

From Reflection to Action: A Pedagogical Framework for Advancing Social Justice and Inclusive Practices in Social Work Education

Kimberly M. Knox
Erika Gergerich
Myra Garcia

Abstract: *This article presents the Anti-Racism, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (ADEI) Teaching and Course Critique Framework (ADEI-TCCF), a comprehensive and reflective process for social work educators (SWE) to critically examine their power, privilege, pedagogical approaches and curriculum development. The tool was developed to guide SWEs through a self-assessment process to review classroom content, environment, and culture, with the aim of establishing inclusive, culturally relevant, and affirming teaching practices for diverse student identities and needs. Created by a committee dedicated to advancing diversity and social justice issues, the ADEI-TCCF integrates the Council on Social Work Education 2022 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards, Culturally Relevant Teaching, Queer Pedagogy, and Decolonization Theory, offering a framework that consists of a self-assessment, peer review, observation, and feedback. Using the ADEI-TCCF uncovers how instructors can improve the content, accessibility, and community of their courses by focusing on diversifying content, increasing inclusive practices, and understanding the importance of lived experience as truth and knowledge alongside more traditional text. Additionally, the tool can be utilized as a self-assessment or group study, and offers crucial self-reflection of ADEI content and how the field of social work education upholds the value of social justice for our students and communities.*

Keywords: *ADEI, Anti-racism, social work education, social justice, culturally responsive evaluation*

With each passing decade, university student populations are gradually becoming more racially diverse. Students of color grew from 14% to 25% from 1976 to 2023 (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2024a), however, graduation rates continue to be concerning for Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) as the respective rates of bachelor's degree graduation for Hispanic is 17%; Blacks 10.4%; and American Indian/Alaskan Native .5%, compared to 58.8% of White students (NCES, 2024b). Research has indicated that an absence of inclusivity and personalized assistance in college classrooms may lead to lower graduation rates among marginalized student groups (Banks & Dohy, 2019).

There are other populations, in addition to BIPOC students, that face barriers to higher education. Students with disabilities face unique obstacles as well. Most universities utilize an accommodation-only approach instead of embracing a more holistic and affirming model for disability inclusion (Pierce, 2024). Disability cultural centers and student organizations focused on disability can offer benefits to students and the community, yet most universities do not have such entities (Elmore et al., 2018). In the heteronormative

Kimberly M. Knox, PhD, LCSW, Assistant Professor, and Erika Gergerich, PhD, LCSW, Assistant Professor School of Social Work, New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, NM. Myra Garcia, PhD Candidate, LCSW-S, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, UT.

Copyright © 2025 Authors, Vol. 25 No. 3 (Fall 2025), 1004-1019, DOI: 10.18060/28776



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

environment of higher education, LGBTQ+ students have suffered hostility and bigotry, leading to a sense of exclusion and inequality (Reggiani et al., 2024). Consequently, university programs are exploring ways to better support a diverse range of students in the classroom. This article explores a newly developed framework that social work educators (SWEs) may utilize, to assess teaching practices and promote anti-racism, diversity, equity and inclusion (ADEI) in the classroom.

Theoretical Frameworks

Several pedagogical theories and approaches helped guide the development of the framework for assessing instruction, including culturally relevant teaching, queer pedagogy, and decolonization theory.

Culturally Relevant Teaching

Research has shown that culturally relevant teaching methods can lead to improved academic achievement and engagement, a sense of critical consciousness, positive racial/ethnic identity, and positive attitudes toward others (Byrd, 2016). The term culturally relevant teaching was coined by Gloria Ladson-Billings in 1995 based on her research from the 1980s that identified a mismatch of students' cultural realities at home versus the world of academia. Ladson-Billings noted that the process of instruction would often demand that students discard their own approach for those expected of them in the classroom (Goering et al., 2022). The four main tenets of culturally relevant teaching include: 1) A welcoming and affirming environment, 2) high expectations and rigorous instruction, 3) inclusive curriculum and assessment, and 4) ongoing professional learning and support (New York State Education Department, n.d.). Therefore, to create an affirming educational environment, SWEs should have diverse backgrounds and should have an awareness of existing systemic inequities and the presence of one's own implicit bias and privilege. To promote inclusion of diverse student and instruction backgrounds and representation, teachers should build upon students' cultural capital and lived experience rather than having students discard it (Byrd, 2016). Importantly, students should be welcome to bring their own unique identity to conversations for the exploration of academic concepts.

Queer Pedagogy and Trans-Inclusive Practices

The term "queer" is used broadly to describe people whose gender or sexual identities or experiences do not correspond neatly to societal norms or expectations (Shlasko, 2005). Queer theory presents from the perspective of being outside of such norms, offering a new viewpoint towards "normalcy" (Caslin, 2025). This perspective would have us question mainstream assumptions, such as those that have instituted the binary categories for "man" or "woman," "homosexual" or "heterosexual." Queer theory asks that we explore and critique underlying assumptions that are present in any conventional approach – not only those related to gender or sexuality. Queer pedagogy examines what underlying assumptions are present in our educational institutions and processes (Shlasko, 2005). Binary categories such as "professor" and "student" may be re-examined for example. Use

of queer pedagogy involves self-reflection for the most basic assumptions we hold about how education “should” look. This includes a critique of the normative processes that are typically used for learning. Students may then have transformative knowledge emerge, based upon reflection on their own unique desires for learning (Fraser & Lambie, 2015).

