblindness in higher education in a way that can be tackled and appropriately managed to benefit students, faculty, and society.

Our position as LIS educators gives us a unique perspective. As information professionals, we can see how DEI topics can be incorporated into curricula to help normalize a DEI-based stance and agency for everyone in the college classroom. As Jaeger and Franklin (2007) point out, within the field of librarianship, the education of its professionals and the subsequent service to communities that librarianship affords, is a cycle of constant collaboration. As LIS educators, we strive to positively impact our students to be influential library professionals who, in turn, will positively impact the communities they serve. If we prioritize and normalize DEI and negate colorblindness and other racial tropes and fallacies, our students will be able to do the same not just in the LIS classroom but also in their workplaces, as practitioners, and in their service communities, as leaders. Thus, our reflective work shared in this paper contributes to the field by presenting some issues we have experienced in the classroom around topics related to colorblindness. More specifically, we reject the idea that colorblindness is a desirable goal by taking an inquiry-based approach to how we have managed to navigate that issue.

Literature Review

Colorblindness in Higher Education

Studies point out that colorblindness is a new form of racism prevalent in American society and higher education (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Bonilla-Silva et al., 2004; Lewis et al., 2000). Williams (2011) defines colorblindness as "…the racial ideology that posits the best way to end discrimination is by treating individuals as equally as possible, without regard to race, culture, or ethnicity" (para. 1). This rhetoric purports that race is no longer socially significant in modern society, that it is only a problem of the past and that it was solved with events such as the Emancipation Proclamation (1863) or the U.S. Civil Rights Movement (1954-1968) (Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2000; Lewis et al., 2000; Vue et al., 2017). This erroneous and simplified version of race in American history and its role in shaping modern systems of exclusion and oppression has led many to believe that white people are victims of legislation intended to exclude and victimize them, such as is the case with Affirmative Action (Lewis et al., 2000).

Many issues make colorblindness a form of racism rather than an effective approach to incorporating DEI. One of the most obvious issues is that non-minorities, especially white people, can easily ignore racism and anti-Blackness. This positionality is not the case for people of color who find themselves living in a world and a reality that does not afford them the luxury of avoidance or denial, particularly within educational systems designed to exclude them and act more as obstacles rather than enabling their education. Lewis et al. (2000) pointed out that

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"white" - especially in academic institutions - is seen as a neutral stance, lacking racial and cultural specificity. In their research, the authors contend that this conception leads to a mentality among white individuals to see their socio-cultural norms as universal, leading to the belief that others, especially people of color, are deviant or divergent from the hetero-cultural norm (Lewis et al., 2000).

Colorblindness creates the perception that negative racist experiences are invalid. Colorblindness is also a silencing mechanism directed at muting racialized events, rendering people of color's life experiences invisible and leaving them voiceless (Vue et al., 2017). There is plenty of evidence that race and ethnicity are vital aspects of the American experience, historical and contemporary. When experienced as discriminatory events, these identity constructs can directly and negatively affect people's health, income, life expectancy and quality of life. Colorblindness redirects this conversation towards mere contextual or tangential issues rather than tackling real racial issues. One of the main distractors in colorblind approaches is treating inequality and racism as rooted in the individual when it is rooted in institutions (Vue et al., 2017). This systemic inequity is particularly prevalent in academic institutions, manifested through curricula, teaching methods and overall campus experiences, where students of color are treated as 'others', outsiders, unwelcomed guests, and unworthy participants of what white people see as their hard-earned education (Vue et al., 2017).

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in LIS Education

LIS has a conflicted history of reconciling its ethical principles of information for all with its overt and covert racist practices. From early on, libraries in the U.S. were used to indoctrinate poor European immigrants into the American way of life and assimilate them into a class stratification, ensuring social order controlled by elitist aristocrats (Harris cited in Rubin, 2015). But even more importantly, libraries were segregated institutions, especially in the American South, with services to African American communities not common until the 20th century. By the 1930s, African Americans were offered information services in segregated public libraries that functioned as separate governmental units with no official connection to the standard public libraries in the systems (Dumont, 1986). Furthermore, the education of Black librarians was directly impacted by segregation policies which prevented the acceptance and education of African Americans in most academic institutions in the southern U.S. (Dumont, 1986).

