No Letting Down Anytime Soon: Engaging Today’s Civically-Engaged College Students

Presented by Brandon Kitchin
Land Acknowledgement

Before we begin I would like to read a land acknowledgement. Land Acknowledgement is a formal statement that recognizes and respects Indigenous Peoples as traditional stewards of this land and the enduring relationship that exists between Indigenous Peoples and their traditional territories. To recognize the land is an expression of gratitude and appreciation to those whose territory we reside on, and a way of honoring the Indigenous people who have been living and working on the land from time immemorial. It is important to understand the long existing history that has brought us to reside on the land, and to seek to understand our place within that history. Land acknowledgements do not exist in a past tense, or historical context: colonialism is a current ongoing process, and we need to build our mindfulness of our present participation. It is also worth noting that acknowledging the land is Indigenous protocol. We would like to open our event today by acknowledging that the land on which we gather is the occupied/unceded/seized territory of the Wichita and Caddo Affiliated Tribes. These tribes have stewarded this land throughout the generations and we would like to pay our respects to elders, both past and present.

We also acknowledge that this country would not exist if it wasn’t for the free, enslaved labor of Black people. We honor the legacy of the African diaspora and Black life, knowledge and skills stolen due to violence and white supremacy. While the movement for justice and liberation is building and we are witnessing the power of the people, many are still being met with violence and even being killed. Please join me in a moment of silence in honor of Black and Indigenous ancestors who have passed and who have paved the way for us. Thank you.
# Principles of Engagement

**Suspend**
- Judgement
- Denial
- Guilt
- Assumptions
- Distractions
- Interruptions
- Side conversations
- Titles

**Embrace**
- Awareness towards **understanding**
- Leaning into discomfort
- Critical **self-reflection**
- Opportunities for cognitive dissonance
- Helping to create a **safe & brave space**
- Opportunity to **learn** about identities & biases
- **Vulnerability**, willingness to "catch" each other
- Speak from "I" perspective (not for an entire group); Allow others to tell their own stories (check first)
- **Share air time** - if you’ve spoken twice in a row, allow others to speak first
- Staying in the moment
ZOOM GUIDELINES

PLEASE

- Rename yourself
- Turn on your camera (if possible)
- Mute your microphone unless actively speaking

PARTICIPATE!

- Chat (Introduce Yourself!)
- Reactions
- Raise your hand
- Polls
- Breakout Rooms

Please keep all moving fans out of view and steady your laptop/computer
Purpose

In times of pressing and concurrent social issues, higher education has a unique role in both educating and supporting their communities. Educators and professionals should be prepared to engage today’s students who are increasingly involved in leading movements and spreading awareness regarding social change – and whose efforts may not let up until they see what they view as necessary reform.
Learning Outcomes

1. Participants will be able to identify methods students are using to use their platforms to voice their opinions on various social issues that affect them or others they care for.
2. Participants will learn a brief history of civil rights on college campuses.
3. Participants will be able to identify methods for them as influential bodies to encourage civil discourse among differences in opinion at their institutions for both students and colleagues.
4. Participants will consider the role higher education plays in educating and supporting college students find themselves and their beliefs.
5. Participants will consider the complexity institutions face to align themselves with or against certain sociopolitical issues that affect their constituents.
Interest in Topic

TCU

NEWS 21

ROCKY MOUNTAIN EMMY AWARDS 2018

2021 UNT EQUITY & DIVERSITY CONFERENCE

Presented by: HILTI

In partnership with:

#EDC21atUNT
Every Saturday & Sunday from Mar. 27-May 2
Bike/Car Tour
RSVP on Eventbrite through DNAWORKS.org/fwlt
Bringing it all together.

My interest is in amplifying stories centered around social justice, restoration & healing, and community building.

I’m able to do that by writing, but also, in my work as a professional. This is possible by supporting and affirming students as they understand their identities, discover their passions, and become actively involved in addressing issues affecting them and their communities.
What comes to mind when you hear “Student Activism”?  
What examples can you think of?  
Did you participate in anything as a student?  
Were certain events taught to you?  
What have you seen on the news or from working at an institution?
Student Activism is Central to Higher Ed

Institutions are microcosms of the world. Or least they ought to be, moving forward.

• The national body of college-going students is continuing to diversify & the trend points upward.
• College is primetime for discovery & crafting of students’ identities.
• Students’ identities inform their passions and guide them to places and actions showcasing who they are.

Let’s look at UNT today:

• Minority Serving institution: 57.5%
• Hispanic Serving Institution: 25.51%
• First-Generation Status: 41.5%
• International Student Population: 9.2%
• Countries Represented: 139

(University of North Texas, 2020)
Main Takeaways

- Activism is as old as higher education is.
- Activism often is identity-based (IBSA). Relates to one or more minoritized identities.
- Activism takes shape in many forms.
- Students recognize their voice and power to mobilize.
- Each issue to an individual/group/community should be regarded equally and considered urgent matters to us as educators and decision makers.

Will student activism ever end?

“Nah.”
-Rosa Parks

(Linder et al., 2020; Thelin, 2019)
Setting the Scene

“I think people assume activism always means pointing their finger at someone telling them they’re wrong – and I do believe that’s necessary – but I also think there’s a place for holding a space for people to have those difficult conversations within them and guiding them to that place where they do the work. Not [me] doing the work telling them what’s wrong with them, society, or what needs to change, but we gently lead them to a place where they recognize [it]”

(Banks, 2021)
Today’s forms of Activism

• Simplest form — seeking to become more educated
• Holding government/institution officials accountable
• Protesting
• Engaging in intentional dialogue over pressing issues
• Donating to social justice organizations & marginalized/underrepresented businesses

(Quaye et al., 2020)
The biggest of ‘em all: Social Media

Social Media instantly gives a voice to the previously unheard.