Queer pedagogy has led to the development of trans-inclusive practices in higher education. Trans-inclusion involves actively establishing environments and systems that affirm individuals who are transgender, non-binary, or gender diverse. For college campuses this may involve, for example, policies that allow students to use preferred names and pronouns without needing to obtain a court order (University of New Mexico, n.d.). Universities that have trans-inclusive practices such as LGBTQ+ resource centers, housing, restrooms, and have instructors who are educated on issues that impact the trans community, report a higher rate of well-being that is related to campus belonging (Weekley, 2017).

Decolonization Theory

American institutions of higher education often have rigid hierarchical structures and systems that promote competition and individualism (Tyler et al., 2024). These Eurocentric ideologies are derived from the history of colonialism. Colonization occurs when one outside group enters the realm of another group and appropriates their resources, as was carried out by European settlers to Indigenous populations throughout the U.S. (Carson, 2017). This domination of one group over another brings a shift in culture as well and a new determination for what is normal, what holds value and what is considered important (Carson, 2017). These perspectives go on to shape institutions and policies. In our educational systems, this includes how we transfer and receive knowledge.

For the United States, decolonization refers to the process of acknowledging historical exploitation, oppression, and discrimination of Indigenous people, then challenging and dismantling the resulting Eurocentric systems that do not serve the colonized (Lamoureux, 2022). Decolonization theory emphasizes the enduring impacts and influence that colonization continues to have upon a country’s institutions and encourages restoration of marginalized perspectives and practices (Tusasiirwe, 2024).

An important first step for decolonization is to face the uncomfortable history of oppression in our country, and the mistreatment of colonized people. Additionally, time should be spent recognizing the role of our discipline (social work) in the history of mistreatment of colonized populations. Instructors may also work to foster a safe learning environment in which students are welcomed to “call others in,” or speak up when something has been said or done that felt oppressive. It is important to take time to reflect and learn from such situations after they have taken place, and identify what went well, or what might have been handled differently (Carson, 2017).

The Rise in Diversity in Higher Education and Its Challenges

Around the year 2020, several key historical events and realities impacted classroom experiences for students of color, including a global pandemic crisis, which impacted economic hardships for students of color, causing a third to leave college at a rate higher than their White peers, primarily due to economic hardship (Ahn & Domínguez-Villegas, 2022; McCann, 2020). Meanwhile, as the pandemic raged on, shocking videos were widely distributed on social media, displaying disturbing incidents of racial violence, white privilege, and systemic racism (Flint et al., 2021). In Minneapolis, police officer Derek Chauvin held his knee on George Floyd's neck, as bystanders pled for him to release his hold. This egregious act of police brutality, alongside the murders of Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor, spurred the Black Lives Matter movement to launch social media campaigns and organize protests demanding justice for these victims and an end to systemic violence against Black communities (Chang et al., 2022). This wave of social unrest and exposure to racial violence galvanized students and SWE to reflect on ADEI teaching practices to advocate for systemic change within universities, their classrooms, and the profession of social work itself.

The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) oversees the accreditation of social work education programs and establishes the facets that students are expected to demonstrate competency for. Prior to 2022, one of the nine competencies in social work education required that students "Engage Diversity and Difference in Practice." In 2022, CSWE's Board of Accreditation adapted the language for this competency to read that students must engage ADEI. As part of the 2022 changes for accreditation of social work programs, departments or schools of social work must also demonstrate how their program and curriculum demonstrate ADEI (CSWE, 2022b). These seemingly minor revisions appear to serve as an effort to challenge social work programs and students to actively acknowledge and address the impact of White supremacy and resulting systemic oppression (CSWE, 2022b).

While movements such as these were working to highlight the experiences of the BIPOC community, counterefforts began organizing to push back against such attention. In 2023, state legislatures and university boards began dismantling ADEI programs and activities across the United States, eliminating mandatory ADEI training, diversity statements, and identity-based preferences used for hiring (Chronical Staff, 2024; Smith, 2025). Other changes made by universities include the discontinuation of race or gender-specific funding sources, closure of gender studies programming and intercultural, LGBTQ+ and women's centers (Gretzinger & Hicks, 2024). Upon returning to the White House for his second term in 2025, President Trump's administration actively worked to ban ADEI programming in higher education and has challenged the use of race-based scholarships and other supports for BIPOC students seeking a degree (Kim, 2025). Such actions contrast with the approaches of culturally relevant teaching, queer pedagogy, and decolonization theory which would instead seek to highlight and incorporate the experiences and perspectives of marginalized groups.