These are just a few of the underlying problems with the idea of colorblindness. The approach fails to consider minoritized experiences by privileging the white experience. Concrete steps have been taken to correct this approach and consider how race and racism undergird academic institutions. For example, diversity courses have proven effective in higher education especially benefiting white students. Case in point, Cole et al. (2011) showed that students who took a college-level diversity course reported an increased understanding of white privilege, acknowledgment of blatant racism, acceptance of intersectional consciousness[1] and an appreciation for the impact of intersectional consciousness on white students compared with students of color.

Problem Statement

As LIS educators, in this article, our primary purpose is to share with colleagues, especially librarians, how we have disabused the notion of colorblindness in the LIS classroom. We base our work on the principles of reflective practice, a process for group learning based on sharing stories

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and analyzing cross-cutting themes (Patton, 2015). This work presents the results of a discussion between the three authors. We work in majority-white academic institutions in New England, and the southeastern U.S. Two of us are representatives of minority groups, one is a Latina faculty member, and one is an African American faculty member. We acknowledge that our experiences as racial and ethnic minorities cannot be excluded from our pedagogy, which we claim as a strength that broadens our perspectives on this topic. The third co-author identifies as a cis-gender white woman who studies the topic of DEI in LIS and has developed courses exploring racism in libraries.

Collectively, we have over 38 years of experience teaching in LIS, and all three of us have taught at least one course focused on DEI topics. In addition, we believe that to be far-reaching and more impactful in our students' experiences, DEI topics in LIS need to be considered in all parts of the LIS curriculum, not just within the confines of a targeted elective. This holistic approach to DEI topics in LIS higher education is the key to providing students with the basic skills and knowledge they will need to become information professionals who genuinely strive to respond to the needs of society. As newly minted librarians graduate from library schools in America, they will operate in library systems that we acknowledge as biased, which heightens the possibility of a new generation of librarians falling prey to the colorblind mentality that glorifies meritocratic approaches to higher education and society.

This work focuses on how we address DEI issues in our courses in ways that actively move towards avoiding a colorblind, meritocratic, and exclusionary rhetoric. We present our strategies, lessons learned, and best practices we have accumulated as part of our teaching experiences in the LIS classroom. The main goal of this work is to present these approaches to librarians and other LIS educators to advance the conversation regarding DEI in LIS and beyond, especially in our classrooms. We acknowledge the shortfalls in some of our approaches and recognize that we will always be working to improve, as is the nature of reflectively approached pedagogy if we are to ascribe to the tenets of cultural humility and culturally responsive teaching (Cooke, 2016). Cooke points out that, by definition, cultural humility is a process in which practitioners take a step back in their practice so that patrons have the freedom to assert themselves and their expertise related to their lives and culture. Culturally responsive pedagogy aims at having teachers engage in honest, critical reflection of how their positionality and intersectionality influence their students' learning (Cooke, 2016). Thus, we consider the work we share in this research necessary to help prepare future information professionals and inform the practice of LIS practitioners already working in the field.

Considerations When Teaching DEI

Teaching DEI beyond colorblindness requires instructors to be brave, which takes many forms. In classroom settings, any topic can turn into an emotionally charged discussion, which is particularly true of DEI topics. Social inequalities, derived from America's history of exclusion and prejudice based on socially constructed racial differences, are something experienced only by members of minority racial groups. This point is critical because our discussion focuses on strategies that can be applied to improve curriculum and teaching practices to nullify systemic racist constructs. These strategies are classified into four main categories: directness and intentionality, managing tough conversations, selection of materials, and contextualization (See Table 1).

