

**Creating an Inclusive Learning Community to Better Serve Minority Students**

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**Abstract.** As campuses become increasingly diverse, it is important that faculties maintain inclusive classrooms. Students of underrepresented ethnic/racial groups are more likely to experience disengagement in an academic setting (Nagasawa & Wong, 1999), which can lead to underperformance (Major et al., 1998). Students with LGBTQA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or asexual) identities are at higher risk of poor mental health and lower academic performance compared to cisgender and heterosexual students (Aragon et al., 2014). These detrimental experiences can lead to even more harm in a remote learning environment, where students have fewer opportunities to feel a sense of belonging and connect with their peers and/or instructors. This paper will consider strategies of inclusiveness in the online classroom and in-person learning environment within a social psychology framework to better support underprivileged students to improve academic performance and the overall educational experience. The suggestions and discussions provided apply to both in-person learning as well as remote delivery.

**Keywords:** diversity; inclusion; minority; prejudice; classroom

Some aspects of diversity on campuses are easy to see, but some of this diversity is less visible. Creating a feeling of inclusion for all students is important for students to feel safe in order to learn (CAST, 2018). Additionally, this sense of inclusion may be especially important in a remote learning environment where students may feel more isolated and disconnected to begin with. Social psychologists have proposed that all humans possess the need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), a cross-cultural and inherent drive that motivates forming social bonds to feel accepted by others. Creating a classroom environment that is a safe space that meets the needs of all students is both a best practice and a component of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and has been shown to increase student learning, and, ultimately, student success (CAST, 2018). This paper will examine concepts related to classroom environments that may not feel welcoming to all (e.g., microaggressions, stereotype threat), as well as approaches to ensure a more inclusive classroom (e.g., inclusive language, including the perspectives of minority groups) to improve all students' overall learning experiences. We also include suggestions of what remote teachers can do to increase equity and better engage in outreach to support students in remote learning. We encourage instructors to incorporate these inclusive teaching practices across various modes of instruction (remote learning, hybrid, face-to-face) to embrace diversity and support minority students. The paper analyzes structural issues in the classroom, explores how they affect classroom dynamics and experiences, and proposes solutions primarily within a social psychology and pedagogical framework. Much research on prejudice and inclusive teaching

practices have been conducted by experts trained in social psychology, with additional recommendations from experts in education, so the inclusion of both of these perspectives allows for a more fulsome discussion. We have included several suggestions that are adaptable to courses across disciplines, though some may be more amenable to the social sciences, education, and the humanities. However, we have also included additional resources so that instructors can review other sources of inclusive teaching practices that may be more discipline-specific.

### **Criteria for Selecting Literature Presented**

Given that this paper is a critical analysis of contemporary literature in education and the social sciences, we chose to cite scholars who are experts in their field indicated by a substantial record of publication (e.g., Shaun Harper's work on racial biases in education, Claude Steele and Joshua Aronson's works on stereotype threat, Derald Wing Sue and Kevin Nadal's works on microaggressions) or scholars who are among the first to publish work on a groundbreaking concept that widely influenced their field (e.g., Peggy McIntosh on white privilege, Anthony Greenwald on the Implicit Association Test). For additional scholarship, we chose to cite those who are highly influential in their areas of expertise, evidenced by a high number of citations (e.g., Steven Aragon, Penelope Lockwood, Anna Woodcock) or those who have much knowledge in matters of diversity, equity, and inclusion, also indicated by their publication records (e.g., Sharon Fries-Britt, Richard Nagasawa).

Books we have chosen to include (*White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism* by Robin DiAngelo and *Me and White Supremacy: Combat Racism, Change the World, and Become a Good Ancestor* by Layla F. Saad) were selected based on the authors' credentials and expertise (a former professor of multicultural education and a law school graduate, respectively), positive critical reception of their work, and their influence in academia (e.g., both books are regularly assigned in faculty book groups that emphasize diversity, inclusion, and anti-racism).

