

Final Report: Contextualizing Public Policy Analysis: Insights from Indigenous Perspectives

ISTLD Grant Program: Disrupting Colonialism Through Teaching: An Integrated Seminar Series and Grants Program

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Courses addressed:

PLCY 800 Introduction to Public Policy Issues and Analysis I

PLCY 807 Introduction to Public Policy Issues and Analysis II

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Acknowledgements

I am a White Settler born and raised on the unceded territories of the Coast Salish (Musqueam), Skwxwu7mesh (Squamish), and S

As a White Settler, Associate Professor in the School of Public Policy at SFU, and Research Scientist in the area of substance use and drug policy, colonization is central to all areas of my work.

At SFU, my teaching assignments center on two courses: PLCY 800 Introduction to Public Policy Issues and Analysis I and PLCY 807 Introduction to Public Policy Issues and Analysis II. Both are required core courses for all our Master of Public Policy graduate students in the School of Public Policy. The courses cover conventional steps and approaches to providing decision support for policy makers in Canadian governments and beyond. In addition to introducing the basic principles and techniques of policy analysis, the course draws on current public policy issues. Environmental sustainability alongside social, economic, and environmental justice are key areas of passion for faculty and students in our school, all of which require a centering of anti-racist and anti-colonial perspectives.

I, however, despite having over a decade of training throughout my Masters, PhD, and post-doctoral studies in interdisciplinary research and applied health research environments concerned with health equity and social justice, had few tools to ground my teaching practice in anti-racist and anti-colonial perspectives. In my teaching I was failing to explicitly recognize or discuss the Euro-Centric nature of policy analysis and the multiple ways government decision-

of colonization was about acquiring land and resources and continues to be. This helps achieve one of the key learning objectives of the session which is to demonstrate that public policy has been a chief instrument of colonization. Dr. Palmater also provides numerous examples of more recent and current ways that public policy has been used to advance the colonial agenda of wiping out Indigenous peoples to prevent their interference with resource extraction (e.g., sixties scoop, child welfare system, missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, over representation of Indigenous people in criminal justice system). This directly supports the session learning objective number three which is to increase familiarity with evidence that public policies continue to be used as a mechanism for ongoing colonization and hence, colonization is not something that is in the past

Providing students with the opportunity to become aware of if they weren't already and reflect on the role of public policy in colonization (both historic and present) is intended to inform and deepen their understandings of reconciliation, as well as reflect on how their perspectives of colonization and reconciliation may shape how they approach and conduct public policy analysis in their future work.

Session Activities

The session started with a general welcome from me and my colleague who team-teach the course. My five-year old son visited at the start of the class and offered students fresh fruit and muffins that he had baked. The format of the session was discussed and then an overview of the pre-session assessment was shared.

Together in class, students then listened to Thomas King deliver his lecture (54 min) and watched the Dr. Palmater Interview (21min). Students were asked to make written notes of their reflections as they listened/watched, including notes on the discussion questions. After listening/watching together, students were put into small groups of three to discuss the questions on Drs. King and Palmater. After the small group discussions, the class came together and shared responses collectively.

After class, students were asked to complete a reading reflection assignment at home where they were asked to reflect on: a) their prior sentiments with respect to Indigenous Rights and whether the lecture from Dr. King or the interview with Dr. Palmater impacted their thinking of those sentiments; b) if and in what ways the lecture from Dr. King or the interview with Dr. Palmater impacted their understandings of colonialism and reconciliation; and c) if and in what ways they expect their perspectives of colonialism and reconciliation to affect how they will approach their future work as public policy analysts.

Given that this teaching and learning inquiry project was designed after the start of the course, there were no course marks dedicated to the written reflection activity. Furthermore, because student responses were going to be used to report on the impact of the teaching and learning inquiry project, informed consent was required from all students. This meant that students were not compelled to complete the reading reflection assignment.

Findings: Pre-session Writing Reflections

Out of a class of 35 students, 21 pre-session writing reflections were submitted. The results of the pre-session writing reflections demonstrated that students had a broad ra

Post-session Instructor Reflections

The session surprised me on a number of levels. Firstly, the level of inadequate baseline knowledge of colonization in Canada was higher than I initially anticipated. This underscored for me the importance of providing basic foundational information about colonization as a starting point for students who have not been exposed to Indigenous history and perspectives. It also emphasized the importance of conducting pre-course assessments among incoming students to allow the general student body to understand that their classmates are coming from very different baseline knowledge levels.

The other surprise for me was the level of resistance to the session that some students had. While some of this could be attributed in part to the timing of the session (end of term), and the structure of the reading reflections (characterised as being for research vs. course marks), there was clearly a lack of engagement among some students during the session that signal a resistance to the content. This was disappointing for me, as well as for many of the students who provided their reflections. Moving forward, a practice that I take away from this observation is to ensure that engaging with and integrating anti-racism and anti-colonial perspectives into public policy analysis be made an explicit course learning objective and one that is tied to course performance and evaluation. Based on student feedback, I am also dedicated to expanding the session and better integrating Indigenous perspectives and content throughout the course.

