

14.07.2020

Dear Students,

We have received and discussed at length the letter you sent us last week. We are all living through a change of paradigm – overdue change but also one that goes beyond the debates taking place in English in North America and Britain. This is a transformation for which we feel as passionate as you are.

Following our forum meeting we held a staff teaching away day on Friday 3rd July and devoted 50% of our debating time to how we will implement a joint diversifying and decolonizing the curriculum agenda. This meeting was effectively the last staff meeting of the academic year but it is also the one that is set to enable us to plan the coming year and the future of our curriculum. Work will continue throughout the summer but meetings will only resume in September when we will outline the changes we will implement. This is because staff use the summer for annual leave, research and preparing their curriculum, we seek to keep 6 weeks clear for these activities. Colleagues are also involved in professional public service e.g. healthcare, humanitarian aid, public health planning and delivery and many play a role in the current COVID-19 recovery work nationwide and in the NHS.

As we discussed in the forum, we are committed to a broad agenda addressing the aspirations of diversifying and decolonizing the curriculum. We intend to take rapid action as well as developing a timetable for thoughtful critical reflection on our teaching and on our environment.

The timetable of this transformative agenda will begin immediately with more explicit rules on how teaching should take place (see attached). The transformative agenda of diversifying and decolonizing the curriculum entails also deeper clarity on how knowledge is produced, by whom and for whom. This is an approach we will work on with you next academic year while we will engage with a range of more profound changes:

1. Re-organize material in the syllabus to bring different issues to prominence; in particular through bringing various kinds of critical perspectives to the earlier sessions
2. Consult a wider range of journals or textbooks for source materials, particularly journals located in the Global South which may help capture different debates or perspectives
3. Talk to students about what kinds of content they would like to see addressed
4. Teach 'controversies' around key issues or think about how to engage topics dialogically
5. Teach through the juxtaposition of material from different areas
6. Contextualize the subject in its historical moment, making explicit the kinds of research programmes, assumptions and aspirations that generated it
7. Diversify the kinds of source material that come into the classroom; intelligent writing or comment on particular issues might well be available online in non-academic form
8. Signal / confront issues that may arise around potentially distressing topics

We acknowledge that the task of diversifying and decolonizing the curriculum is not simply about the addition of new literature from a diverse array of authors. It is also about how we engage with different material and engage with topics and issues. Widening the framework of what we teach and how we learn is not an easy task and southern scholarship may not necessarily be as widely available as it should be. We will work with colleagues and publishers to make more scholarship available using notably our open access journal and working with publishers.

Practically in Semester 1, 2020-2021, we will renew our conversation through a forum addressing issues of racism and all forms of discrimination which will be convened at the onset of the semester, this forum will lead to specific working groups composed of staff and students on a range of issues identified in the forum. We will continue to work closely with the school Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) committee and we will support active participation of HCRI students in the SALC EDI student committee. We will undertake training in unconscious bias and this training will be offered to all staff and students. We will use Staff / Students committees to report on changes taking place and on ways forward.

Changing a university or an academic culture is work that will take time and prolonged commitment. To make this possible we will continue exploring all options available to diversify recruitment of staff and students. While many of our online programmes (for instance LEAP) have 75% of students from the Global South, many of our face-to-face programmes need to become more diverse.

This is the path we seek to take; we look forward to doing this journey with you, on behalf of HCRI:

Mandy Turner, Deputy Director of HCRI

Darren Walter, Director of Online Programmes, HCRI

Rubina Jasani, Director of IBsc programme,

Nat O'Grady, Director of IDM and Postgraduate Research programmes

Billy Tusker Haworth, Director of Postgraduate Teaching 2019/20 and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Representative

Róisín Read, Programme Director BSc International Disaster Management and Humanitarian Response 2019/20 and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Representative

Paul Dark, Professor in HCRI, Chair of Critical Care Medicine

Larissa Fast, Director of Research, HCRI

Amanda McCorkindale, Director of Postgraduate Teaching 2020/21 & Admissions Tutor

Stephanie Rinaldi, Research manager, HCRI

Adele Aubrey, Partnerships and Programmes Manager, HCRI

Hanna Baumeister, Lecturer, HCRI

Antoine Burgard, Lecturer, HCRI

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Jessica Hawkins, Undergraduate Programme Director 2020/21

Lucy Darowksa, Senior Marketing and Communications Officer, HCRI

Jessica Murphy, Engagement Assistant, HCRI

Luke Kelly, Research associate, HCRI

Kirsten Howarth, Programme Director MA Humanitarianism & Conflict Response 2019/20

Appendix: HCRI statement on creating safe spaces for discussing difficult and controversial topics

HCRI is committed to ensuring that our teaching environments (including all lectures, tutorials and seminars) are safe spaces for discussing difficult and controversial topics.

Safe spaces are not about limiting critical engagement with ideas, but about ensuring that students and staff from marginalized groups know that their existence will be respected in our classrooms. It is not designed to restrict people from sharing their views, but about ensuring that students know that the expression of openly discriminatory views will be challenged.

If you are concerned about how particular topics are being discussed during a teaching session, or how certain people are expressing them, you can approach your lecturer in the first instance, confidentially, either at the time or after. If you feel that you cannot approach your lecturer, or that your lecturer has not taken your concerns seriously, you can contact the course convener or your academic advisor, then the programme director.

Furthermore, on occasion, we will be engaging with potentially distressing issues and images. This is in the nature of our topics of research and teaching. These are not shown or discussed for gratuitous effect but in order to enhance understanding in the belief and desire that knowledge can help us work towards creating a world without violence and oppression. We will flag up potentially distressing issues and images before and during our teaching so that students can either opt out or prepare themselves. You can, if you would like to, absent yourself from a specific topic, lecture or teaching session because of potential distress over its content. You can approach your lecturer in the first instance, either in person or on email to discuss this. All communications between you and your lecturer are confidential.

These structures and mechanisms are designed to ensure that all students feel supported during their learning experience. HCRI is committed to building a collegial and safe environment for teaching and research.