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Table 1. Considerations when Teaching DEI

Directness and Intentionality	• Curriculum should provide more than one DEI-focused course. • Course titles should be forthright in their approach to DEI. • DEI topics should be infused throughout the entire curriculum; not just confined to a single DEI elective course.
Managing Tough Conversations	• Correct students' misconceptions, misinterpretations, and misunderstandings gently, directly, and intentionally. • Avoid conversations and discussions that degenerate into a "*Suffering Olympics*." • Invite students to self-reflect on possible origins of their discomfort around certain topics. • Have a statement of conduct on the syllabus and where relevant (e.g., as part of the instructions on discussion boards or as reminders before classroom discussions).
Selection of Materials	• Provide interdisciplinary readings from fields beyond LIS. • Choose readings and materials by people of color, as well as LGBTQIA+ and non-North American authors. • Leverage topics to advance DEI issues (e.g., topics on popular culture to present concepts such as hegemony). • Contextualize course assignments to guide deeper, more meaningful discussions. • Consider the validity of assignments (i.e., Do they enable students to learn what is intended?) • Ask for help from colleagues who specialize on DEI when creating assignments.
Contextualization	• Constantly remind students of how DEI connects to course objectives, course materials and greater issues in society. • Recognizing that DEI topics might contradict what students have been taught all their lives. • Identify and self-reflect on your own biases as an instructor.

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Directness and Intentionality of Teaching DEI

Although there have been recorded positive effects on college students taking diversity courses (Cole et al., 2011), researchers warn that students might need more than one diversity course to sustain their identity construction of embracing differences (Bowman, 2010). Recent studies emphasize offering more than one DEI course by imbuing DEI topics throughout the curriculum to reinforce inclusive concepts and practices. This approach is more effective than just a single DEI course and is more relevant to lasting positive student outcomes (Cooke, 2016; Denson et al., 2020).

Furthermore, in higher education, the preference seems to be to create courses framed as "diversity." Not many courses directly address racism, anti-racism, or anti-Blackness. Specifically, in LIS, we see course titles like *Diversity*, *Social Justice,* and *Services for Diverse Users*. Still, we are less likely to see course titles like *Anti-racism in Information Science*, *Racism in Libraries*, or *Colorblindness in the Information Professions*. Sanitized course titles seem to mirror a generalized practice exhibited throughout LIS. Rather than offering forthright concepts critically relevant to the field's maturation, LIS considers topics like racialized power and cultural nuance through the polite lens of multiculturalism. (Hudson, 2017).

Being direct about which topics and approaches will be employed in LIS courses is crucial. It is equally important not to limit DEI topics to only a specialized course, which in most LIS programs and areas of study is an elective course. It is essential to infuse DEI topics throughout the entire LIS curriculum. This inclusive approach reinforces an ongoing discourse and helps put the topics discussed in context with direct application to LIS professional practice. This method will ultimately produce positive student outcomes related to DEI and reduce any possible resistance to learning about diversity topics (Denson et al., 2020).

Managing Tough Conversations

We have found that when managing classroom interactions, especially around complex topics, which can quickly arise when covering DEI, it is important to correct problematic behavior and language as soon as it happens. It is also essential to correct misconceptions, misinterpretations, and misunderstandings gently, directly, and intentionally. As instructors, our purpose is to share our knowledge and be in conversation with students. Still, our role—which carries inherent privilege and power in and of itself— also demands that we point out and correct inappropriate behavior when it occurs. With DEI as our pedagogical framework, we must immediately unpack racist and discriminatory language and attitudes and engage students in a discussion that signifies the issues. Although it is sometimes necessary to move on with a lesson and return later to address a problematic issue, some comments, language, or ideas expressed by students must be tackled in the moment, as they arise in the classroom or in online class forums. Intricate and complex conversations are often fertile ground for profound growth in librarian identity formation.