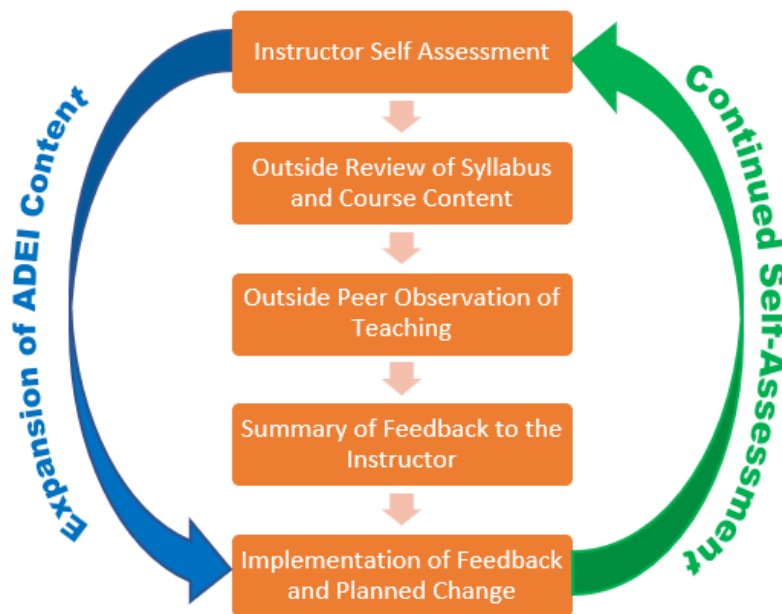
The Development of a Culturally Responsive Critique Framework for ADEI Social Work Education

Within this context of historical disruptions and realities, in the fall of 2019, four SWEs at a Hispanic Serving Institution near the U.S./Mexico border formed a committee to develop a teaching/course critique specific to diverse student learning. The ad hoc group titled itself the Diversity and Social Justice committee and was recategorized to remain as a standing committee in 2023. While the committee has not yet experienced any opposition to its existence or mission, in spring of 2025 there was some discussion as to whether there could be in the future by either the university and/or presidential administration.

One primary objective for the committee was to develop an ADEI focused teaching assessment framework, to examine the extent to which SWEs were using affirming practices in the curriculum to honor other ways of knowing through lived experience instead of only empirical knowledge (CSWE, 2022a; Hammond, 2015; Roberts et al., 2020; Louie et al., 2017). Additionally, the committee considered how SWEs were creating classrooms that students considered safe to share their stories and not be silenced because of the hierarchical structures of higher education (Razack, 2009). The ADEI Teaching and Course Critique Framework (ADEI-TCCF) was designed with consideration for CSWE's new and more explicit anti-racist competency, along with tenets of culturally relevant teaching, queer pedagogy and decolonization theory. This article will outline the process of the ADEI-TCCF so that it may be easily replicated.

Figure 1 illustrates the ADEI-TCCF and demonstrates the flow of the process, its parts, and how the tool facilitates planned change.

Figure 1. *Anti-Racism, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (ADEI) Teaching and Course Evaluation Model*



The ADEI-TCCF is a process with several components including the following ADEI Teaching and Course Critique Framework Forms (Figures 2-5): 1) The SWE self-critique, 2) The Outside Review of Syllabus and Course Content, 3) The Outside Peer Observation of Teaching, and 4) The Summary of Feedback to the SWE.

After development of the ADEI-TCCF, the first cohort of faculty to complete the process was made up of three SWEs who opted to participate as both reviewers and reviewees. A single SWE reviewed each faculty course. Upon conclusion of the review process, reflections on the experience were obtained from the perspective of reviewer and reviewee via electronic survey. SWEs used thematic analysis for open-ended survey responses. The project was approved by the New Mexico State University Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Social Work Educator Self-Critique Reflecting in Teaching Practices

The intent of the SWE self-critique (Figure 2) is to identify existing course strengths while exploring what improvements facilitate meaningful change for a range of student learners. The SWE self-critique serves a dual purpose: it systematically evaluates current teaching practices and philosophies while providing a valuable opportunity to engage in critical reflexivity. The critique is obtained by written survey and includes open-ended questions to reflect on teaching philosophy, personal values, social work values, and how privilege, power, and oppression have influenced their teaching.

By reflecting on their positionality and current approaches, educators can gain deeper insights into how their perspectives and experiences shape their pedagogical approaches and curriculum development. Additionally, SWEs have the opportunity to celebrate the teaching process and realize the privilege we hold as teachers, and to create self-awareness to engage in our labor (Warren, 2011). The framework is essential for fostering a more inclusive and equitable educational environment, as it encourages SWEs to recognize and address biases that may influence their teaching practices (Smith, 2021). This exercise aligns with culturally relevant teaching in its emphasis on the importance of instructor awareness of personal privilege and bias.

Figure 2. *SWE Self-Critique*

The primary goals of the Diversity and Social Justice Committee are to consider and address any oppressive and/or non-inclusive components present in our program and curriculum and increase awareness and integrate knowledge and practices that are affirming and responsive to underrepresented people and communities. This SWE self-critique will be utilized for self-reflection and to understand the SWE's philosophy, intention, and implementation of diverse, inclusive, and socially justice-oriented practices in their courses, with students, and programmatically.

