

Who's on Your Syllabus?

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Abstract

In this presentation, I want to challenge the audience to think more about who and what is on their syllabus—and why that question matters. In 2013, Sara Ahmed famously asked, “who appears? And: who does not appear?” noting that this question of citation has implications for what kinds of knowledge are taken for granted in any discipline, and who those knowledges reflect. As she put it, “the reproduction of a discipline can be the reproduction of these techniques of selection, ways of making certain bodies and thematics core to the discipline, and others not even part.” The consequences of this naturalized selection, of course, are that some voices and perspectives are not heard, that many of our students are not reflected in those knowledges, and that “knowledge” is presented as universal and neutral (rather than contingent and invested). Making our syllabi—no matter the field—more inclusive of the diversity of people in the classroom, as well as in the larger society around us, can make many forms—from changing content, to incorporating different voices and perspectives, to foregrounding how some knowledges become present and others are made absent. In this short presentation, I want to go through a number of ways in which the issue of “citational politics” matters, and to whom, and offer some suggestions about how we can all take more responsibility for diversifying our syllabi and creating more inclusive knowledges and spaces for all our students.