For online teaching resources that are tailored toward college instructors, we included resources from institutions with an exemplary record of commitment to diversity and inclusion evidenced by diversity awards (presented to the University of Delaware, Center for Teaching and Assessment for Learning and the University of Southern California, Rossier School of Education), or institutions that have been awarded numerous grants with the goal of launching and sustaining diversity initiatives (Cornell University, Center for Teaching Innovation and the University of Michigan, Center for Research on Teaching and Learning). Finally, in recognizing the importance of universal design to support inclusion (in all aspects of life, but especially education), we also included resources from CAST, the center which developed the universal design for learning (UDL) framework in the mid-1980s, and has since become *the* resource for educators regarding UDL. We felt it was important to include CAST because it promotes the design of safe learning spaces for all students, knowing that an unsafe learning space creates a barrier to learning and reduces the motivation to learn.

### **Combating Microaggressions that Lead to Inequity in Higher Education**

Microaggressions are subtle forms of prejudice that can be verbal (insulting comments), behavioral (expressing surprise at a minority student's academic accomplishments), or environmental (a male-dominated workplace that conveys a message that female employees are not welcome), which some have argued can be more harmful than overt prejudice (Sue, 2010). Cumulative experiences with microaggressions can lead to poorer mental health, diminished confidence, and feelings of self-doubt (Pierce, 1995), which lead to students feeling further disengaged, decreasing motivation to improve performance, choosing a different major, transferring to a different institution, devaluing education, or dropping out of college (Fogliati & Bussey, 2013; Woodcock et al., 2012; Yosso et al., 2009). All of these outcomes can be exacerbated in a remote environment, where it is already more challenging for instructors to engage students with the course material and motivate achievement.

To facilitate greater rumination about how white privilege and systems of oppression perpetuate inequality, instructors can consider having students complete a white privilege checklist, which includes aspects of belonging (seeing oneself reflected in media representations), assumptions of law-abiding behavior (not being followed in a store), and assumptions of intelligence and ability (perceptions of being hired due to qualifications rather than filling an Affirmative Action quota) (McIntosh, 1988). We encourage instructors to complete this checklist as well (regardless of their racial identity) to reflect on the topic along with their students. Following completion of the scale, instructors can initiate a dialogue asking students how white privilege impacts them both directly and indirectly and what are continued harms of white privilege that operate within a culture of white supremacy.

To encourage empathy, instructors can have students complete a microaggressions checklist, which addresses more subtle aspects of prejudice, such as having one's citizenship status questioned/doubted or being ignored in a professional setting (Nadal, 2011) to reflect on how their identities afford them various privileges or, conversely, how their identities may make access to such privileges more challenging. We also recommend that instructors complete the checklist to ruminate over their own experiences with microaggressions to encourage greater awareness of how race/ethnic identity affects how we navigate the world and interactions with others. Following either (or both) of these exercises, instructors can provide recommendations on combating microaggressions in social and professional contexts to facilitate more productive intergroup communication and relations. For instance, instructors can encourage more privileged students to refrain from interrupting others when speaking given that men are more likely to interrupt women and white individuals are more likely to interrupt people of color (Elsass & Graves, 1997; Smith-Lovin & Brody, 1989). We should also remind more privileged students to use their privilege to advocate for others, such as by amplifying the contributions of people of color, given that contributions from those with marginalized identities are more likely to be overlooked (Liss et al., 2019). Similarly, instructors must be mindful of and follow their own advice, especially by

reminding themselves that there are tangible power dynamics within the classroom, and, as authority figures, instructors generally hold privileges that students may not (age, education level, job stability, financial status, etc.). Research in social psychology has shown that improved communication between group members and across different social groups facilitates cooperation, strengthens group cohesion, increases trust, and encourages individuals to adhere to group norms by setting them at the beginning of the interaction (Bornstein et al., 1989; Bouas & Komorita, 1996; Drolet & Morris, 2000; Pruitt, 1998). All of these outcomes can lead to a more cooperative and supportive learning environment that is more inclusive of diversity, whether pertaining to identity, background, or perspective.

A meta-analysis (analyzing 23 data sets from 20 empirical studies) found that various aspects of a student's social identity can lead to lower grades due to automatic stereotype activation tied to implicit biases (Malouff & Thorsteinsson, 2016). Factors that led to lower grades included racial/ethnic identity (being a student of color) and underachievement in past academic performance. To avoid activating these stereotypes, which can lead to microaggressions related to assumptions of abilities, instructors should consider anonymous grading to remove potential biases associated with students' identities (this is already a feature of most learning management systems). Thus, educators should reach out to those who maintain the learning management system, if such an office exists, to obtain technical support in successfully utilizing these online teaching tools to best serve their students. If such an office does not exist at the institution, instructors could attend online workshops, webinars, or discussion groups to receive support from one another to maximize teaching strategies in encouraging and empowering minority students. Whenever possible, instructors should also consistently give positive feedback on student work and in response to student comments during discussions (whether in person or online) to increase self-efficacy and combat the negative effects of prejudice.