SWE Participant Name:

1. Briefly share how long you have been teaching and the courses that you have taught and are currently teaching.
2. What is your teaching philosophy?
3. What personal values do you hold and how do they align with and reflect inclusivity and social justice?

4. (Broadly) how are these values reflected in your approach to teaching?
5. Where *specifically* are the following concepts reflected in your teaching? Below, list the content and location where these concepts may be found. (It might be helpful, here, to review the “*Syllabus and Course Content Review*” document provided to you as part of the Critique framework process for Teaching Methods for Diverse Student Learning. You might also include classroom discussions here.
 - a.) Diversity and Intersectionality
 - b.) Equity
 - c.) Social Justice
 - d.) Anti-racism
6. Could you describe and reflect upon a time when you were *unable to* successfully execute the reflection of those values?
7. What strategies do you utilize to engage others in dialogue about these concepts?
 - a) Amongst students?
 - b) Amongst colleagues?
 - c) In the community?
 - d) In social work practice?
 1. Provide an example of how/when you have done this (or how you will, if you have not)?
8. Describe opportunities that you provide for students to give feedback for your course/instruction. Are they prompted to offer feedback specifically about the concepts of intersectionality, diversity, equity, social justice? If not, how might you develop such opportunities in the future?
9. How do you implement feedback provided by students? Can you provide an example of how/when you have done this (or how you will, if you have not)?
10. Representation Matrix: Presence of diversity among authors or other characters in course material

Attribute	Girl/Woman	Boy/Man	Non-Binary	Total/ Tally
Middle Eastern				
Asian/Pacific Islander				
Black/African				
Hispanic/Latinx				
Native/Indigenous				
White				
Racially ambiguous				
Multiracial				
People With Disabilities				
LGBTQ+				

* Adapted from Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019

11. Describe aspects of your own privilege and power and how you consider these when engaging with students, teaching, and/or developing course content.
12. How has oppression impacted your teaching, engagement with students, and/or course development?
13. Can you provide an example of this?
14. Are there aspects of your instruction/courses that you have already identified as problematic or needing revision, in order to be more inclusive of diverse student learners? If so, what are these and what revisions do you have planned?
15. (If you have attended any) please list/describe any professional development training or courses you have taken to support you in enhancing your approach to diversity and social justice in your courses. What did you learn? Is there anything you could bring back to others?
16. What resources do you need from the SSW to be able to improve your approach to diversity and social justice in your courses?
17. What is the name of the course that you wish to have a Peer Observation for?
 - If the course you wish to be reviewed is asynchronous, what components of your course do you want reviewed (Ex. The Home Page, Syllabus, Course Schedule, Assignments, Module 1 and Module 6)?
 - If the course you wish to be reviewed is synchronous, what day/time/location(s) might your reviewer plan to attend your classroom for Peer Observation? (Peer observation should be made in-person for in-person classes).

Syllabus and Course Content Review: Ensuring Inclusivity

The second component of the ADEI-TCCF (Figure 3) involves an external review of the course syllabus and course content for inclusivity, anti-racist pedagogy, mutual respect, and creating a sense of belonging (Ahadi & Guerrero, 2020). The reviewer checks for specific content in the syllabus, such as statements of inclusion (land acknowledgement, anti-racist statement, pronouns, mental health supports, accommodations for disability, wellness/trigger warning statements) and overall, for use of inclusive language. Additionally, the syllabus is examined to verify that it outlines classroom etiquette expectations that foster community and safety. It should also provide contact information for available community support and resources and be assessed for accessibility to accommodate all students' needs. These aspects of the assessment process align with trans-inclusive practices and decolonization theory in that they “normalize” recognition of the region’s history of colonialism, as well as a non-binary approach to gender. Fostering an open and safe classroom for critical discussion aligns with culturally relevant teaching and queer pedagogy.

Course content is reviewed for clarity of course structure, student expectations, assignment descriptions, and evaluation of student work. Additionally, reviewers are instructed to examine course content for inclusion of diverse authors, presenters and topics as they pertain to lived experience, a variety of geographical locations, and interventions and modalities. Content is also explored for use of trigger warnings, culturally relevant interventions, impact of theory/research/policy for underrepresented and marginalized populations. Furthermore, assignments and student input are considered for clarity, inclusivity, feedback and communication strategies.

