

Kovener Teaching Fellows Program

End-of-Year Report

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## **Inclusive Pedagogy: Cultivating Teacher Self-Awareness, 2019-2020**

### **In the Words of Kovener Fellows**

“Having pods include people at various levels was an amazing idea. I am getting to hear perspective that I would not usually hear. Even when [there] is a power dynamic, I found the pods to be a safe space in which we could openly share concerns and not fear judgment” (Kovener Fellow, 2020)

“These meetings have been invaluable in terms of finding out more about the students' lived experience and how they view their classroom environments” (Kovener Fellow, 2020)

“I think pod meetings [are] not only for teachers to change their teaching ways, moreover as students it [made] me start to understand my professor” (Kovener Fellow, 2020)

“Kovener program provides a bridge that connect professor and student. As a student after attending, I would like to tell my friends around me that we should give our professors more chances to get know us. They are trying their best to make the classroom more welcome and more respectful for everyone” (Kovener Fellow, 2020)

“The impact that the students have provided throughout this experience has been profound. Being in the "trenches" allows us to see firsthand what is happening in the classroom” (Kovener Fellow, 2020)

“...being in this space with others who have more and varied experiences with inclusive teaching and elements of oppression has helped bring me toward a better understanding of these ideas and the language used to communicate them effectively. I really appreciate this opportunity to interact with so many individuals who can help me get better!” Kovener Fellow, 2020)

“I think the most helpful experience happened on the very first meeting day. I was a few minutes late, and [X] walked over, introduced herself (and shook my hand) and welcomed me to the group. I can honestly say that was the first time I felt like my presence was valued in a meeting, and it served as a very powerful model for me to think about inclusivity--how my actions make others feel included in what I'm trying to achieve” (Kovener Fellow, 2020)

## **Background**

Inclusive pedagogy is a teaching-and-learning mind-set and an approach that is beneficial to *all* students and thus relevant to all courses and curricula. Inclusive pedagogy is guided by a number of values that have been shown to be important predictors of academic success. These values include that all of our students (1) have full access to learning and the tools they need to do so successfully and meaningfully, (2) are treated equitably, and (3) feel welcomed, supported and valued in their learning (Finn 1989; Moallem 2013). A central tenet of inclusive pedagogy is that the ability to cultivate such values, as well as achieve the outcomes that we strive for in our teaching—academic achievement and cognitive development such as critical thinking, perspective-taking and problem-solving skills —are informed not only by the social identities of the student, but equally, those of the teacher.

The Kovener Teaching Fellows devoted 2019-2020 to the topic and practice of instructor self-awareness. The work of this year’s Fellows was centered on understanding the myriad ways in which knowledge of self—the multiple identities that one might hold as an instructor—allows for instructors to be more cognizant of students’ different cognitive and social needs, as well as the diverse ways in which students interpret meaning at various levels within their learning environments.

The outline below details the Kovener Fellows program objectives, overall approach, and outcomes for AY 2019-2020.

## **Objectives**

Fellows formed part of a 5-person mentoring pod focused on discussion and exploration of strategies and interventions meant to cultivate and improve inclusive teaching.

Pods had the following key objectives:

1. Develop knowledge of the theory and practice of inclusive pedagogy.
2. Develop self-awareness around one’s own social identity as a key first step in developing an inclusive classroom.

Active work on the above two objectives went toward faculty and graduate instructor fellows creating and redesigning immediate and long-term effective teaching and learning practices that facilitate an inclusive and supportive classroom so as to foster greater student motivation and academic achievement.

## Approach

A total of four pods were formed in AY 2019-2020. Each pod was comprised of two faculty—one senior and tenure-track and one junior or non-tenure-track—one graduate student, and two undergraduate students. The program was comprised of 20 fellows. One of the senior faculty members, Martha Oakley, served as the Senior Fellow. Her role was to serve as a liaison between the fellows and Carmen Henne-Ochoa, Assistant Dean for Diversity and Inclusion. Together, Drs. Oakley and Henne-Ochoa selected readings and created agendas for meetings, facilitated all-pod meetings, evaluated the progress of the program and adjusted schedules accordingly, and provided support and accountability for deliverables.