In combination with anonymous grading, instructors should create and consistently use grading rubrics to assess assignments in order to increase objectivity in evaluating student work. This method, along with anonymous grading, can be implemented in any discipline, and instructors should communicate these methods to students consistently throughout the semester to highlight a commitment to equality in reducing biases in assessment. Additionally, students will likely appreciate transparency in the grading process, especially if they are provided with grading rubrics beforehand, given that honest communication increases trust (Pornpitakpan, 2004). Quinn (2021) found that using a rubric reduced the likelihood of stereotypes affecting instructor perceptions of students' work, increasing equality and objectivity. With no rubric, a submission from a "Black sounding" student name (*Dashawn*) was consistently given a lower grade for the same writing sample as a submission from "white sounding" student name such as *Connor* (Quinn, 2021). With the use of a rubric, however, teachers gave much more similar evaluations of both writing samples. Interestingly, Quinn (2021) also assessed teachers' implicit racial biases via the Implicit Association Test (IAT, Greenwald et al., 1998) and found that without rubrics, even those with more favorable attitudes toward African Americans exhibited racial bias in grading.

To motivate students to engage in greater self-reflection of their own potential racial biases, instructors can create an IAT assignment in which students read background information pertaining to Project Implicit, take the IAT (<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/index.jsp>), and then respond to corresponding questions, such as “What is your reaction to your results?”, “How are you interpreting your results?”, and “Do you think all human beings hold implicit bias toward outgroups? Why or why not?” Despite some issues with the IAT test, it shows predictive validity such that high implicit bias predicts lower quality cross-race interactions (Greenwald et al., 2009). Thus, instructors can remind students to ruminate over their IAT results and encourage them to be more mindful of their assumptions of others in cross-race interactions, which can discourage microaggressions such as making stereotypical statements or making comments that invalidate minority group members’ identities and experiences (“I don’t see color”). We strongly recommend that instructors also complete the IAT and reflect on the questions assigned to the students, so they can be better aware of their own potential biases and engage in more open and honest dialogue with their students in follow-up discussions.

Racial spotlighting, a particular kind of microaggression, is placing unwelcome attention on a member of a minority group, which creates psychological tension (Carter, 2008). Examples of spotlighting include asking minority students to act as a spokesperson on behalf of their social group (ex. “What do Latinx individuals think about this issue?”) or soliciting comments to obtain “a different perspective.” Racial spotlighting can cause harm in several ways. Asking one individual to act as a spokesperson conveys a false assumption that the social group is homogeneous with little to no variation. Relatedly, specifying that a minority student’s views offer “a different perspective” assumes that the student is an outsider, creating an “us versus them” mentality that can exacerbate ingroup bias and outgroup derogation. Thus, instructors should avoid singling out minority students and emphasize that there is much diversity and variation within all social groups. In an online learning community, instructors can consider reading aloud or sharing the work of a minority student anonymously as a teaching and learning tool. Sometimes, it may be difficult for students to take the perspective of another group member, especially related to diversity and cultural issues, if they lack interactions and experiences with those of different identities/backgrounds. Sharing the voice of a minority student amplifies the voices of those who are underrepresented in society, gives additional perspective to dominant group members, can encourage empathy and perspective taking, yet avoids spotlighting so that attention is focused on the speaker’s voice and perspective while preserving anonymity if they do not wish to be the focus of attention. In a remote environment, where instructors are more heavily utilizing technology as teaching tools, we recommend using polls to further engage the students by giving them the opportunity to express their reactions. Using this technique, students will be able to share what they think in response to the course content, and the instructor can choose to share the results instantly by displaying aggregated responses on the screen, whether immediately or at a later time. By amplifying the voices of those who are underrepresented in society and sharing the group’s reactions (especially in real time), students may have a greater appreciation of diverse perspectives, and this technique can increase a sense of

community in a remote environment. Furthermore, allowing students to see one another's responses in real time may increase a sense of bonding or validation by showing students that their peers are experiencing similar emotions or reactions.