Figure 3. *Outside Review of Syllabus and Course Content*

<p>Review the syllabus and course content for the following information and criteria</p> <p>Syllabus:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Does the SWE provide statements of inclusion in their syllabus? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Land Acknowledgement, Anti-Racist Statement, Pronouns, Mental health, Accommodations for Disability, Wellness/Trigger Warning Statement). 2. Are there links and information to various university supports: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Accommodations for disability, the Writing Center, (for Junior BSW students) TRIO Program, Hispanic Council/Chicano Programs, NMSU Black Programs, American Indian Program. 3. Language utilized throughout syllabus is inclusive: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Holidays and breaks as discussed are secular, inclusive, and sensitive. (Ex. Winter in place of Christmas, Fall break in place of Thanksgiving, and Indigenous Peoples Day in place of Columbus Day). b. Descriptions of students utilize gender-neutral language of <i>they</i> or are referred to as students rather than “he/she.” 4. Classroom etiquette is described clearly and is inclusive to create a safe and inviting space: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Encouragement for open discussion about difficult topics and various viewpoints b. Provides information about steps to take if there is conflict during dialogue or presence of microaggressions in the classroom. 5. The document is designed for accessibility: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Has the Syllabus been designed for or checked with vision impaired students? Has SWE utilized immersive reader to review the Syllabus?
--

Course Content (Canvas page/Lecture materials/Activities)

1. Does the SWE provide clear descriptions of structure of the course and expectations of students, describing assignments relevant to course content, and how their work will be evaluated?
2. Does the SWE attempt to include diverse authors, presenters, topics as they relate to course content?
 - a. Lived experience: Materials (reading, audio, video) wherein people from communities themselves, describe an issue related to social work practice.
 - b. Inclusion of content that includes experiences/perspectives of local/regional populations.
 - c. Inclusion of content that highlights the experiences of local student population (Ex. Hispanic, first generation, etc.).
 - d. Use of trigger warnings for sensitive or disturbing material.
 - e. Consideration for the impact of historic, systemic oppression of various populations and outcomes related to social work practice.
 - f. Theory, policy, research and/or practice modalities are examined to determine their value in application with underrepresented and minoritized populations.
 - g. Exploration of interventions, practices, modalities that are culturally relevant and based that may not be well known.
 - h. Have course templates on Canvas been checked for accessibility? Has SWE utilized immersive reader to review Canvas course?
 - i. Is the SWE utilizing elements of ungrading in their course? If so, how are students included in this process?

Assignments:

- a. It should be plainly clear what you want students to do, why, and how their work will be evaluated.
- b. Use of clear grading rubrics.
- c. Provide students with a variety and/or choice in modes of obtaining information (written, audio/visual)?
- d. Provide students with a variety and/or choice in methods to display comprehension (written, presentation, creative).

Student Input:

- a. Is student feedback regarding assignment descriptions and purpose solicited/scheduled throughout the semester?
- b. Are students consulted and engaged in dialogue on how to make class inclusive?
- c. How is feedback applied and communicated to students?

Outside Peer Observation of Teaching: External Insights

The third step in the critique framework (Figure 4) is an external peer observation of teaching by the reviewer. One class observation is chosen by the participant at a point in the semester where changes and improvements to the course can still be implemented, preferably one month into the semester after the students and SWE have built rapport. The classroom observation focuses on inclusive language usage and instruction, open discussions, SWE feedback and encouragement, creating a safe and encouraging environment and integration of student experiences (New York State Education Department, n.d.).

Figure 4. *Outside Peer Observation of Teaching*

Ideally, Peer Observation takes place on the first day of class (as the SWE, syllabus and course overview is covered) and/or around one month into the class, (before or after which midway student course critiques are deployed). Below are some considerations for both the SWE participant and SWE Reviewer, in preparation of Peer Observation.

Introductions:

1. SWE introduces themselves to the class using preferred pronouns (1st day)
2. Professors who identify as first-generation, of a particular race/ethnicity, LGBTQ+, have a disability, etc. make their status known to students (to the degree that they are comfortable).
3. Include pronouns in your university email signature and Zoom name.
4. Gives students opportunity to introduce self, preferred name and pronouns (1st day)
5. Goals for the class are described by the SWE with input requested from students.
6. Encourage discussion about difficult topics, various viewpoints, through respectful dialogue with consideration given to what is/is not evidence-based.
7. SWE describes how to prepare for assignments (how to best engage with material, study, and succeed).
8. SWE offers frequent and positive engagement between professor and first-generation students (this leads to greater academic, social/emotional benefits). Ex. Office hours, before/after class.

Communication with Students:

1. Check in with students at the beginning, middle and end of class.
2. Address external stressors that may be present that could impact student learning (Ex. COVID, or community violence).
3. Provide students various options to share/engage in class (in addition to speaking out loud). Ex. chat, anonymous boards, etc.
4. Use and discuss inclusive language (Ex. be aware of and discuss microaggressions).
5. Offer outside/supplemental resources on subject matter discussed.
6. Integration of students' personal observations and experience in discussion.
7. Explore alternative perspectives (Ex. differences of opinion, or marginalized voices).
8. Identify and explore aspects of theory, practice modalities and research that are biased.
9. Encourage communication between SWE-student outside of class.

Feedback and Continuous Improvement: Closing the Loop

The fourth and final step in the ADEI-TCCF (Figure 5) is for reviewers to give the SWE feedback from their critique and observation of course materials. Reviewers provide feedback through a document that prompts them to organize their feedback into the following domains: Use of the Learning Management System (LMS), course content, assignments, instruction, communication, inclusivity and accessibility. Additionally, the feedback form includes SWE strengths, suggested action steps, and recommended resources. Once the reviewer completes the form, the feedback is relayed to the SWE through dialogue, along with the completed Feedback Form.