Another issue that might be more difficult to tackle than egregious and blatant racist language or behaviors is reading responses that arise when comparing stories of the trauma of various cultural or identity-based groups. When discussions veer into this territory, sometimes a phenomenon that Antony Polonsky has described as the "Suffering Olympics" can occur (Cohen, 2012). On a personal level, this happens when we compare our grief to another's experience in a way that delegitimizes the other party (Amgalanbaatar, 2020). It is important to manage

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a conversation like this without invalidating the experiences of various groups by contextualizing and focusing on the overarching themes of the class discussion.

A strategy to tackle such a situation in the LIS classroom is to redirect the conversation to the overarching topic, not the particular story of a specific demographic or historical context. For example, when discussing a topic such as slavery in the U.S. and its long-term effects on African Americans, this topic is also the trope of the Irish being enslaved. As an instructor, it is essential to bring the conversation back to the issues at hand and establish significant contextual differences. In this specific example, the differences between the slavery of African Americans and the indentured servitude of early Irish Americans triangulated with issues such as anti-Blackness, make aspects such as discrimination based on skin color more difficult to conceal than national or ethnic origin. Instructors should intentionally deliver this type of argument to present facts instead of avoiding the topic, dismissing the issues at hand, or downplaying the experience of either group. In the case of someone pressing on with a flawed argument, it is also important to invite the person to self-reflect and explore the possible feelings they are encountering and their probable origins.

It is essential to highlight the usefulness of having a statement that directly addresses classroom conduct expectations. Instructors should create these statements and make them part of the main components of the course, including the syllabus, assignment instructions, preamble to starting a new lesson, evaluation rubrics, and discussion board instructions. This conduct statement should directly address expectations for behavior and the rules of engagement in how topics and conversations will be approached in the course. Common statements may include but are not limited to:

> Using "I" statements so that it is clear that the individual is speaking from their point of view instead of generalizing;
>
> That the use of racial slurs or other derogatory language will not be tolerated;
>
> The importance of critiquing ideas, not individuals or groups;
>
> Avoiding inflammatory language (e.g., including name-calling);
>
> Asking questions when one does not understand a point or term;
>
> Not assuming one knows others' thinking or motivations;
>
> Not expecting any individuals to speak on behalf of their gender, ethnic group, class, status, etc. (or the groups we perceive them to be a part of); and,
>
> Acknowledging that the topics will make students uncomfortable.

Selection of Materials

DEI literature has grown significantly in the last decade, so locating information on these topics is not as difficult as it used to be. Instructors should also consider consulting the DEI literature in various disciplines to locate relevant interdisciplinary information about the courses they teach and their program's objectives. Fields such as education, sociology, psychology, and cultural anthropology have a long history of literature and methodologies supporting DEI work;

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therefore, introducing students to these disciplines would benefit their development as information professionals.

When selecting course materials, it is of utmost importance to select authors of color, LGBTQIA+ authors, and non-North American authors. While this can be challenging, especially when incorporating readings that move beyond DEI topics, it is well worth the effort. Another strategy we recommend is not to immediately address the fact that these are minority or underrepresented authors with the students until the end of the semester. Here the purpose is to gauge students' reactions to materials and then move on to a discussion regarding the rationale for picking the specific materials, the different points of view represented by the authors, and what the students liked or did not like about the readings.

Instructors need to leverage the topics discussed in class to advance discussions of DEI. Discussions such as those centered on topics like popular culture are a great way to introduce concepts such as hegemony and the role of popular culture in helping disseminate specific images and tropes into the general consciousness. This way, the discussion can move into more meaningful and directly applicable DEI principles that students can put into practice or be aware of in their future as LIS professionals.

Moreover, including DEI content goes beyond just course readings. Therefore, it is important to caution about the need to be careful about the assignments we give students and consider their unintended consequences. Assignments that guide discussions to more meaningful topics are highly effective and essential for teaching DEI topics. Classroom (or electronic) discussions and assignments must delve into hard conversations and highlight subtle institutional barriers to DEI instead of staying on the general, polarized, or easy-to-identify examples of wrongdoing throughout history.