When sharing an individual student's work, we recommend that the instructor provide an opportunity for the speaker to identify themselves if they wish to clarify or elaborate on points made or address questions others may have. It is important to note that the instructor should not pressure the student to reveal their identity if they do not feel comfortable doing so; thus, we suggest that the instructor emphasize the speaker's autonomy in whether they wish to remain anonymous or identify themselves. In a remote learning environment, instructors have various options to share a student's work including posting the assignment on the shared learning management site (e.g., Blackboard, Canvas, Moodle, etc.) with identifying information removed, emailing the document to the class list, or reading the work aloud during an online session. With each of these methods, we encourage the instructor to make a statement beforehand (whether written or stated aloud), such as "If you are the author of this piece, please feel free to identify yourself if you would like to do so. If, however, you would prefer to remain anonymous, as an inclusive learning community, we respect your wishes. I encourage you to choose whichever option you are most comfortable with."

While we acknowledge that some disciplines (e.g., psychology or sociology) cover topics that more readily facilitate discussions of race-related issues, we encourage instructors to highlight a theme of equity throughout the semester to make students more mindful of how racial discrimination affects students of color. This may be especially helpful in encouraging white students to further ruminate over race-related issues, given that individuals who are unaffected by social issues are less likely to see them as problematic and, therefore, may be less motivated to engage in social justice activism (DiAngelo, 2018; Saad, 2020). For instance, instructors can mention the racial achievement gap, a documented phenomenon in which white students tend to obtain higher grades and graduation rates compared to students of color, in conjunction with evidence that factors such as socioeconomic status, lack of access to resources, and race-based discrimination cause these discrepancies rather than differences in intrinsic ability (Aronson et al., 1998; Jacoby & Glauber, 1995; Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Steele, 1997). Students can then locate a scholarly article that amplifies the voices of diverse researchers who are experts in education and race-relations (see Carnevale & Strohl, 2013; Harper, 2010; Harper & Davis, 2012; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Harper et al., 2009 as recommended readings) and write a reaction paper in response to the reading(s) to raise awareness of inequity in higher education. As a follow-up exercise, instructors can assign students an additional reflection assignment in which they must find a scholarly article that covers a topic relevant to the course written by a researcher from an underrepresented social group. Students can then hold a small group discussion with classmates and/or write a paper that highlights the author's contributions to the field and consider obstacles minorities are more likely to experience in research/academia compared to members of the dominant group. Further, to reinforce a commitment to equity, instructors can provide data and statistics from their own institution (if available)

that indicate race-based discrepancies in educational and/or professional outcomes to motivate greater anti-racism activism within the student body by making the social issue more salient and personally relevant. This exercise can also make faculty more aware of how they and their colleagues need to be part of the solution, and thus we recommend ongoing conversations at both the departmental and institutional level between faculty to address anti-racism in the classroom at the cultural level.

Microaggressions cause harm in various ways (Sue, 2010), and victims of microaggressions are further disadvantaged in that deciding how to respond can be a lose-lose situation (Yosso et al., 2009). Those who confront perpetrators of microaggressions are often further invalidated in the form of racial gaslighting, which diminishes or discredits their claims and their overall experiences with prejudice (for instance, perpetrators may say the victim is being “too sensitive” or “can’t take a joke”). The other option for victims of microaggressions is to suffer in silence. However, perpetrators often claim that they were unaware that their comments were harmful or offensive. As an educational exercise, instructors could present commonly reported microaggressions (e.g., “Did you get into college because of Affirmative Action?”) and facilitate a class wide discussion in which students analyze why these statements are harmful and problematic. These discussions can lead to students becoming better informed about social issues and increase awareness of injustices in both social and academic settings.