Figure 5. *Summary of Feedback to the SWE Peer Observation*

<p>Please give detailed feedback for the SWE based on observations and reviews to improve ADEI course content.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Documents: 2. Canvas: 3. Course Content: 4. Assignments: 5. Instruction: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Communication (style, frequency, etc.): b. Inclusivity: c. Accessibility: <p>Considerations for other aspects of the Class:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. SWE Strengths: 2. Suggested Action Steps: 3. Suggested Resources:

Discussion

Overall, SWEs that participated in the ADEI-TCCF reported meaningful self-reflection and subsequent changes to their curriculum. The self-critique process was an area of strength for the ADEI framework and gave participants an opportunity to reflect and think about ADEI content or lack thereof within their curriculum. Participants described the impact of recognizing and sharing their own identities, and how this could lead to heightened awareness and inclusivity. Interestingly, reflection upon one's own power and privilege (and impacts upon teaching) reportedly gave some a sense of vulnerability, knowing that a peer would be reading about their lived experience and having a fear of being judged.

When receiving the Summary of Feedback, participants found reviewer input to be valuable, comprehensive and constructive. SWEs acknowledged that their courses needed improvement in ADEI content. Several areas of planned change were identified following the initial deployment of the ADEI-TCCF. Importantly, SWEs detected content areas that needed to be expanded to include more representation for various populations including LGBTQ+, Indigenous communities, and immigrants, and intentional about integrating concepts of intersectionality, diversity, equity into materials, assignments and activities. Specifically, representation of the disability community was lacking (Kim & Sellmaier, 2020). Key elements related to disability competence that may be included in curriculum content include accessibility, able privilege, disability justice and disability culture (Pierce, 2024). Following the critique, SWEs described intentions to make university support resources and accessibility options more visible for students who require accommodations. SWEs also considered various ways to relay information about supportive collectives for certain demographics including African American, Hispanic/Latino and LGBTQ+ student groups. This may ideally be shared in various ways such as within the course syllabus, on the electronic learning platform, and/or linked on the departmental website. Importantly, SWEs identified the need to create safe spaces where students could share lived experiences, identity and intersectionality in the social work curriculum.

An unintended strength of the framework was the open discussion that the ADEI

critique framework initiated. Overall, SWEs reported an appreciation for the ability to hear about colleagues' backgrounds. One respondent wrote, "I also enjoyed hearing about my colleague's personal background. I typically share a bit about my own background. But I might include more explicitly the privilege I have benefited from, as well as the struggles, and of course my passions." Faculty may not typically find themselves in a position of sharing personal vulnerabilities or histories with one another. Participating in this in-depth review process provided a valuable opportunity to share and learn about one another in a way that may not have otherwise happened.

Challenges and Future Improvements

Although the assessment offers a comprehensive framework that helps identify areas of improvement for ADEI, there are challenges to implementation. First, the framework itself can be time-consuming, especially peer observation. Secondly, the evaluators should consider if the course is asynchronous or synchronous and what content will be assessed and observed. An observation may be more challenging if there is no live class. Thirdly, there was no feedback from students about content or inclusive practices included in the ADEI-TCCF. Participants felt that student feedback should be developed and included as a fifth component for the framework to enrich student experiences. Conventional student course evaluations are often quantitative in nature, which is not ideal for gathering input about nuanced topics such as classroom safety, instructor bias, consideration for a range of perspectives, and opportunities for critique. Focus groups would be a preferable mode for seeking student feedback. Often student perspectives are gathered by faculty halfway or at the conclusion of a course. Instead, participating faculty agreed that it would be valuable to gain insights from students following the first day of class, as well as one month later. The first day of class often sets the tone for a classroom environment. One month into a class, students are likely to have a clear sense of an instructor's approach, and their input may be applied in a timelier manner for the remainder of the class when gathered at an earlier stage.

One additional suggestion for improving the framework is for faculty to participate in the process in small groups to allow a broader look at the program's curriculum, while also allowing SWE to learn about and from one another. Additionally, by engaging in critical discussions with others, it gives an opportunity for difficult conversations and to become aware of unconscious bias that may impact ADEI in social work curriculum (Akhtar, 2023).

Finally, it is important to recognize that university programs have faced a call from the Trump administration to eliminate ADEI efforts with a not so veiled threat to federal funding should they not comply. Given this hostile political climate, faculty may understandably be wary of implementing such a teaching assessment. There are some ways, however, that social work instructors may "push back." First, faculty should be prepared to detail the evidence or data that supports the use of ADEI initiatives in the university setting. Research has shown that when college campuses have ADEI programs, faculty report increased job satisfaction, and students have better academic success, are less biased, and are more civically engaged in their communities after graduation (Licht, 2023). Second, social workers have the distinct advantage of being able to point to their

accrediting body, CSWE, and the competencies that our social work students are expected to achieve. Competency three explicitly states that social work students engage in anti-racism, diversity, equity and inclusion (CSWE, 2022a). Finally, the ADEI-TCCF may be offered as one of several methods that faculty may choose to have their teaching assessed, making it optional.