**Table 1.** Kovener Fellows for AY 19-20.

|                              | <b>Pod 1</b>                          | <b>Pod 2</b>                        | <b>Pod 3</b>                              | <b>Pod 4</b>                          |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|
| <b>Student 1 (Undergrad)</b> | CHEM/BIOCHEM/<br>1 <sup>st</sup> Year | CHEM/<br>1 <sup>st</sup> Year       | HUBI/<br>3 <sup>rd</sup> Year             | HISP/Spanish/<br>2 <sup>nd</sup> Year |
| <b>Student 2 (Undergrad)</b> | PBS/NEUS/<br>2 <sup>nd</sup> Year     | MEDIA/JOUR/<br>3 <sup>rd</sup> Year | PBS/Neuroscience/<br>2 <sup>nd</sup> Year | HUBI/<br>1 <sup>st</sup> Year         |
| <b>Student 3 (Grad)</b>      | PBS/Psychology                        | CHEM                                | ENG                                       | ANTH                                  |
| <b>Faculty 1</b>             | CHEM                                  | MCB (Mol. Cel.<br>Biochem)          | MEDIA                                     | ECON                                  |
| <b>Faculty 2</b>             | ENG                                   | FOLK                                | PBS                                       | ENG                                   |

To meet the above objectives, throughout the academic year, fellows met in their individual pods and as a network (that is, all four pods). Fellows met as a whole four times. Individual pod members met three additional times before the Covid-19 pandemic led to the closure of the campus. Due to this interruption, fellows are continuing their work in the late summer and early fall of 2020. Readings and discussion in the first half of the program (Oct-Feb) were devoted to understanding inclusive teaching, considering teaching as, in bell hooks's words, "a practice of freedom," and helping fellows to understand the impact of their own positionalities on teaching and learning. The second half of the program, which was interrupted due to the Covid-19 pandemic, was/is devoted to practices that improve inclusivity.

**Table 2.** Kovener Meetings for AY 19-20.

| Meeting | Date     | Format       | Readings/Activities  |
|---------|----------|--------------|--|
| 0       | Sept. 12 | Faculty only | Introduction to the program.   |
| 1       | Oct. 10  | Whole Group  | “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack” Peggy McIntosh; ice-breakers and discussions of community norms.   |
| 2       | Oct. 24  | Pods         | Discussion about the evidence supporting the efficacy of inclusive learning. “Inclusive learning and teaching in higher education: a synthesis of research” Hockings, 2010; “How Learning Works: Seven Research-Based Principles” Ambrose et al. (2010).   |
| 3       | Nov. 14  | Pods         | Chapters 1-3 of <i>Teaching to Transgress</i> , bell hooks. Discuss education as a practice of freedom.  |
| 4       | Dec. 12  | Whole Group  | Discussion of implicit bias, experiences with <a href="#">Implicit Association Tests</a> . Payne, Niemi & Doris, 2018 “How to Think About ‘Implicit Bias;’” Payne & Vuletich, “ <i>Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences</i> ,” 2018; Newkirk, 2019 “Why Diversity Initiatives Fail.”   |
| 5       | Jan.     | Pods         | Chapters 6 and 10-12 of <i>Teaching to Transgress</i> , bell hooks. Discuss the ways in which our positionalities affect our teaching  |
| 6       | Feb      | Pods         | Columbia University Inclusive Teaching Guide, pp 8-27; Cooper & Robinson (2020), “The Argument for Making Large Classes Seem Small”<br><a href="https://commons.georgetown.edu/teaching/design/universal-design/">https://commons.georgetown.edu/teaching/design/universal-design/</a><br>Student experiences with steps that professors have taken to enhance or reduce sense of belonging. |
| 7       | March    | Whole Group  | Share Fall Deliverables. Describe the experience of crafting personal reflections, what we learned from the reflections of other fellows.  |
| 8       | April    | Zoom         | Discuss how to move forward in the pandemic.   |

Throughout, every attempt was made to reduce the power differential and dynamics that are often characteristic of faculty/student relationships. To that end, all fellows were involved in a discussion and worked to co-create community agreements. Once established, community agreements actively guided all pod meetings. Below is a sample of some co-created community agreements.