DEI is a complex, multifaceted concept. Assignments need to reflect this complexity with instructor expectations for students to engage beyond just lip service and surface-level support for minority groups. For example, when using pre-designed material for classroom activities, modules such as the *Circles of My Multicultural Self* [2] or the *Privilege Walk* exercise[3] require the instructor to guide the conversation towards meaningful self-reflection. Issues easily separated from the topic of race, such as poverty or intersectionality, can be avoided unless the discussion guides students to these more nuanced avenues of self-reflection.

Additionally, instructors must consider the validity of the assignments given to students: are they learning what we want them to learn? A popular assignment is still used, especially in DEI-focused courses, which at first glance, is intended to encourage students to engage with people who are different from themselves. This assignment instructs students to go to a place they would not usually go, and some of the suggestions include a local gay bar, a Black church, or a Latinx community center, to name a few places. After their visit, students are instructed to write about their experiences and discuss how they interacted with people in these locations, all within a DEI context, tied to class readings or discussions. Whether we in LIS have considered this kind of approach or not, this kind of assignment sends students into places that are long-held safe spaces for members of those cultural groups. Thus, the students' uninvited, voyeuristic presence stands to colonize those safe spaces and violate their sanctity.

Kenny (2001) offers an essential definition for a safe space as a public space where an individual is encouraged to have "...a certain license to speak and act freely, form collective strength, and

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generate strategies for resistance" (as cited in Roestone Collective, 2014, p. 1346). Therefore, when we send students to these spaces, especially when students are not prepared or have not come to terms with their own biases and the systemic nature of racism and prejudice present in many of our organizations in American society, we are endangering those who inhabit the safe space. We dismiss the importance of the safe space and its meaning to those who frequent it, seeking solace and fellowship among other like-minded individuals who are rejected or stigmatized in mainstream society. This assignment also objectifies and further marginalizes the people being 'studied.'

As LIS instructors, we must approach DEI assignments mindfully to support the need for students who belong to non-minoritized groups to take personal responsibility to do the work to embrace DEI concepts and understandings. One way this can be accomplished is to have students do their own research and take the time to engage with the topics instead of having others educate them. Otherwise, the effort is placed on minority groups, akin to tokenizing their agency and experiences. Another essential strategy is to ensure that assignments do not have unintended negative consequences and are counterproductive to our efforts. If you, as the instructor, have any hesitation related to the potential risks of students misunderstanding course content or misinterpreting the intentions of an assignment, a good practice is to reach out to black, indigenous, people of color (BIPOC) colleagues or those who specialize in DEI topics for suggestions and, if possible, ask them if they are willing to review materials, comment, or brainstorm when creating assignments.

Contextualization

When teaching DEI topics, it is also important to constantly remind students of the reasoning for the topics' inclusion in the course, the connections to course objectives and other course materials, and their relevance to being a contributory citizen in society. As instructors, we must contextualize discussions, assignments, and readings and remind students about the interplay of different phenomena within the profession. More importantly, we need to recognize that this may be the first time many students will encounter some of these topics or issues that go against what they have been taught throughout their lives. They need time and space to process the information presented to them and the contradictions of what they had been taught throughout their lives.

This unfamiliarity with the topics and issues covered in the course, and the anxiety they may provoke in some students, might drive some of them to resist the topic actively. This issue, as pointed out by Venner and Verney (2015), might include minimizing instructor expertise and relevance to practice and research, with resistance manifesting itself in the classroom with students challenging the instructor's authority and competence; specific behaviors demonstrated by students might also include discounting, arguing, or outright ignoring the instructor. As unnerving as an experience like this can be, it is essential to point out that ignoring the issue will not yield a positive outcome in the classroom, especially when dealing with incidents in which students disagree. Research on the matter insists on the importance of effective classroom management, which includes giving the student the space to comment on the process and dynamics of tense discussions while also allowing them the time and space to reflect on the negative emotions they are experiencing in the context of the discussion at hand (Sue et al., cited in Venner & Verney, 2015).

