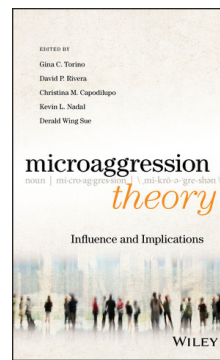


# The Science of Microaggressions

Block C Summer 2022



“Microaggressions are derogatory slights or insults directed at a target person or persons who are members of an oppressed group” (p. 3).

## The Course Guide & Her Teaching Approach

I, Peony Fhagen, work in the Office of the Dean of Faculty and am part of the campus-wide 3-person ADEI (antiracism, diversity, equity, and inclusion) leadership team.

I have several position titles: Senior Associate Dean for Faculty Equity & Inclusion, Director of the Crown Faculty Center, and Director of the Bridge Scholars Program. I am also an associate professor of psychology.

I am a Nigrescence theory scholar and started doing research on racial identity development when I was an undergraduate student at Wellesley College in Massachusetts.

I use equitable teaching practices to foster a dynamic learning environment. So, what does that mean for you? It means your perspectives and ideas about how your experience should go in this course are incorporated throughout the 3 weeks we will be learning in community together.

My goals, as your course guide, are the following:

- Promote an inclusive and equitable learning environment.
- Decenter myself and center students
- Provide regular opportunities to engage with you outside of class meeting times
- Be flexible so that we can pivot and change the intended agenda for a class meeting as necessary to meet learning needs
- Facilitate engaging dialogues and discussions
- Effectively manage tensions that may arise
- Be mindful of comfort and discomfort levels

## REQUIRED TEXT

Torino, G. C., Rivera, D. P., Capodilupo, C. M., Nadal, K. L., & Sue, D. W. (Eds.). 2019). *Microaggression theory: influence and implications*. Wiley.

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

Microaggression is a psychological concept that was introduced by Black psychiatrist Chester Pierce in the 1970s to describe the everyday put downs and insults his African American clients described to him. In 2007, Derald Wing Sue, an Asian American psychologist, reintroduced the concept to the social sciences and started a program of research on the concept that includes a theoretical taxonomy, how microaggressions manifest, and how they impact the lives of people from marginalized and majoritized social groups. Research has proliferated on the topic and so have critiques of the concept and the research. We will explore this research, consider the critiques, and discuss implications for policies and educational programs. Students will have the opportunity to study, in more depth, an aspect of microaggression research and develop either a research study proposal or an educational program proposal.



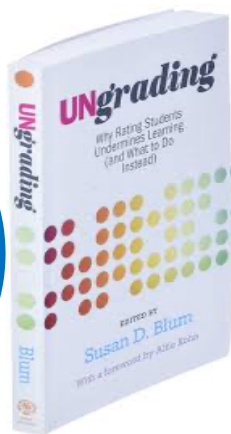
## What Are Microaggressions?



[Microaggression Tumblr Blog Link](#)

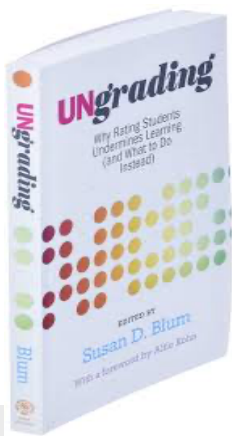
## Ungrading & Learning in the Course

*"There is no room for student agency to breathe in a system of incessant grading, ranking, and scoring" (p. 27).*



I have come to believe, based on research, that grading is bad for the health of learning. Therefore, we will use ungrading in this course. This approach to assessment is designed to take the focus away from grades and put it where it belongs--on learning. You will receive written feedback on assignments only --no letter grades or points. This feedback is designed to support your learning and growth in the course. In addition, you should regularly self-assess your own learning and see me for support if you need it.

At the end of the course, you will submit a course process letter (see orange box on this page), which is a summary of how you believe your learning evolved over the block based on the goals you set for yourself at the beginning of the course. In addition, because letter grades do have to be submitted even if you choose to take the class pass/fail, in your course process letter you will include the letter grade that you think best represents your work in the course and why. The grade you give yourself will be honored under most circumstances.