- *We agree to make and preserve an honest, respectful space for discussion, where all can be heard, by holding each other accountable for talking, listening, and hearing within our pod and the broader Kovener community. (And, we will be especially careful to avoid*

*reproducing societal inequities with respect to who does the talking and who does the listening.)*

- *We agree to participate equally in the work of the community by: completing the assigned reading in time for each meeting (and, as the case may be, acknowledging our failure to do so); asking questions when we do not understand (and, at the same time, making sure to educate ourselves about unfamiliar terms and concepts that may appear in the assigned reading); and, responding to disagreement and criticism with a commitment to remembering that the work of the community is contingent upon the promise of constructive growth and realization (which means, too, that anyone who feels hurt should not have the sole responsibility to explain why a behavior or comment is hurtful).*
- *We agree to strive to put into practice in our classrooms and everyday interactions what we learn about in our pod and the broader Kovener community by recognizing that the great task of prioritizing inclusivity is one that requires both the smallest of gestures and the grandest of plans.*

Every meeting offered opportunities to draw upon the knowledge of all pod members to provide guidance to each other in the context of cultivating and improving inclusive teaching. Student input was explicitly solicited and welcomed with the objective of helping teachers shift or transform their own understanding of learners, curriculum and classroom dynamics. In this way, students themselves occupied a “teacher” role at various moments throughout their participation in the pod and network.

In addition to the preparation for and participation in pod and whole-group meetings, each fellow was asked to submit a mid-program reflection (Student and Faculty Reflections) explaining how their positionalities have affected their teaching and learning. In the second half of the program, fellows were asked to work in groups containing both faculty and students to submit a deliverable that takes a concrete step toward more inclusive teaching. Examples of such a deliverable include a syllabus with a more inclusive reading list, a proposal for a pilot class that is a more inclusive version of a large gateway course, or a presentation of best practices for faculty. Program leadership committed to working with the College and Departments to implement recommendations of the Kovener pods.

## **Outcomes**

Throughout the program, undergraduate student fellows were instrumental in shaping and guiding conversations on instructor self-awareness. As anticipated, student fellows increased opportunities for faculty and graduate instructors to learn and dialogue about inclusive pedagogy, and significantly increased opportunities for horizontal collaborations that afforded diverse and multidimensional perspectives. Over time, the co-creation of a brave space for dialogue meant that students willingly and authentically offered their insights that helped instructors identify and verbalize their own values, motives, strengths, and limitations in their pedagogical praxis. Dialogue, even around students’ seemingly mundane comments—e.g., “I am

the kind of student who is slower in thinking or processing...,” “we are constantly reminded that all that matters are grades,” “math has never been easy for me,” “I felt like an outsider in my X class,” “I am a terrible test-taker,” and “I feel like going to office hours means admitting that there’s something wrong with me”—allowed instructors to critically examine challenge areas in their teaching approach that may be the source of roadblocks in creating inclusive learning environments. Instructors used student insight to begin to consider and craft strategic approaches to improve the learning environment.

In addition to the student-faculty conversations, the Kovener Program provided rare opportunities for faculty to learn from one another. Graduate student fellows, who had dual roles as teachers and students, were valuable interpreters. Senior faculty came to understand the constraints under which junior faculty felt that they had to teach and began to advocate more effectively for their junior and non-tenure track colleagues. Cross-disciplinary conversations allowed faculty to question traditional teaching practices in their own disciplines.

The reflections that all fellows wrote were shared and discussed at a powerful meeting in March 2020. This exercise was deeply revealing about the success of the program, even before final deliverables had been crafted. A representative sampling of the ways in which the Kovener Program had a remarkable impact on both students and faculty includes:

- Students were willing to communicate with the faculty in the program in ways that provided deep insight for even the most experienced and interactive faculty. At the same time, faculty were willing to struggle along with students in ways that students rarely get to see. This interplay led rapidly to a kind of trusting conversation that is very rare in the busy world of a Research 1 University.
- Students communicated clearly to faculty about impediments to their learning—preferring oral over written contributions, feeling that both students and faculty encourage a focus on short-term outcomes over deep learning, and the pain that being reduced to a number on an exam brings to our student body. Indeed, our Senior Fellow, a veteran of over 24 years in the classroom, commented that she had never before fully understood how devastating this pain can be for our students.
- Faculty felt empowered to try new strategies in the classroom. One faculty member described the results of these conversations as bringing joy back into her classroom—for her and for her students.
- Even some of the faculty who had seemed most concerned in the beginning of the program about their ability to increase inclusiveness in learning began to experiment with ways of bringing additional classroom voices into the discussion.