Despite the low number of student responses, I believe that the session was valuable and something worth continuing in the courses. Based on these learnings and reflections, I subsequently revised and expanded the project, which I describe in the next section.

Background and Context

Based on the key feedback from students in the Fall of 2018, the teaching and learning inquiry project was expanded from one session into four sessions. The first session included a guest presentation from an Indigenous Scholar in Indigenous Studies at SFU. They provided a history of colonization in Canada and an overview of Indigenous resistance movements and efforts spanning from court challenges to blockades and protests. Students also participated in a _____ at the _____ on the second day of class which students within the program arranged. The Blanket Exercise is an interactive participatory activity. Participants bring blankets that represent the lands of Turtle Island and take on the (-)1152.72 172.55 T

impacts of colonization and students and faculty reflected on the experience of taking part in the exercise.

Two subsequent in-class sessions on colonization and public policy were integrated into the course syllabus (which was not done in the Fall of 2018). Participation and engagement with these sessions was reflected in course grading.

Expanded Learning Objectives

Revised Session Activities

To address seemingly low engagement and participation in the Fall 2018 sessions on colonization and public policy, I purposely created activities for these sessions that were tied to course grades and required students to demonstrate that they read all session materials.

All students were informed that they were responsible for reading all the materials assigned but they would be divided into six groups and each group would be assigned to a series of readings and responsible for developing a 30min presentation. I developed a series of questions for each reading and group presentations were tasked with concisely summarizing the reading and responding to questions posed about the reading. They were encouraged to include key quotes or passages they found interesting or particularly helpful in describing a key theme/point. Each student was also responsible for submitting an individual written summary and analysis of all the readings and a personal reflection at the end of the sessions. The group presentation was worth 10% of the course grade and the mark would be based on: accuracy of information; thoroughness of summary and analysis; and presentation engagement. The individual written summary and reflection was worth another 10% of the final course grade and was based on: thoroughness yet conciseness of summaries and analyses; and inclusion of independent thoughts and reflections.

Group Assignments

Students were given an opportunity to rank their preferences for the group materials and topics. One group was assigned materials related to the history of colonization, one group was assigned to Indigenous perspectives and voices, and four groups were assigned to settler perspectives on colonization settler privilege and white fragility. Due to an unforeseen snow day the class where I was planning to introduce and describe the reading materials for each was canceled so students indicated their preferences just based on the title of the reading materials.

Revisions During the Sessions

After groups were assigned based on stated student preferences, a number of students of colour contacted me to express that the dynamics in their small groups were problematic. They identified that I had not provided the class with any ground rules or outlines for engagement.

In the next class I began the session by outlining ground rules for engagement. Taking from

and

to presented the following

two sets of guidelines for the class moving forward:

1. Recognize your own social positionality (e.g., race, class)

(Student #1)

(Student #8)

(Student #3)

(Student #7)

(Student #5)

Some students also spoke to their appreciation of the sessions generally as reflected in the following responses:

(Student #4)

(Student #7)

(student #3)

Students also identified a number of concerns with the materials and activities, particularly in relation to some of the texts featured and the structure of the activities. Specifically:

(Student #1)

identified student of colour)

(Student #7, Self-

Another

: Explicitly acknowledge that the positionality of students in the class will be different. Note the importance of white students reflecting on their white privilege prior to the first session and group work

: Offer guidance for white students on how to handle mistakes and missteps prior to the first session and group work

3.

: I did not share my rationale for or make it explicit why DiAngelo's text was being featured heavily in the sessions. When students of colour expressed discomfort about the inclusion or perceived overemphasis on _____ text I missed the opportunity to engage with them more fully on the importance of having white voices recognizing that they are implicated in systemic racism and underscoring the importance of speaking and acting against white supremacy.

: In the future I will do more front-end-loading for why different texts and perspectives are being included and covered. If there is resistance to materials chosen, I will aim to make explicit how these materials expose white fragility and the burden in places on BIPOC, and linking the relevance for both Settler and BIPOC students collectively.

4.

As noted above, I did not adequately front-end-load and make explicit the benefits of studying texts like _____ to BIPOC students which left some with the impression that they were meant to learn about racism and white supremacy. The description of the class assignment also contributed to the approach that BIPOC were put in a position of teaching classmates about racism and white privilege.

: In future sessions, in addition to providing more background and context for the texts that will be covered, I will aim to ensure that I am making it clear that unpacking a text like _____ has beneficial impacts, meaning and relevance for BIPOC beyond learning about white supremacy. These include a recognition of the

which Indigenous peoples are brought into educational settings and asked to share their knowledge matters. Learning how to better engage and invite Indigenous voices in feels like one step in the right direction though I remain unsure how I can best engage in this regard.

As I reflect on my participation in the _____ seminar series and work in the classroom trying to bring Indigenous perspectives and anti-colonial and anti-racist perspectives into the course content, I have the following three final reflections.

1. Participating in SFU's _____ seminar series was necessary for me to build the foundation and confidence to embark on this work. I would not have

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