*"When . . . university teachers protest that it is unrealistic to get rid of grades because students wouldn't do the reading or even show up without them, these teachers are, on one level, offering evidence about the harm grades have already done. . . Why in the world would we then compound the damage by continuing to employ what we know crushes intrinsic motivation?" (p. xvii).*

**READY**   
college. career. life. Self-Advocacy

Initiative & Self-Direction

Personal Responsibility & Self-Management

## PROCESS LETTER GUIDELINES

(DUE 3<sup>RD</sup> FRIDAY)

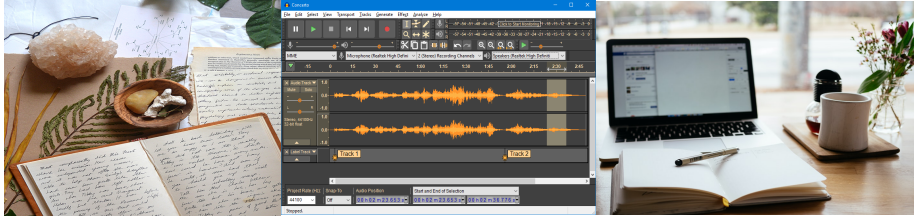
This letter is a summary of how your learning evolved over the block based on the goals you set for yourself. Your process letter should address the following:

- Why were you initially interested in taking the course?
- What past courses or experiences prepared you for this course?
- How does this course fit into your overall CC education?
- Identify skills or knowledge you gained this block and how that can be applied to other courses, your major, your future career, etc.
- Discuss one or two key questions that this course helped you answer.
- Of the topics related to microaggressions covered in this course, which were particularly interesting to you and why?
- Were there some topics that did not hold your interest? If yes, which ones and why?
- What level of engagement and work in this course do you believe is sufficient to earn the letter grade "A"?
- For this course, what is the difference between an A, A-, B+, B, B-, C+, C, C-, D+, D, or D-? What would constitute an F in this course?

When you determine your course grade, think about how you prioritized course work (i.e., class attendance, course journal assignment, participation in class activities and discussions, and course project) based on your course goals.

## Course Journal Assignment

(Due First & Second Fridays of the Block after Class)



This assignment is designed to help you keep up with the readings, check your understanding, and engage in class discussions and activities. It involves tracking your own reactions, thoughts, comments, confusions, and questions and expressing them in your course journal in any format that works for you.

You can write a short essay, you can write a short story, you can write a poem, you can write “notes” with bullet points, you can draw pictures, you can make a comic strip, you can write and record a song, you can record and/or video yourself addressing the question prompt, you can video a short skit, interview, etc.

To guide your journaling, I provide question prompts (see course schedule at the end of this newsletter). Please complete each journal entry before coming to class and bring it to class so you have it to refer to during class discussions and dialogues. You are welcome to continue editing, revising, altering your journal entry throughout class.

I will collect your course journal the first and second Fridays of the block and provide feedback letters by the second and third Tuesdays. While I do not collect your journals for the third week, I still provide journal prompts for the third Monday and Tuesday. I keep a course journal for the entire 3 weeks.

Journal entries for each week should include:

- A label for each entry (e.g., Wk1 Monday, Wk1 Tuesday, etc.)
- Written headings or verbal instruction to delineate journaling done before class and new ideas, perspectives, and/or questions developed during class (e.g., heading labeled “Ideas from class”)

### Submission Instructions

Course Canvas site → Assignments → Week 1(or 2) Journal → Upload

## CLASS PARTICIPATION GUIDELINES

1. Be brave. Get comfortable with taking risks and failing sometimes.
2. Step back if you tend to contribute much, and step up if you tend to do a lot of listening
3. Critique or challenge the idea not the person
4. Be mindful that the burden and gift of experiences related to oppression vary widely among us. Just because you never experienced certain situations does not mean they do not happen. Just because you experience certain situations often does not mean everyone is aware of them.
5. Give grace since we all come to talking about bias, stereotypes, oppression, prejudice, and social identity with different comfort levels, skills, awareness, and knowledge. Mistakes will be made, and someone is likely to say something that is offensive or ignorant. We will work through this situation together as a class.
6. Accept feedback as the gift that it is. Be open and not defensive.

