**Edited and Compiled Chat from “Anti-Racist Series: Action and Advocacy” (July 21, 2020)**

**Presenters:**

**Jack Nuelle, *Program Manager, Faculty Center for Ignatian Pedagogy***

**Sandra Sullivan Dunbar, *Associate Professor, Department of Theology***

**Ruth Gomberg-Munoz, *Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology***

**Rebecca Valeriano-Flores, *PhD Student in Philosophy***

***Note****: The following transcript has been edited for length and clarify and organized by overarching topic. Participants’ names have been made anonymous.*

***Logistical questions or concerns? Please email*** ***Jack Nuelle, Program Manager, Faculty Center for Ignatian Pedagogy.***

**Rebecca Valeriano-Flores**: Critical thinking: not what to think but how to think critically about issues.

**Participant A**: Exactly. You're encouraging students to be aware of what being involved civically could be. It's not appropriate to demand students advocate in a specific way for a specific bill. However, making them aware that legislation exists or has implications can be part of contextualizing issues in the current world and landscape. I think you can call their attention to its existence and encourage them to examine it. Mandating action on it as a part of a class assignment is problematic.

**Faculty Center**: The focus is less on students promoting an '"agenda" but instead understanding the ways in which to exercise their constitutional rights.

**Participant B**: To be involved in the democratic process, diversity of thought is important. Cancel culture seems to silence many who hold different views. Another recent video by Glenn Loury and John McWhorter on July 23.

**Rebecca Valeriano-Flores**: Dismissing something as “cancel culture” is often way to say that people should not be held accountable for their (racist, sexist, transphobic, etc.) words and actions.

**Participant B**: Everyone should be held accountable as individuals including racist or any discriminatory behavior. This is different than being able to evaluate any view or position.

**Sandra Sullivan Dunbar**: I do not tell students what policies to advocate for. I simply show them how they can advocate. Feel free to reach out to me directly if you would like to see the assignments.

**Participant C**: Sandra, I would definitely be interested in your Google doc. My upper level students create a social advocacy campaign every fall.

**Participant D**: Sandra, I am a medical student at Stritch and I would love your resources to share with my classmates who are learning how to be physician advocates.

**Sandra Sullivan Dunbar**: I find that many of our students who are very active and engaged on campus do not know how to advocate in policy processes off campus. They may educate their peers, but don’t know how to contact officials, etc.

**Participant A**: I've also found it helpful to let students know how young many individuals working in elected official's office are. They often aren't aware that those are roles you don't need to have multiple advanced degrees or be of a certain age to apply for.

**Participant E**: I also give extra credit if students work as poll workers (they can even get paid) - and I have had students do this as Republicans, Democrats, and Independents - so they see what goes into making voting possible. And also, in the time of COVID most poll workers historically are older - at more risk for serious illness - so really helpful now. Here is one site: <https://www.powerthepolls.org/>

**Sandra Sullivan Dunbar**: Great suggestion. I have had students do this. While I give points for some such activities, when I do so, I offer alternatives such as reflection papers so people don’t feel pressured to do a civic engagement activity. I agree that civic engagement around democracy does not presume a particular partisan affiliation.

**Participant E**: I do this as extra credit - poll worker - and ask them to write up a short reflection paper about the experience - not a requirement - and they can do this for any political party.

**Participant B**: I use reflection and analysis papers also and this allows students who do not feel psychologically safe to discuss views that are not popular. Some feel that they will be attacked in class if they verbalize their views.

**Participant F**: I like the idea of utilizing critical reflection papers with some sort of community engagement activity as extra credit. Thanks for sharing this idea!

**Participant A**: That reflective activity around these experience is key to helping connecting the experience back to the course work AND what it will mean for them as future professionals. It makes sure the experience is leveraged to support the learning that's occurring in class.

**Participant B**: I teach business ethics at both the undergrad and graduate level at the business school. It is also important to train students how to assess corporate cultures and the values that are espoused. Do these values cohere with their own? How do corporate decisions and actions reflect those values? If values are mere window dressing then students need to be aware of the cognitive dissonance they will experience and a possibility of violating their own values.

**Participant E**: Yes, absolutely! Vital!

**Participant A**: At the CEL, we talk about partners as being co-educators to make sure to recognize the incredible work they are doing with our student (out of a place of immense generosity).

