



Illustration by Yvette DeChavez

decolonizing our teaching and learning:

a short guide to an unsettling process

Colonization as a mode of power is alive and well today, from our presence on the ancestral territories of the Meskwaki, Ioway, and Sauk peoples, to the ways we think, learn, act, and interact. The legacies of colonialism are ongoing in a variety of ways, including at our institution. Decolonizing our teaching and learning, including the curriculum, is *all of our work*.

We acknowledge that this document is *our* beginning and that it could have taken many different paths. **We offer this toolkit as an imperfect contribution as we work together toward concrete ways of unsettling colonial histories and realities of land, life, and learning.**

foreword

Decolonization as a movement seeks to abolish the theft and abuse of Indigenous lands, peoples, and cultures. We affirm that decolonization is not a metaphor for social justice work in general,¹ but a process that culminates in the recognition of Indigenous communities as hosts and living according to an ethics of guest and host. We can all work toward that eventual goal in a variety of ways. This toolkit is about how we—teachers and learners at Grinnell College—can engage in our work in ways that acknowledge and work to address colonial forms of power as they are at work on our campus and in our classrooms.

Colonial power manifests in institutions of higher learning in many ways. These include privileging particular forms of knowledge, producers of knowledge, methods of producing knowledge, applications of knowledge, and expressions of knowledge, often to the exclusion of Indigenous peoples and others historically underrepresented in the academy. With lofty goals and good intentions, educational institutions can make it hard to see colonial power at work in how we understand achievement, how we build and maintain relationships within bureaucratic structures, and how knowledge becomes a commodity in our lives.²

As we think about teaching and learning at Grinnell, we want to highlight that colonial histories influence all majors and disciplines of study—and the work of virtually every unit on campus. Acknowledging and learning about these histories and how they influence what we do is uncomfortable, messy, *necessary* work. The questions we offer are meant to be a place to begin. Nothing more, nothing less.

In order to truly listen to each other through this ongoing process, we must practice **generous thinking** by “not only refrain[ing] from assuming that everyone else is in the wrong, but remain[ing] open to the real possibility that we might be.”³

questions for reflection & action:

We have tried to identify questions relevant to teachers and learners. Your understanding of them will likely reflect your status and position at our institution. They are meant to stimulate thinking for us all.

- How do you contextualize the identities and backgrounds of the authors you read in class?
 - How have institutional barriers limited diverse representation within scholarship?
 - How do you promote the dismantling of these barriers?
- How do colonial histories within your field affect classroom content, discussion, and dynamics?
 - Are these histories reinforced or resisted in the classroom?
 - Do you feel comfortable challenging colonial ideas and practices? Why/why not? How might you start?
- How can you actively center indigenous knowledge in your teaching and learning?
 - How about decolonial and anti-colonial work?
- How do you make space for dialogue about classroom dynamics and non-traditional course materials and pedagogies?
 - How do you define a good student? What behavior is rewarded in the classroom?
 - How do you respond when challenged by your peers/students? How might you implement generous thinking?
 - Is classwork individual or collaborative?
- How will you implement decolonial practices to actualize Grinnell's values of "asking hard questions and questioning easy answers?"

glossary and course information

Epistemology: The study of knowledge creation, with regards to methods, validity, and scope.

Unsettling land/Land Back: centering an Indigenous epistemology of connection with land, Indigenous stewardship of the environment, and reparations for the lives and ways of life of colonized peoples.

View reading and examples of decolonizing work in the academy:

https://decolonizing_sites.grinnell.edu/further-reading/ and

https://decolonizing_sites.grinnell.edu/examples/

We acknowledge that our work was done while residing on the ancestral territory of the Meskwaki, Sauk, and Ioway Peoples, whose land was taken from them through the encroachment of white settlers, and then formally in 1845 through government land concessions. We offer this statement as a call to center and learn with and from Indigenous communities in this work.

This toolkit is the product of nine non-Indigenous people working together in the fall 2019 Decolonizing the Curriculum short course, which was designed and led by two White people, one faculty member and one student, with contributions made by five White students, one Latinx student, and one Black student. Together, we read work of indigenous and non-indigenous scholars from around the world, interrogated our knowledge about colonialism and decolonization, and questioned our epistemologies in order to encourage others to join in the work of unsettling inside and outside the academy.

Contributions from diverse perspectives an essential part of this ongoing project. If you want to ask questions, communicate concerns, make suggestions, or express interest in working on something related. You can:

- Fill out an anonymous form, which you can find at:
<https://forms.gle/fgn3CzU3zC9S7m4b8>

Citations

1. Tuck, Eve, and K. Wayne Yang. "Decolonization is not a metaphor." *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2012, pp. 1-40.
2. Mbembe, Achille J. "Decolonizing the university: New directions." *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2016, pp. 29-45
3. Fitzpatrick, Kathleen. *Generous Thinking*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019.