Making Excellence Inclusive in Challenging Times: Moving Beyond Diversity to Create Equitable and Anti-Racist Learning Environments

In January 2022, the CTE held our Ninth Annual Symposium on Teaching and Learning. This year’s Symposium explored how to promote inclusive, affirming, and equitable learning environments both in and outside of the classroom. Over 80 members of Rice’s community joined our featured speaker, Dr. Frank Tuit (Vice President and Chief Diversity Officer, University of Connecticut) as he presented a remote keynote address entitled “Moving Beyond Diversity to Create Inclusive, Affirming, and Equitable Learning Environments.” Because of COVID restrictions, Dr. Tuit’s workshop, “Making Excellence Inclusive in Challenging Times: Moving Beyond Diversity to Create Equitable and Anti-Racist Learning Environments” will be held on Monday, April 11, 2022.

Explore the CTE Library

The CTE library is growing! Our collection, which now boasts over 300 titles, can help you explore topics such as student creativity, innovations in assessment, collaborative learning techniques, the role of emotions in learning, and equity and inclusion in the classroom and in higher education more broadly. Every year we add new titles that inspire and spark debates about education. This year’s new additions include Ungrading by Susan D. Blum that advocates for a new approach to assessment and José Antonio Bowen’s new book Teaching Change about teaching that can change hearts and minds.

Explore our collection online or stop by to browse our shelves!
CTE Faculty Fellows Host Discussions on Interdisciplinary Teaching

In the fall of 2020, the Faculty Senate tasked a Working Group to study Rice’s general education curriculum. The Working Group prepared a report whose recommendations were eventually adopted by the Faculty Senate in December 2021. The report’s central findings were that Rice’s undergraduate curriculum tilts heavily in favor of offerings for majors, and the current distribution system, while offering a large number of course options, is ad hoc and lacks coordination and oversight; in the words of the report, “no one owns distribution at Rice.” In many ways, Rice’s current distribution system risks falling short both of accreditation standards and the University’s stated commitment to provide a broad, liberal arts education.

In adopting the Working Group’s recommendations, the Faculty Senate committed to improving Rice’s distribution system. After the Faculty Senate vote, the CTE Faculty Fellows discussed how they could support that effort. The consensus was that encouraging faculty to offer more interdisciplinary courses—which, by their nature, cannot just speak to specialists—would be a great way forward. As a first step, the Fellows held an informal gathering at Valhalla in December, during which Deborah Harter (Modern and Classical Literatures and Culture) and Mike Gustin (BioSciences) discussed how they had conceived of and put together “Monster: Conceiving and Misconceiving the Monstrous in Fiction and in Art, Medicine and Bioscience,” their highly successfully course at the Moody Center. In the lively discussion that followed, attendees agreed that one big obstacle to creating interdisciplinary courses was simply that faculty too rarely have opportunities to meet and mingle with peers outside their disciplines; as a result, it’s hard to find like-minded faculty interested in similar topics.

Taking those observations to heart, the Fellows decided to host a series of informal meet-and-greets focused on topics of broad interest, in the hopes of attracting a wide variety of faculty. Given President Leebron’s recent commitment to put climate change front and center in the University’s priorities, as well as the diversity of faculty represented in the Envirofac list-serve, we decided that climate change would be an ideal launch topic for these get-togethers. We’re currently in the process of scheduling this first meeting before the semester’s end.

As Rice welcomes a new President and Provost, it feels like a particularly felicitous time to forge ahead with new initiatives for the undergraduate curriculum that would synergize with the University’s identified priorities in interdisciplinary scholarship. To cause change of this scale will inevitably require extensive collaboration across campus. The CTE Fellows look forward to supporting these efforts.

- Anthony Brandt (Music), Lesa Tran Lu (BioSciences), Renata Ramos (Engineering)

Spring 2022 Reading Group

This semester the CTE hosted our annual campus-wide reading group for discussions of the book *The Inequality Machine: How College Divides Us*, by Paul Tough.

Over three sessions, participants discussed whether American colleges and universities have become a tool of social immobility—“a system that secures a comfortable future for the children of the wealthy while throwing roadblocks in the way of students from struggling families.” Our discussions focused on the role of teaching, pedagogy, and interactions with students in addressing inequities in higher education as well as the impact the coronavirus pandemic has had on our efforts to provide inclusive and equitable opportunities for our students.