### Questions of the Day

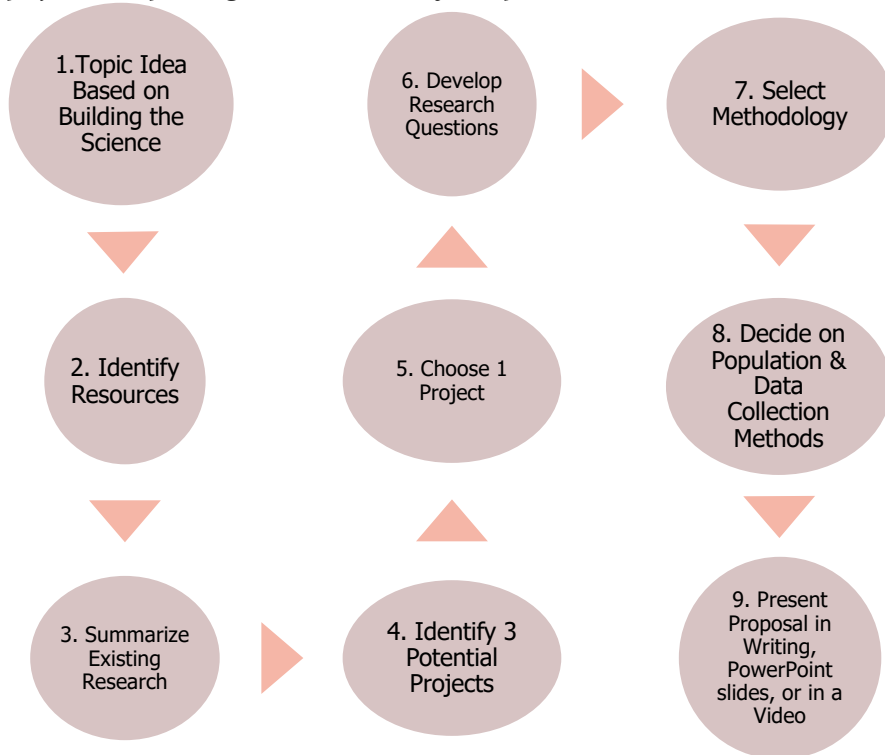
Please come to class with one or two topic-relevant thought questions to pose to the class each day. These will be discussed, along with the journal question prompts.

**READY** ↓

college. career. life. Communication Skills, Risk Taking  
Learn Independently, Work ethic—dependable & reliable  
Global and Cultural Awareness, Personal Awareness

## Steps to Complete Course Project Assignment

### Steps for Completing Research Study Proposal



### Steps for Completing Educational Program Proposal



## COURSE PROJECT ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTION

Doing science, producing research, and/or using research to create educational programs/therapeutic interventions is how social scientists help us understand human behavior and social systems, help us build awareness, knowledge, and skills, and help us cope with and heal from oppressive experiences.

Throughout this course we will consider the research findings of many scientific studies which are summarized in the chapters of your textbook. We will also consider some of the most recent research published on the topic in journal articles.

A plethora of future directions for research on this topic are suggested in the readings. I am sure you will come up with more in class. Equally as robust in the readings are ideas for educational programs to expand awareness and understanding and to promote new skills and ways of behaving interpersonally that affirm rather than oppress others.

For this assignment, you will decide whether you want to create a research study proposal or an educational program proposal. I have broken this assignment into 9 steps (see diagrams on to the left of this box) to make the work more manageable. In the course schedule, I indicate my suggestions for when these steps should be completed. You will also see on the course schedule that you will have class time in the third week to work on this assignment.