• Awareness Posts & Informational Threads
• Sharing their own stories
• Documenting Evidence & Events (pictures/video)
• Organizing Movements

(Quaye et al., 2020)
Activism as Labor

• Students perform emotional, physical, mental, and social labor in addressing oppression at their institutions. Isn’t that what professionals should be doing?
• Students of color don’t necessarily see themselves as activists. They’re just trying to survive.
• Students of color do not see themselves represented in institutional culture. Students of color in comparison to dominant group peers feel more compelled to care for other students.

• Admin protect dominance financially, through freedom of speech claims, or by aligning themselves with institution over students.
• Institutions benefit from student’s labor and ultimately water down efforts and impact potential.
• Consequences: Isolation from peers and family, decreased performance and learning, poor emotional and physical well-being.

(Linder et al., 2019).
Power-Conscious Framework

Six Tenets:

- Self-Awareness
- Context & History
- Behavior
- Systems
- Role of Power
- Solidarity

Three Assumptions:

- Power is omnipresent
- Power and identity are inextricably linked
- Identity is socially constructed.

(Linder et al., 2020)
Tenet Breakdown

Self-Awareness:
Consistently find ways to further your education.

“Be comfortable being uncomfortable” by surrounding yourself with new information and perspectives.

Context & History:
Consider environment in which you work and live and how that influences your interaction with others.

Ahistoricism = ineffective strategies, toxic institutional climate, and lower retention of students and employees.

(Linder et al., 2020)
Tenet Breakdown

**Behavior:**
We must act and learn at the same time.

Individuals perpetuate systems so if we can achieve individual-change, we can achieve systemic change.

**Systems:**
Call out systems and how they disproportionately affects marginalized identities.

Call out power and reinforce that relinquishing privilege does not always equate to losing power.

(Linder et al., 2020)
Tenet Breakdown

Role of Power:
Highlight how people benefit from investing in systems of oppression.

Ask: Who is centered & erased in policy? Intentional or not? What impact does power have on people’s lived experiences?

Solidarity:
Be aware of who decides course of action, and make sure everyone’s voice is accounted for.

Strength in numbers and impact is loudest when it’s perfectly in sync.

(Linder et al., 2020)
Data from Student Affairs Professionals

Key Finding: significance of identity and positionality on educators’ experiences supporting student activists and mixed messages they received from supervisors and admin about supporting SAs.

- Educators of color felt under the microscope and in danger of being severely reprimanded while also struggling to personally identify as activist while upholding image to remaining apolitical.

- Admin and supervisors cautioned staff to air on side of supporting “appropriately”, but there’s no definition of appropriate. Coded term much like “professionalism”.

- Admin and supervisor’s silence is a major challenge. Silence results in reinforcing oppression.

Administrators:
- Students mostly deal with individuals who possess mostly dominant social identities.
- Considered to be resistant and reinforcers of status quo.

Faculty:
- Generally positive relationships.
- Perform behind the scenes work and provide space for conversations within class, research, etc.

Staff:
- Serve as conduits between upper-admin and students.
- Feel unprepared and conflicted to navigate supporting students. Fear of being fired and blackballed in future.

(Stewart et al., 2020)
Recommendations

• Upper-level admin must outline clear and explicit expectations for faculty/staff related to supporting activism.

• Direct conversation with faculty/staff allowing them a space to, without consequence, pushback and negotiate expectations.

• Silence should not be used as a threat tactic... and is a statement of its own.

• View student activism as embraceable feedback.

(Stewart et al., 2020)
BK’s Tips for Engaging Student Activists

WE GOT THIS!
Respect & Validation of Experiences

One of the most productive things we can do as professional educators is offering our students a listening ear. The student as an individual, and the institution benefits when we affirm students’ experiences.

It does not require that an educator be like-identifying in order to affirm a student.

Each student and what they share should be treated with the utmost care and consideration. Once we decide to favor one issue over another, we have failed.
Prepare Them in a Safe Environment

One of the most productive things we can do as professional educators is providing our students the skills, knowledge, and experience they need in the discovery of themselves and their passions/interests.

Activism is mentally and physically taxing – and in many cases, dangerous.

Students should expect and be encouraged to learn inside the classroom and in co-curricular spaces what they need to know in the real world, so they’re prepared.
Transparency

One of the most productive things we can do as professional educators is to be real with our students.

Students understand our hands might be tied as employees. They also respect if you say you don’t know enough on a subject to speak on it quite yet (won’t work for forever though).

They appreciate your honesty upfront than deciding to pretend by leading them to failure, frustration, and wasted time.
“Let’s Chop It Up” - Group Discussion

I invite you to share your own stories involving student activism, so that we might learn from each other.

It can be an experience you had as a student, or it can be as a professional working with students.
“Let’s Chop It Up”

Option 1:
During your time as a student, did you participate in any activism events? Were you an organizer or a supporter?

• What were the responses from the act?
• How did participating make you feel?

Option 2:
As a professional who gets to work with students, what have you witnessed as it pertains to student activism?

• What was your proximity to said activism? Did they seek you out for support?
• Since act(s) occurred, how have you engaged with students?
References


Thank you for participating!

Please complete the workshop survey.