Positionality of Participating Faculty

It is important to highlight the positionality, or the demographic circumstances for participating faculty members, as these realities undoubtedly had some influence upon the work. We have chosen to do this for the sake of transparency, as well as to provide context for development of the assessment process and findings.

Participant one: The intersections of my identity have afforded me a great deal of privilege, as well as challenges and unique perspectives. I am a White cisgender woman who was raised by cisgender, heterosexual parents in a middle-class household. I am a U.S. citizen and have lived most of my life in the U.S., primarily in the south. I am a single mother by choice and am living with stage four cancer. For all my adult life, I have avoided placing a label on my sexuality and would describe this as fluid and personal to me.

Participant two: My positionality comes from the space of identifying as a cisgender, women, first generation graduate, who is white appearing. I am racially diverse and was raised in a lower-middle class family with European, mono-lingual and bilingual first- and second-generation immigrants as part of my family and cultural context. I intersect with disability and neurodivergence in my circle of care and influence. I am a US citizen.

Participant three: I'm a proud daughter of immigrants, first-gen college graduate, Chicana/Fronteriza from the NM, TX, Mexico border. While I hold these marginalized identities, I also occupy multiple privileged positions that are not always visible, and I strive to remain mindful of how these shape my perspectives and interactions. These intersecting identities influence my lens as a social worker, educator, and researcher, and inherently impact how I approach teaching, mentoring, and scholarship.

Conclusion

This article offers a critical reflection on the development of the ADEI Course and SWE Critique Framework. Following participation in this process, SWEs noted gaps in diverse representations, calling for them to re-think course content and delivery to address gaps particularly for accessibility and disability, immigration and regional Indigenous groups. At the institutional level, implementing ADEI critiques can drive systemic changes in social work education programs by advancing culturally relevant teaching and ensuring equitable representation in course materials, thereby mitigating citation bias and broadening access to diverse perspectives (Baffour et al., 2024). By emphasizing anti-racism, queer pedagogy and decolonization theory in educational standards, social work education can work toward dismantling structural inequalities and develop more culturally grounded curricula, thus addressing the dominance of Eurocentric perspectives and promoting a more inclusive approach to social work education and practice (Fairfax et al.,

2023).

References


- Ahadi, H. S., & Guerrero, L. A. (2020). [Decolonizing your syllabus, an anti-racist guide for your college](#). *Academic Senate for Community Colleges*.
- Ahn, T., & Domínguez-Villegas, R. (2022). [A change of plans: How the pandemic affected students of color and their plans for higher education](#). UCLA Latino Policy and Politics Initiative.
- Akhtar, F. (2023). [The emotional labor of decolonizing social work curricula](#). *Journal of Social Work Practice*, 37(3), 297-308.
- Baffour T. D., Garcia, M., & Rich, M. (2024). [Advancing the grand challenge to eliminate racism: A call to action for citational justice in social work](#). *Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work*, 34(5-6), 275-285.
- Banks, T., & Dohy, J. (2019). [Mitigating barriers to persistence: A review of efforts to improve retention and graduation rates for students of color in higher education](#). *Higher Education Studies*, 9(1), 118-131.
- Bryan-Gooden, J., Hester, M., & Peoples, L. Q. (2019). [Culturally responsive curriculum scorecard](#). Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools, New York University.
- Byrd, C. M. (2016). [Does culturally relevant teaching work? An examination from student perspectives](#). *SAGE Open*, July-September 2016, 1-10.
- Carson, Q. (2017, August 25). [Pedagogy of the decolonizing](#) [Video, TEDxUAlberta]. YouTube.
- Caslin, S. (2025). [Creativity as queer praxis: History, pedagogy and academic assessment](#). *History*, 110(393), 725-732.
- Chang, H. H., Richardson, A., & Ferrara, E. (2022). [#JusticeForGeorgeFloyd: How Instagram facilitated the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests](#). *PLoS One*, 17(12), 1-19.
- Chronicle Staff. (2024). [ADEI legislation tracker: Explore where college diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts are under attack](#). Chronical for Higher Education.
- Council on Social Work Education [CSWE]. (2022a). [2022 EPAS: Educational policies and accreditation standards for Baccalaureate and master's social work programs](#). Author.
- CSWE. (2022b). [2022 Educational policies and accreditation standards \(EPAS\) frequently asked questions](#). Author.
- Elmore, K., Saia, T., & Thomson, E. A. (2018, November). [Special feature: An introduction to disability cultural centers in U.S. higher education, Part I](#). *Association on Higher Education and Disability*.
- Fairfax, C. N., Rountree, M., Murray-Lichtman, A., Moore, R. M., Bird, M. Y., Albritton, T., Naseh, M., Izaksonas, E., & Williams, T. (2023). [Lessons learned from the CSWE task force to advance anti-racism in the social work educational policy and accreditation Standards: Praxis in a racially volatile society](#). *Advances in Social Work*,