**DUE THIRD THURSDAY**

*Submission Instructions*

Course Canvas to Assignments to Course Project and Upload

**READY** ↓

college. career. life. Critical Thinking & Problem Solving

Creativity & Innovation

Inquiry & Analysis

Time Management, Work ethic—dependable & reliable



## Week 1: Defining Microaggressions

### Monday

*Syllabus Review, Doing Science, Getting Acquainted*

### Tuesday

*Operationally Defining Microaggressions*

Readings: Chapters 1 and 3

Journal Question Prompts:

- What piece of information in the FAQs of chapter 1 are you skeptical about and why?
- Do you agree or disagree that counterstories of microaggressions and microaffirmations help us understand racism? Why or why not?

### Wednesday

*Relating microaggressions to other concepts*

Readings: Chapters 2 and 4

Journal Question Prompts:

- What is aversive racism and how does it relate to microaggressions? Provide an example, either real or fictitious, that illustrates the relationship between these concepts.
- According to the authors of chapter 4, how do we make the invisible visible in term of everyday bias and oppression?

### Thursday

*The Psychological Impact of Microaggressions Part 1*

Readings: Chapters 5 & 6

Journal Question Prompts:

- Read the first paragraph of chapter 5 and then answer the following question, if you were Lily's therapist, how would you have responded to her concerns? Now read the remainder of the chapter, would your response have changed based on the information presented? Why or why not?
- On pp. 45-96 of chapter 6, the authors present 3 client cases. Choose one to discuss in terms of how you would work with them as their therapist.

### Friday (Course Journal Due by 5pm)

*The Psychological Impact of Microaggressions Part 2*

Readings: Chapters 8 & 9

Journal Question Prompts:

- Do you think it is helpful, conceptually, to delineate between subtle and blatant microaggressions as the authors did in chapter 8? Why or why not?
- Using the 2 scenarios in chapter 9, think of similar scenarios you have experienced or witnessed. Choose one of the scenarios you thought of and deconstruct it in terms of the psychological costs of microaggressions framework described in the chapter.

## COURSE GOALS TO CONSIDER

### Course Specific Goals

- To explain and evaluate current theoretical and empirical work on the concept of microaggressions.
- To explain and evaluate controversies and critiques about the concept of and research on microaggressions.
- To self-reflect on experiences with microaggressions to augment critical consciousness about individual, interpersonal, and systems of oppression.
- To use existing research to develop a course project that would advance the science of microaggressions in the form of a research project proposal or educational program proposal.

### Equity & Power Course (US) Curricular Goals

- Students will gain an understanding of social, political, cultural, epistemological, and/or economic forces that have produced and/or now sustain multiple forms of inequalities and their intersections.
- Students will identify, analyze, and evaluate the ways in which individuals and groups have unequal experiences, social positions, opportunities, or outcomes based on the intersections of race, indigeneity, caste or class, citizenship, gender, gender identity, sexuality, size, (dis) ability, religious practices, belief systems, or other dimensions of difference
- Students will seek to identify and challenge their implicit biases and assumptions while learning to participate respectfully and productively in potentially uncomfortable discussions about equity and power and their position in relationship to others

## Week 2: Microaggressions in Context

### Monday

#### *Education Settings and Microaggressions*

Readings: Chapters 7 & 18

Journal Question Prompts:

- In chapter 7, the concepts of racial battle fatigue, stereotype threat, and imposter phenomenon are discussed. How do the authors explain the relationship between the microaggression concept and these 3 other concepts?
- Whether currently at CC, and/or in K-12 schools, what has been your experience with microaggressions in education settings?

### Tuesday

#### *Workplace Environments and Microaggressions*

Readings: Chapters 11 & 16

Journal Question Prompts:

- In what ways are microaggressions in the workplace and education settings similar and in what ways are they different?
- Of the interventions discussed in chapter 16, which do you think have the most promise in being effective and why?