In situations of remote teaching and learning, the instructor may consider using an online reporting system so that students can anonymously notify the instructor of prejudicial/discriminatory incidents committed by other students. The instructor can also make a statement encouraging more privileged students to advocate for others by reporting acts of bias that they overhear or witness that were directed toward students of marginalized identities. This could encourage greater anti-racism activism through direct actions and raise awareness of microaggressions that students of colors experience, which white students are less likely to experience. If an incident is reported, the instructor can then reach out to the perpetrator to better educate the student on why the act was harmful, act as a mediator between the target and perpetrator to engage in productive conflict resolution, if needed, and take punitive actions toward the perpetrator when warranted. We recommend that instructors also make statements to students at the beginning of the semester that if the instructor engages in behavior(s) that cause harm to students of marginalized identities, students should bring this up in an open dialogue to facilitate better understanding of how instructors may unintentionally perpetuate biases. This then, could facilitate productive conflict resolution to improve classroom dynamics. We also suggest that instructors state that if students are uncomfortable bringing the matter up directly to the instructor given the power dynamics, they should speak with the department chair, who can act as a mediator to facilitate dialogue between the instructor and student(s). If students would rather not speak to the chair, the instructor can recommend other potential mediators, such as an academic advisor, a student diversity committee/organization, a staff member who works in a division of

diversity/inclusion, or a bias education response team if these committees/positions exist at the institution.

### **Combating Stereotype Threat**

The process of stereotype threat occurs when one is reminded of a negative self-relevant stereotype prior to a cognitive task, which then impairs performance via distraction and anxiety, and can lead to disengagement (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Disengagement involves decreased motivation and the devaluing of a specific domain, such as academic success. There is a great deal of evidence that the performance gap between Caucasian students and students of color is not due to differences in intrinsic ability, but rather due to social factors, such as stereotype threat and a lack of equity in opportunities (Aronson et al., 2002). A successful method of minimizing or negating the harmful effects of stereotype threat is for instructors to emphasize a malleable theory of intelligence. In other words, instructors can explain to students that abilities can improve with effort and practice (as opposed to a fixed theory, where abilities are inherent and constant). A malleable theory of intelligence can counter the harms of stereotype threat. Students who adopt a malleable theory of ability show greater engagement with learning and higher academic achievement (Aronson et al., 2002). Thus, professors should emphasize the malleable theory of intelligence and consistently provide positive feedback that values effort, dedication, and improvement over inherent ability. Using this method can also be a meaningful way for course instructors to develop a mentoring relationship with students in times of remote learning where interactions are more limited.

Minority students may struggle academically due to increased pressure to succeed and a lack of role models (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; McDonald et al., 2004). A strategy to inspire success is to provide successful role models with which the students can identify. Role models provide inspiration by showing that someone similar has overcome challenges and can provide examples of strategies that promote success (Lockwood, 2006). Indeed, research has indicated that role models are most successful in motivating achievement when the target and role model are matched for sex/gender (Marx & Roman, 2002) or race/ethnicity (Marx et al., 2009). Role models can also buffer against stereotype threat. For instance, women can improve math performance by reading about successful women in science, technology, engineering, and math (McIntyre et al., 2005). Therefore, professors should highlight successful exemplars from underrepresented groups for students to identify with. Doing so can make success more salient, increase motivation, provide inspiration to improve learning outcomes, and improve the overall educational experience for minority students.

Another advantage of highlighting diverse scholars is to show that the field has benefited from the contributions of non-dominant groups. Further, increasing representation whether related to race/ethnicity/culture, gender identity, and orientation conveys a message to the students that the field embraces and values the works of all individuals, not just members of the dominant group. Instructors could promote this by choosing a specific textbook that highlights contributions of

minority groups, sharing a photo of a diverse scholar when covering course content to highlight diversity in the field, and providing autobiographical information about diverse scholars when presenting lectures and during class discussions.

### **Using Inclusive Practices**

LGBTQA+ students are also susceptible to microaggressions and hostile learning environments. Instructors should use gender inclusive language (for example, saying “you all” instead of “you guys”) to embrace students of all gender identities, especially those from underrepresented groups such as women, transgender individuals, and those with a non-binary gender identity.