- 23(2), 262-277.
- Flint, A. S., Laman, T. T., & Jackson, T. O. (2021). [Culturally sustaining pedagogies in education](#). *Theory Into Practice*, 60(3), 227-230.
- Fraser, J., & Lambale, S. (2015). [Queer desires and critical pedagogies in higher education: Reflections on the transformative potential of non-normative learning desires in the classroom](#). *Journal of Feminist Scholarship*, 7(7), 61-77.
- Goering, A. E., Resnick, C. E., Bradford, K. D., & Othus-Gault, S. M. (2022). [Diversity by design: Broadening participation through inclusive teaching](#). *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 2022(199), 77-79.
- Gretzinger, E., & Hicks, M. (2024, March 22). [The chaos of compliance: How public colleges in two states are actually responding to DEI bans](#). *Chronicle of Higher Education*.
- Hammond, Z. (2015). *Culturally responsive teaching and the brain: Promoting authentic engagement and rigor among culturally and linguistically diverse students*. Sage.
- Kim, J. (2025, March 14). [More than 50 universities are under investigation as part of Trump's anti-DEI crackdown](#). NPR.
- Kim, J., & Sellmaier, C. (2020). [Making disability visible in social work education](#). *Journal of Social Work Education*, 56(3), 496-507.
- Lamoureux, K. (2022, April 20). [A beginner's guide to decolonization](#) [Video, TEDxSurrey]. YouTube.
- Licht, E. J. (2023). [5 ways that college campuses benefit from diversity, equity and inclusion programs](#). *Academic Matters: OCUFA's Journal of Higher Education*.
- Louie, D. W., Poitras Pratt, Y., Hanson, A. J., & Ottmann, J. (2017). [Applying Indigenizing principles of decolonizing methodologies in university classrooms](#). *Canadian Journal of Higher Education*, 47(3), 16-33.
- McCann, C. (2020, September 18). [New federal survey data show the pandemic has hit would-be college students hard](#) (Blog). *New America*.
- National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES]. (2024a). [Table 306.20. Total fall enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by level and control of institution and race/ethnicity or nonresident status of student: Selected years, 1976 through 2021](#). *Digest of Education Statistics*.
- NCES. (2024b). [Degrees conferred by race/ethnicity and sex \(Fast Facts No. 72\)](#). U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences.
- New York State Education Department. (n.d.). [Culturally responsive-sustaining education framework](#). Author.
- Pierce, K. L. (2024). [Bridging the gap between intentions and impact: Understanding disability culture to support disability justice](#). *The Professional Counsellor*, 13(4), 486-495.
- Razack, N. (2009). [Decolonizing the pedagogy and practice of international social work](#).

- International Social Work*, 52(1), 9-21.
- Reggiani, M., Gagnon, J. D., & Lunn, R. J. (2024). [A holistic understanding of inclusion in STEM: Systemic challenges and support for women and LGBT+ academics and PhD students](#). *Higher Education*, 87, 69-87.
- Roberts, L. M., Nelson, R., & Purcell, C., & Harbin, B. (2020). [Teaching beyond the gender binary in the University classroom](#). Center for Teaching Vanderbilt University.
- Shlasko, G. D. (2005). [Queer \(v.\) pedagogy](#). *Equality & Excellence in Education*, 38(2), 123-134.
- Smith, J. (2025, September 17). [Anti-DEI laws have passed at a furious pace this year. Here's what they do](#). *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.
- Smith, L. T. (2021). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples* (3rd ed.). Zed Books.
- Tusasiirwe, S. (2024). [Disrupting colonization in the social work classroom: Using the Ubuntu/Ubuntu framework to decolonize the curriculum](#). *Social Work Education*, 43(8), 2170-2184.
- Tyler, S., Ladhani, S., Pabia, M., & McDermott, M. (2024). [Animating pedagogies of discomfort and affect for anti-racism and decolonizing aims in social work education](#). *Teaching in Higher Education*, 29(5), 1253-1266.
- University of New Mexico. (n.d.). [Transgender inclusion and equity at UNM](#). Author.
- Warren, J. T. (2011). [Reflexive teaching: Toward critical autoethnographic practices of/in/on pedagogy](#). *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies*, 11(2), 139-144.
- Weekley, T. (2017). [Transgender inclusion in higher education: An examination of perceived inclusion and personal wellbeing on four college campuses](#). *Undergraduate Research Journal*, 21(1), 1-20.

Author note: Address correspondence to Kimberly M. Knox, College of Health, Education, and Social Transformation, School of Social Work, New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, NM 88003. Contact: kimknox@nmsu.edu

Acknowledgements: We want to acknowledge the Diversity and Social Justice Committee for their insights, and contribution to the development of this tool.

ORCID: Kimberly M. Knox  [0000-0002-8436-1465](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8436-1465)