### Wednesday

#### *Health Care and Microaggressions*

Readings: Chapters 11 & 2 (revisited)

Journal Question Prompts:

- If you were to conduct a research study on microaggressions in health care, what population would you focus on and what aspect of the topic would you study and why?
- What solution(s) would you propose to help close the health disparities gap between majoritized and minoritized peoples in the United States?

### Thursday

#### *On-line & Environmental Microaggressions*

Readings: Chapters 12 & 13

Journal Question Prompt:

- We have discussed the problem with including microassaults as a taxonomic category in the microaggression framework. How do the authors of chapter 12 resolve the problem in their model of online racism? From your perspective, does it work?
- Using the authors' analysis of mascots as a template, choose another societally embedded visual entity to consider using microaggression theory.

### Friday (Course Journal Due by 5pm)

#### *Activism and Microaggressions*

Readings: Chapters 14 & 15

Journal Question Prompts:

- TBD
- Course Project Prep: Research Project Proposal or Educational Program Proposal? Why?

## COURSE GOALS TO CONSIDER CONT'D

### *Equity & Power Course (US)*

#### *Learning Goals*

- Explain how systems of power (such as white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, ableism, classism, capitalism, or colonialism) produce forms of inequality related to race, gender, sexuality, religion, ability, class, or nation, etc.
- Describe how a system of power reproduces inequalities over time
- Describe how a system of power has been critiqued by people who have been disempowered or discriminated against due to race, gender, sexuality, religion, ability, class, or nation, etc.
- Explain how the production of knowledge is mediated by power, noting how the positionalities of knowledge producers (such as scholars, writers, artists, government officials, scientists, or activists) inform their perspectives
- Describe their own positionality in relation to one or more systems of power that establish a form of inequality or injustice.

### *Societies & Human Behavior Curricular & Learning Goals*

- Introduce students to how to study societies and cultures
- Critically discuss the nexus of social structures, individual behavior, and cultural contexts
- Encourage reflection on the study of societies and/or human behavior
- Describe one or more approaches to studying societies and culture
- Explain the value of studying societies and/or human behavior
- Describe how social structures, cultural contexts, and individual agents intersect with each other

## Week 3: Controversies, Critiques, & Course Project

### Monday

Topic: *Research Evidence Critiques*

Reading: Lilienfeld, S.O. (2017). Microaggressions: strong claims, inadequate evidence. *Perspectives on psychological science*, 12(1), 138-169.

Journal Question Prompts:

- Have you found Lilienfeld's critiques of the science of microaggressions inspirational for your project proposal? If so, which critiques and how? If not, why not?
- Course Project Prep: Complete Steps 1 & 2

### Tuesday

Topic: *Microaggressions Impede Freedom of Speech?*

Readings: Cantu, E., & Jussim, L. (2021). Microaggressions, questionable science, and free speech. *Texas Review of Law & Politics*, 26(1), pp. 217-267.

Journal Question Prompts:

- Based on your understanding of the theory of microaggressions, do you agree or disagree with the authors' conclusion that the concept has "socially caustic and legally pernicious effects"? Why?
- Course Project Prep: Complete Steps 3 & 4

### Wednesday

Work Day: Course Project: Complete Steps 5, 6, & 7

Office Hours: 9-12noon

### Thursday (Course Project Due)

Work Day: Course Project: Complete Steps 8 & 9

Office Hours: 9-12noon

### Friday

(1:1 Meetings, Bring Draft Hardcopy of Process Letter, Final Process Letter Due Electronically by Midnight)

## YOUR COURSE GOALS

In this space, jot down the course goals you will be working on throughout this Block.

Phone: 719-389-6087

Office: Armstrong 206 (Office of the Dean of Faculty Suite)

Office Hours: First and Second Week, Monday – Friday, 1-2pm or by appointment

Third week, Monday & Tuesday regular office hours, Wednesday & Thursday, 9-12noon

Zoom Option: Office Hours can be in-person or over zoom

Zoom Link: <https://coloradocollege.zoom.us/j/3746732109>