Additionally, instructors should take attendance on the first day of classes in a way that avoids spotlighting transgender students and/or those with a non-binary gender identity. Transgender students, whether they are in transition or have completed the transition process, often have a name and personal pronouns that differ from the legal/birth name and implied pronouns of the gender assigned at birth. Professors should allow students to introduce themselves using their preferred names and ask for their pronouns in writing. We recommend that instructors ask students to state their preferred names aloud so that professors and peers know how to address one another but ask that students give their personal pronouns in writing because stating one’s personal pronouns aloud, especially if meeting a large group of strangers, may induce anxiety. For LGBTQA+ individuals, they perpetually need to make a conscious decision of whether they want to “come out” each time they meet someone (Ellis et al., 2019). Further, if one asks each student to state pronouns aloud on the first day of class, this forces those who may be questioning their gender identity to make a public declaration of their current status, which may change later (Manion, 2018). Thus, we recommend that professors state aloud on the first day of class that students should write their personal pronouns on a piece of paper to be collected at the end of class, and then add that if anyone’s pronouns change at any time, they are encouraged to notify the professor in a one-on-one conversation or through written communication to indicate that the instructor supports LGBTQA+ students and understands that one’s identity may change over time. Further, this reinforces a norm of respect by demonstrating that the professor will adhere to a student’s pronouns whether they are consistent or change over time.

In the format of remote teaching, instructors may wish to encourage students to turn on their web cameras during online sessions but should not pressure students to do so. Students who are from a lower socioeconomic status background may not wish to turn on their cameras to give others “access” or a “view” into their living space. Further, students with a transgender or non-binary identity may not feel comfortable being visible when they have the option to be heard, but not seen, especially if they are in the beginning or middle of a transition process. Therefore, instructors can encourage participation through verbal contributions, using a chat function, and through the use of non-verbal reactions if available (such as using on screen reaction symbols to indicate agreement in Zoom). This can increase engagement while being respectful of each individual student’s comfort level.

Another option is to use a virtual background if a student is comfortable being visible to others but does not wish to share the appearance of their living space. Doing so shifts the central focus onto the participant rather than their place of residence, but facilitates interactions by maintaining eye contact, showing facial expressions, and highlighting body language. An additional benefit of using a virtual background is that students can also share their interests/hobbies, such as using a background that showcases their favorite sport, novel, musician, etc. which would allow students to connect over shared interests and perceive the class as a social unit. This can be especially helpful in a remote learning environment as opportunities to socialize with classmates in virtual classes are fewer, thus the instructor could also begin remote sessions early to allow students to bond, similar to how students can hold informal conversations with one another in a traditional classroom if they arrive early and are waiting for the class to begin.

We encourage faculty to incorporate discussions of diversity and anti-racism at department meetings to facilitate exchange of ideas in promoting inclusive teaching practices and anti-racism activism. Some suggestions for fields outside of social sciences include, for instance, in natural science courses (e.g., biology, chemistry, physics), instructors could discuss Henrietta Lacks (an African American woman whose cells were taken and studied without consent, leading to the discovery of HeLa cells) or the Tuskegee Syphilis Study (an experiment in which African American men who had been diagnosed with syphilis were not disclosed their diagnosis status, nor were they provided with medical treatment) to highlight racial injustices in access to healthcare and ethical violations tied to racism within medical research. In certain math, economics, or business courses, the instructor could discuss redlining (the process of limiting whether African Americans would be approved for a mortgage to purchase a home) and emphasize how this affected accumulated wealth tied to home ownership across generations, exacerbating the racial wealth gap. The instructor could then teach students the application of mathematical formulas and statistics to real world social issues that perpetuate inequality. For additional ideas, we recommend the Center for Research on Teaching and Learning (2021), Center for Teaching and Assessment of Learning (2021), Center for Teaching Innovation, and USC Rossier School of Education (2021) for suggestions of additional inclusive teaching practices and resources which are relevant to various disciplines.

### **Using Diverse Perspectives and Cooperation to Enhance the Learning Experience**

The jigsaw classroom is an integrative learning technique in which students are given small portions of information on the same topic, and then work in small groups to teach one another their individual share of the course material (Aronson, 1978). Through the use of discourse, interdependence, and cooperation to accomplish a shared goal with communally beneficial outcomes, students learn to value one another's contributions and respect one another regardless of differences in background or identity (Aronson, 2002). The jigsaw classroom has indeed been shown to increase empathy, reduce racial prejudice, reduce intergroup hostility, and improve academic performance, especially for students of underrepresented groups (Aronson & Bridgeman, 1978; Walker & Crogan, 1998). Therefore,

instructors should assign groups (rather than asking students to select groups themselves) so that students have the opportunity to work with new individuals each time there is group work. This increases exposure to diversity in thought, perspective, and identity and promotes respect for those who are different from themselves. The use of team-based learning can be especially helpful in times of remote learning to facilitate social bonding among students, which can increase support for one another in facing academic challenges and allow students to feel interpersonally connected with one another.

