

ual:

Decolonising reading lists



Why use this tool?

The reading list is a familiar way of directing students' reading. Although these lists are not equated to 'learning', they often offer ideas and language that shape how course discourse is created, forming perceptions of the types of knowledge that are valued or given most prominence. Most reading lists included in course handbooks and unit guides reflect white male western-centric perspectives (Still Waiting Discussion Group, 2017).

Decolonising reading lists is an intrinsic part of the work of decolonising the curriculum and enables all students to explore and reference different cultural histories and narratives in their work. This can also increase a sense of belonging within the university and so ultimately contribute to the work of closing awarding gaps.

As libraries prioritise the purchase of resources from reading lists, more diverse reading lists will result in more diverse library collections overall.

How to use this tool

Decolonisation remains a complex and contested concept that can also lead to some challenging conversations. This guide suggests some practical steps for you to start that conversation.

This is an area where students are very invested. The UAL So White campaign (Arts SU, 2016) called for 'every UAL course's content and curriculum to be reviewed and for all reading lists... to better represent the current UAL student body'. The function and content of the reading list is under discussion, and new models of co-created reading lists are emerging across UAL.

This resource is designed to help you decolonise your reading lists as a course team, with support from librarians and in collaboration with students. It can be used by course teams to examine and reflect on their reading lists and provides some practical approaches to evaluating and sourcing alternative texts, to make sure that texts support a plurality of narratives.

Step 1: Engage with the library support offer

Each course has an Academic Support Librarian who works with the course team and students. They provide introductions to the library, run workshops on finding and managing information, and ensure that resources are purchased which support the course – both from the reading list and by selecting resources more generally.

Find out who your course Academic Support Librarian is from your course Moodle site or check on <http://arts.ac.libguides.com/yourlibrarian> and invite them to take part in reading list reviews and decolonisation activities.

Finding resources

The library search page is the best starting place for finding resources
<https://libsearch.arts.ac.uk/>

This page links to:

- The Library Subject Guides: introductions to key resources, by subject
- The library catalogue for finding books, e-books, journals, films and DVDs
- Articles Plus: for finding articles

Access to a wide variety of literature is key to contextualising your art making and that of others throughout history

– NSS CSM BA (Hons) Fine Art

Step 2: Question your reading list

These questions can help structure a discussion on the reading list:

- What are the dominant voices and narratives in your areas of study?
- What voices and narratives are excluded, and how can they be identified?
- Are the texts Western-centric, or Euro-centric?
- Are bodies of knowledge distorted? Can discourse affect the way that we look at groups of people?
- Who is the author of the work? Are the majority of the authors the same gender and ethnicity?
- What is the relevance of the author's identity in this context?
- Who is talking about whose experience and/or culture?
- What is the place of publication and geographic coverage of the text?
- What is the language of the text? Is it a translation or in its original language?
- What kinds of sources do we perceive to be of most academic value and why?

Disciplinary differences

Decolonising texts may seem easier in some disciplines than others, depending on the disciplinary traditions, and the nature of the established canon. Texts that discuss this difficulty and set out ambitions for a decolonised approach are valuable for opening up discussion (for example in the field of design – <https://www.decolonisingdesign.com/>).

It can also be helpful to acknowledge the geographical and historical context of knowledge production, and this is a useful starting point for discussion.

Auditing a reading list is challenging but in a fun and growth-filled way

– LCC Liberate the Curriculum (2019)

Step 3: Find the marginalised voice

Mainstream publishing tends to favour those established within the academy, and we know that some people are underrepresented, particularly staff of colour (El Kadi, 2019). This is slowly changing and it is important to stay abreast of existing and new scholarship by academics of colour.

Shades of Noir's 'Terms of Reference' journals include extended key terms, resources and reading lists to support the democratisation of curricula which centres marginal communities <http://shadesofnoir.org.uk/terms-of-reference-journals/>, and can be incorporated into reading lists. Many students also prefer accessing information from a variety of media sources, which are often more inclusive of emerging voices. The library has the following resources to support you in diversifying the format of materials on your reading lists:

- Journals and magazines: the library has many international titles
- Films: DVDs are available in the library, and via Kanopy for streaming media (<https://arts.kanopy.com/>)
- TV and Radio Content: via Box of Broadcasts (<https://learningonscreen.ac.uk/ondemand/>)
- Blogs, web sites, open resources
- YouTube/TedTalks

You can also consider including references to special collections and archives. Although historical archives may be predominantly white there are archival collections that offer a rich source of alternative material in certain areas. Certain disciplines may also benefit from the zine collections such as at LCC, CSM and LCF where subcultures and alternative non-traditional viewpoints are often surfaced and articulated.

The Decolonising the Arts Curriculum Zine 1 and 2 also feature resources which can be used to enhance reading lists.

Step 4: Co-create interventions with students

Sector research on closing awarding gaps via curriculum development states that 'it is vital that any reviews are undertaken in partnership with students' (NUS and Universities UK, 2019, pp 47-8). There is a host of additional literature you can access on student partnership working and curriculum co-development. Here are some points for consideration:

- Reflect on what training, preparation and guidance students need to effectively participate in curriculum decolonisation
- Agree how to do this, be that alone, with librarians or with academics
- Think about what will incentivise students, in particular those who are disengaging as a result of their marginalised identities, to participate in curriculum liberation work. Can you offer an award?
- Reflect on what opportunities exist to embed reading list review and decolonisation into the assessed curriculum. Consider whether this can be aligned to learning outcomes and assessment criteria

Activity: Staff-Student discussion on the disciplinary canon, areas of exclusion, and alternative narratives.

Activity: Ask students to critique the reading list and suggest new content from their own research and experience.

I think the exercise has been valuable in identifying gaps in the reading list and highlighting regions of the world we ought to be hearing from
— LCC Liberate the Curriculum (2019)

List of resources

Arts SU (2016) *UAL So White: What Next?* Available at: <https://ualsowhite.tumblr.com/>

Crilly, J. (2019) 'Decolonising the library: a theoretical exploration'. In: *Spark Journal*, 4(1). Available at: <https://sparkjournal.arts.ac.uk/index.php/spark/article/view/123/190>

El Kadi, T.H. (2019) *How diverse is your reading list? (Probably not very...)*. Available at: <https://fairplaygame.org/resources/>

Global Social Thinkers website, includes shared reading lists <https://globalsocialtheory.org/resources/>

NUS and Universities UK. (2019) *Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Student Attainment at UK Universities: #closingthegap*.

Shades of Noir ToR: <https://shadesofnoir.org.uk/terms-of-reference-journals/>

Still Waiting Discussion Group (2017) *Overview*. Available at: <https://hernoise.org/interactions/still-waiting-discussion-group/overview/>

Whiles, V. (2019) Decolonising the canon. *Art Monthly*, pp 6-9.

Academic Enhancement Model Toolbox

Decolonising Reading Lists is one of a series of worksheets brought together by the Academic Enhancement Model (AEM) team, part of the UAL Teaching, Learning and Employability Exchange.

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To download digital versions of this series of tools: Search for 'AEM' on www.canvas.arts.ac.uk For further support and tools on attainment, go to www.arts.ac.uk/about-ual/teaching-and-learning-exchange

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