**Participant D**: The environment determines outcomes. Thank you for sharing this! Mentorship is critical.

**Participant E**: This is true also for faculty searches - what values we prioritize - etc.!

**Participant G**: The idea of what is “fair” also applies here—how do we gate keep by claiming we’re being “fair”?

**Participant H**: Yes! I have heard a lot this summer about how faculty can’t be flexible for students because then that’s not fair. But what happens is that it’s not fair or equitable for anyone. Sorry - can’t be flexible in regard to assignments and grading.

**Participant A**: That lack of ability to make reasonable and responsive adjustments flies in the face of cura personalis, which should be showing up in our Jesuit pedagogy.

**Participant B**: If we are to evaluate students differently based on race then this needs to be a policy change in how faculty grade students. This is an issue of safety for faculty who believe that students are graded on the standards of the course.

**Participant H**: I agree. I am thinking about situations when students need a few extra days to finish an assignment because of a family emergency, illness, etc. I think that some students don’t get extra grace but others do. A policy in a class where you explain that you are flexible for everyone - within reason, within policy. I focus on my students knowing that the goal of assignments is quality, and if that means the assignment is a few days late, I prefer that.

**Ruth Gomberg-Munoz**: I don’t know that grading students differently is the point. I think of it as the difference between giving students a low grade and sending them to the writing center, vs offering to work with students to rewrite and work closely on their writing skills (mostly in anthropology it’s writing). That’s the ushering vs. the gatekeeping approach.

**Participant G**: I don’t think this is about evaluating students based on race, but being open to our own bias that might come through when we say we’re being fair. I think it’s a point of personal reflection as opposed to policy changes.

**Participant I**: One way to think about this is thinking about what the learning goals are for the assignment, and making sure that grading or deadlines do not reflect norms outside of these goals. So, if a writing assignment is intended to show understanding of the text, don't take point off for grammar or spelling which may disadvantage non-native English speakers.

**Participant B**: I agree, those exceptions are already stated and communicated to my students.

**Participant A**: That model of encouraging a rewrite actually models a way of approaching grading and assessment called specifications grading that is a best practice in teaching and is an evidence based practice for higher levels of learning.

**Participant H**: And yes, offering writing center and the many resources the university has. Hearing faculty say that they give a zero because an assignment wasn’t turned in is disturbing. If it was important enough to assign, it’s important enough to ‘chase’ students to do.

**Participant B**: A zero is extreme, there is a half letter grade reduction for each day the paper is late, and of course a longer time period allowed for extenuating circumstances.

**Participant H**: Exactly. A zero or F doesn’t mathematically make sense, if nothing else.

**Participant D**: Are students of color not already graded differently because of professor bias towards BIPOC? I think the point that was Rebecca was trying to make is to be more equitable. Addressing bias is critical.

**Rebecca Valeriano-Flores**: Thanks for all of your comments! Gatekeeping vs. ushering in this presentation is not necessarily about grading students based on race. I’m saying that when it comes to reaching out to students, we focus on students who are already going doing well and ignoring students who don’t show exceptional talent.

**Participant H**: Rebecca, thank you so much for your presentation! I apologize - the gatekeeping vs. ushering made me think of conversations I have had this summer related to grading. I apologize for leading us down this rabbit hole.

**Rebecca Valeriano-Flores**: You can grade students at a high level without being discouraging, and you can mentor students regardless their grade in your class. No worries, glad we can have this conversation!

**Participant H**: Absolutely. I totally agree. I have a really hard time with grades because they can be subjective and often include averaging which negates progress made, etc.

**Participant I**: Although these are philosophy-specific, the papers "Fair Grades" by Daryl Close and "The Case for Motivational Grading" by John Immerwahr are provide two perspectives on this subject and might be of interest.

**Participant J**: I use what I call iterative grading; I kick a heavily edited work product back to them and tell them "this is because I have confidence in your ability to do good work" and meet as needed to clarify.

**Participant B**: Yes, reaching their potential by assisting students to develop their human capacities (as Kant would support)!

**Rebecca Valeriano-Flores**: I Kant agree more!

**Participant A**: Have you read anything by Linda Nilson? I think you'd enjoy her take on assessment as well!

**Participant J**: No, but thank you for the reference.

**Sandra Sullivan Dunbar**: Me too, thanks, scribbling references!