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Self-reflection regarding the topics discussed in the course allows students to explore their emotions, thoughts, reactions, and—most importantly— the root of these, especially those that trigger discomfort. It is imperative to highlight here that this is not only applicable to students, but as instructors, we also need to take the time to think about why some topics make us uncomfortable and are aware of our own biases.

For LIS Instructors

It is also important to highlight the significance of LIS instructors having colleagues who do DEI work to create a supportive community of practice because teaching and research that prioritizes DEI can be isolating. This isolation factor is especially relevant for BIPOC LIS faculty and librarian practitioners. Additionally, when LIS students do not have connections with classmate-colleagues, librarians, or LIS faculty who are as invested in issues of DEI, the student might receive an education that affirms their dominant role in society. Then, when they get to a class that directly addresses issues such as oppression and racism, these students often get the feeling that the class is oppressive, that the instructor is picking on them, or that the objective is to provoke guilt or to put them in a position in which they must justify their existence. This misunderstanding can make students angry and defensive of their points of view and place in society.

This perspective reinforces the importance of having DEI infused throughout the curriculum and consistently offering specialized courses and electives as part of the overall course schedule. We tap into our personal networks, especially with other faculty of color and proven non-BIPOC accomplices, especially when trying to incorporate new assignments/projects, revise course content, locate new activities or materials and critically evaluate the content of our own assignments. These interactions with faculty of color and white faculty enrich our teaching and create a support system. At least one of us has sat down with a BIPOC faculty colleague to rewrite and co-create assignments for use in classes taught by both instructors.

In addition, teaching DEI content can be risky. Pushback to these topics can come from colleagues, administration, students, parents, elected officials, and beyond. For BIPOC instructors, there is an additional risk of students saying that one is sensitive because of one's ethnicity or race or has a chip on their shoulder. These issues come out in our teaching evaluations because when students are challenged academically in a way that makes them question their frames of reference, especially in classes where the instructor is the only visible minority in the space, it opens the door to challenges to one's qualifications and suitability as an instructor.

One aspect we must point out here is the lack of diversity these students have had throughout their academic lives. In our experience as instructors, we have had graduate students tell us that they have never had a teacher who is a person of color, which means these students most likely have never had to deal with this type of power imbalance before. In the classroom, the student-instructor dynamic can take the form of students challenging the BIPOC instructor, trying to talk about 'reverse racism' issues, and giving poor teaching evaluations. Teaching evaluations of BIPOC instructors tend to stray away from constructive comments regarding teaching skills and become very personal towards topics such as the instructor's appearance, tone of voice, or accent. In our experiences as instructors, student comments on course evaluations have veered into full-on criticism of the curriculum (which we as faculty have limited control over), linguistic accents, communication style, body size and hairstyles, choice of shoes and clothing, to name only a few

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potentially discriminatory and detrimental topics. While some of these components may be perceived as relevant to providing high-quality education (e.g., curriculum concerns), our experiences as BIPOC faculty are not the same as those experienced by white colleagues and can ultimately impact advancement and retention in the LIS professoriate (Bourg, 2014; Cooke et al., 2018; Irvin, 2019; Mehra & Gray, 2020).

The issue of course evaluations veering into aspects that the faculty member has little control over should also be an essential consideration for those in charge of evaluating teaching personnel to make decisions related to promotion and retention. Student evaluations of teaching (SET), also known as student course evaluations, are generally accepted ways to evaluate the performance of faculty members in higher education. These evaluations are usually tied to retention and compensation. However, a substantial body of work demonstrates that SET are highly flawed systems and that basing personnel decisions on these can lead to discriminatory employment practices (Kreitzer and Sweet-Cushman, 2022; Lohman, 2021). Some issues with a reliance on student evaluations of teaching include the reciprocity effect, which happens when students use course evaluations as a punitive action for a lower grade received (Boring & Ottoboni, 2016; Reid, 2010).