Faculty members supported students in ways that would rarely occur in the classroom.

- A faculty member reassured a student who prefer oral communication with remarkable effectiveness, encouraging us not to underestimate the sophistication of these types of presentations.
- Another faculty communicated the importance of having a range of materials in subsequent years of the program rather than just reading— much of which was scholarly, and some of which was quite difficult for the students in particular.
- Graduate students suggested more accessible literature for some of our meetings, and this was a huge success.
- Perhaps most noticeably, one of the undergraduates gave one of the most powerful presentations any of the faculty had ever seen. It is not clear that this young man would ever have been given an opportunity to put all of his talents on display like that in a normal classroom setting. The experience greatly empowered the student in question and left the faculty determined to find ways in which students can shine like that in the classroom.

In short, the Overton window of what undergraduate education can and should be has shifted significantly for all members of the program. In addition to the immediate modifications faculty and students have made, longer-term projects are also underway in the Kovener Program for the 20-21 academic year.

### **Future Directions**

Two of last year's faculty fellows, Drs. Alisha Jones and Cara Caddoo, will serve as Senior Fellows in the program for the 20-21 academic year. Seven of the initial eight faculty, and eight of the initial twelve students, will continue in the program, with new fellows recruited to replace those who have graduated. The fellows will take time to acknowledge the extent to which the world has changed this summer, due especially to the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact of high-profile police killings of Black Americans and to consider carefully how these events impact the goals for this year's program. The fellows will continue to meet in pods and also work on projects according to their interests. The projects that have been proposed for this year include:

- ***Inclusive Introductory Writing Project.*** ENG-W131, Reading, Writing and Inquiry I, is a course required of all IU students, who generally take the course in their first year. The syllabus for the course is proscribed and relatively traditional. This project will design a syllabus for a more inclusive course, with both class assignments and teaching practices. One of the fellows teaches this course regularly and will implement these changes in a pilot program the following academic year. The impact of the intervention will be monitored with the help of our Scholarship of Teaching and Learning team. Once the pilot program becomes at least as successful as the traditional model, more faculty will be recruited to join this effort.
- ***Introductory Chemistry Project.*** Introductory STEM classes have infamously large gaps in the grades and retention of affluent and underserved students, including underrepresented minority students, students eligible for PELL funding, and first-

generation college students. This project seeks to develop a more inclusive style of general chemistry that grades students for mastering specific content rather than for simple test performance. Fellows will develop a syllabus and other materials, and this course will be implemented on a small scale (~ 50 students) in the Spring of 2021. The performance of students in this course and the subsequent course in the curriculum and their persistence in STEM majors will be monitored to assess its effectiveness.

- ***Including Race and Gender in Introductory Economics Courses.*** It is common that modern economic research and developments on issues of race and gender are completely ignored in undergraduate economics programs, especially in introductory courses. Nonetheless, student interest in these topics is clear. Indeed, it is astonishing how little we consider the impact of colonialism, oppression, and slavery as we try to understand why some countries are rich and some are poor. This project will identify and prepare materials that will be incorporated into introductory economics courses at IU, beginning in 2021.
- ***Equitable Online Teaching.*** The sudden move to online instruction in the spring revealed and exacerbated substantial inequities with respect to digital devices and internet access. This project seeks to address these barriers and provide best practices for faculty to teach their online courses as inclusively as possible.

Importantly, these projects have the support of administration in the College, the home departments and in the Office of the Vice-Provost for Undergraduate Education so that implementation of the plans the Fellows make can be carried out beyond the term of the program, as needed.