The benefits of group work and cooperation have also been demonstrated by implementing a superordinate goal, where individuals must work collaboratively to obtain an outcome that benefits everyone (Sherif, 1954; Sherif et al., 1961). The Robbers Cave field study (Sherif et al., 1961) documented that ingroup bias and outgroup hostility arose between two groups of adolescent boys despite no group differences in ethnicity, age, or socioeconomic status. The simple categorization into two separate groups was enough to elicit competition, distrust, and outgroup denigration. Researchers eventually implemented a superordinate goal, emphasizing that non-cooperation would mean a loss for all while successful cooperation would benefit all members of both groups. By facilitating cooperation, researchers found that the two groups, after obtaining a successful outcome, merged to form one larger group, no longer maintaining an “us versus them” mentality. Additionally, the formation into a combined group promoted more positive attitudes across individuals and led to friendship development.

Though it may be more challenging to implement group work and group discussions in a remote format, online management tools/systems can facilitate this process. For instance, Blackboard, Brightspace/D2L, and other learning management systems allow the course instructor to create group pages so that students can share work and initiate group discussions, and Zoom utilizes breakout rooms in which participants can form small groups to engage in discussions and collaborative efforts. Additionally, instructors can encourage students to use Google Docs and/or Google Slides to work cooperatively on assignments and projects so that they are able to give one another constructive feedback and see one another’s edits-and comments in real time. Instructors should also encourage students to provide positive comments on each other’s work whenever possible to emphasize a learning community, foster closer working relationships, and reinforce that the class functions as a social unit to support one another in a remote learning environment.

Some cognitive psychologists recommend implementing collaborative note-taking during each class session such that two students are assigned as note-takers and simultaneously summarize the course content in a Google Doc, which is later made available to all students and the instructor (e.g., Patson, 2021). Alternating pairs of note-takers throughout the semester sets a norm of collaborative learning, signaling that students are responsible for their peers’ learning process in addition to their own. This technique also allows the instructor to review each set of notes to ensure that students adequately understand the course material, allowing the instructor to allocate more time to review any concepts students may be having difficulty with, ensuring greater success and learning outcomes.

## **Committing Ourselves to Anti-Racism Through Greater Awareness of White Supremacy and Other Systems of Oppression**

We encourage those in higher education (regardless of whether they are students or faculty) to read *Me and White Supremacy* (Saad, 2020), a book that discusses the pervasiveness of apathy toward racism and how we can better commit ourselves to equity. Saad (2020) directly addresses those who hold white privilege by addressing various topics that white individuals may not be aware of (tokenism, tone policing, double standards that benefit white individuals while harming people of color, etc.) and states that her book is an “anti-racism tool structured to help people with white privilege understand and take ownership of their participation in the oppressive system of white supremacy” (Saad, 2020, p. 3). It is structured so that readers can read a new chapter each day on a specific topic pertaining to white privilege and/or white supremacy. Each chapter also includes question prompts that encourage the reader to maintain a journal to reflect on how the information relates to their own lives and their own privileges, solidifying deeper commitment to anti-racism. Saad (2020) also includes many suggestions of actionable items of how white individuals can better use their white privilege to advocate for others. Her examples explore how to continue our own journey of self-education about racial issues, including amplifying the voices and contributions of people of color, being more mindful in verbal communication to empower and center people of color, de-centering oneself in conversations to better support people of color, avoiding cultural appropriation, and speaking about racism to other white individuals in a way that encourages greater mindfulness of the harms of racism and white supremacy.

### **Conclusion**

As enrollment for minority students continues to increase, including both domestic and international students, it is imperative for faculties in higher education to reinforce the message that diversity is valued by maintaining an inclusive learning environment, especially in remote situations where face to face meetings are not possible or are less frequent. Faculties need to be sensitive to the various biases that these students are more likely to encounter, provide paths to success for underprivileged students, use language that encompasses individuals of all identities, and facilitate collaboration between students in order to send the message that differences in background are appreciated and valued. Implementing these strategies creates a safer and more inclusive learning environment (CAST, 2018) which can improve motivation, academic success, and retention, leading to greater professional success when students transition from higher education to long-term careers.

### Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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