The issues related to SET go beyond being used as a way to punish faculty members for not awarding the expected grade. Research has found that student evaluations of teaching are marred with sexist comments, tend to judge racial minorities more harshly than whites (Reid, 2010), as well as express more negative performance evaluations of faculty when diversity and inclusion topics are the focus of the courses being evaluated (Boatright-Horowitz & Soeung, 2009).

Furthermore, faculty of color are not only underrepresented in higher education, especially in higher-ranking positions, but also face work environments in which they must overcome bullying, stereotyping, and institutional neglect to achieve their ranks in their universities. Adams and Batty (2019) highlighted these hardships as part of the finding of their study focusing on Black female academics in the U.K. These adversities echo the experiences of female faculty of color in the U.S. (Turner et al., 2008). Faculty of color, despite gender, are also more prone to bias in student evaluations (Reid, 2010). Therefore, academic institutions and the leadership in academic programs must recognize these biases and support those teaching DEI content, especially BIPOC faculty.

Conclusion

To maintain and strengthen the collaboration inherent in this virtuous circle of LIS education, service, and practice, we offer our reflections to our professional colleagues in the form of meaningful suggestions for avoiding colorblindness in LIS classrooms and learning environments. The topics of DEI, which call for a direct approach to teaching that rescinds colorblind rhetoric, are essential in providing a well-rounded educational experience for *all* college students. Creating a sense of belonging and inclusiveness depends on students seeing themselves reflected not only on the faculty but the curriculum to which they will be exposed (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Therefore, imbuing DEI topics throughout the curriculum should be a core consideration for institutions of higher education, given the fact that the general population in the country is ever more diverse (United States Census Bureau, 2020). By 2026, the number of Latinx/Hispanic students in American higher education may exceed 41 million (Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, 2022). According to a report by the National Center for

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Education Statistics (2020), between the years 2000 and 2018, college enrollment rates among 18- to 24-year-olds increased among African American/Black (from 31 to 37 percent) and Latinx/Hispanic (from 22 to 36 percent). This data conveys that in higher education in America, the diversification of the student body is not an expected future trend. Still, students who belong to racial and ethnic minorities are already part of academia. Our duty as instructors is to provide students with a collegial experience inclusive of their racial/ethnic identity, which celebrates and studies their heritage instead of erasing and colonizing it.

For instructors, teaching and engaging with directness and intentionality, managing tough conversations, selecting appropriate materials, and contextualizing the entire learning event can be challenging. This work requires ongoing, dynamic individual self-reflection and cultural humility and can feel like it is more trouble than it is worth. However, once we normalize this lens and apply it to our pedagogy and practice, we promise it becomes easier. More importantly, it will benefit us as LIS instructors, our colleagues as LIS practitioners and students, and the profession worldwide. This stance is how we implement radical pedagogies (Cooke, 2019) and work toward decolonizing our practices. We need to continue having these collective and collaborative conversations across the virtuous collaboration cycle between LIS faculty and librarian colleagues, librarians and their community members, LIS faculty and LIS students, and stakeholders. The collaborations needed to eliminate colorblindness in the profession run the gamut, and collective understanding and efforts will ensure that the work is substantive and perpetual.

Endnotes

[1] To learn more about the concept of intersectional consciousness, consult Boveda, M. (2019). An Afro-Latina's Navigation of the Academy: Tracings of Audacious Departures, Reroutings, and Intersectional Consciousness. *Feminist Formations,* 31(1), 103–123. https://doi.org/10.1353/ff.2019.0011

[2] *Circles of My Multicultural Self* is available at: http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/activities/circlesofself.html)

[3] The *Privilege Walk* exercise is available at: http://doloreshuerta.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/privilege-walk.pdf.

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