

August 12, 2030

## **Memorandum**

**To:** All TJ freshman faculty

**From:** Lisa Turtle, faculty liaison for decolonization in the curriculum (turtle@fcps.tjhsst.edu)

**Re:** Incorporation of decolonial elements into course content

Dear colleagues:

Attached is the current working draft of the proposed syllabus for IBET courses in the coming school year. The syllabus working group has referred to methods and theory of decolonization and education for sustainable development, as well as guidelines for freshmen learning goals for Fairfax County Public Schools. This draft syllabus should present a framework for IBET teachers to help guide students' progress throughout the school year.

We are all proud to work with the excellent students at TJ, and we understand the uncertainty many of you feel about taking up this new focus for our curriculum. But we are excited to begin the process of decolonizing what we teach—and how we teach—and look forward to sharing this journey with you.

We welcome all comments and feedback, and are particularly interested in suggestions related to projects, readings, and guest speakers. Please direct all feedback to Lisa Turtle, the faculty liaison for this work.

We plan to have a final draft of the syllabus available August 27, the week before school begins.

## Syllabus for IBET courses

2030-2031 school year

Draft 0.12 August 12, 2030

### Main learning goals:

- Students will learn critical thinking skills, including how to evaluate statements presented as facts, use sources, and understand point of view and inherent bias
- Students will learn the practice of “decentering”
- Students will gain an understanding of the diversity of knowledges, beyond Western scientific and historical perspectives, and with particular emphasis on local Native American tribal knowledges.
- [Note: We are still in talks with Fairfax County about the extent to which we can go curriculum-free near the end of the year and let students design their own learning plans. Key here will be developing assessment tools that match county metrics.]

### Suggested curricular foci:

#### First quarter (September-October)

##### 1st Unit: Rules of the road (in all courses)

- How do we learn from one another? What are our responsibilities to each other? At the beginning of their time at TJ, students will create a code of conduct for themselves, their parents, teachers, administrators and staff to follow in their four years at the school.
- Questions to address: class times, breaks, grades, homework loads, discipline...and more!
- Codes of conduct will be drafted in every English classroom, and collated at a freshmen assembly; goal is ratification by early/mid-October
- To scaffold this discussion, students will explore sociological writings on educational systems and how they have been central to creating and reinforcing inequalities in the US and elsewhere (cf, Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*; Paolo Friere, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*; Pierre Bourdieu; Meira Levinson, *No Citizen Left Behind*).

##### 2nd unit: Imagining the near future (key text: Octavia Butler’s *Parable of the Sower*)

- In Biology, learn the concept of traditional ecological knowledge, how to identify local edibles, understand planting seasons, and make acorn bread
- In English, discuss the novel and the genre of speculative fiction, especially Afrofuturism; write short speculative texts
- In TEC, learn about the climate crisis and interconnected ecological crises as well as current and proposed technological solutions; in groups, master the mechanics of one of the following renewable energy technologies (solar water, photovoltaic, wind, hydroelectricity) and build a working prototype

#### Second quarter (November-December)

##### 3rd Unit: Living with relations

- In Biology, conduct individual research on plant or animal species of student's choosing. What characteristics make this species important to its ecosystem? How does it interact with its surroundings, including with humans? What impact have humans had on this species?

- In English, discuss the concept of relationships between humans and animal/plant relations. What does it mean to live in a web of relations? What responsibilities does that create? How does that de-center humans in the ecosystem? Students will read short stories by indigenous authors.
  - Suggested final project: students write a short story as a plant or animal.
  - At least one week on concept of implicit bias; students AND INSTRUCTORS should reflect on their implicit bias(es) and develop strategies to overcome these (including anti-racist concepts to anchor discussion, e.g., what it means to be racist)
- In TEC, learn ecosystem mapping strategies and tools. Create maps for the school and its surrounding environs. Perhaps also learn supply chain analysis to look at the natural and human materials and relationships that go into making modern electronics.

#### **4th Unit: Seven Generations - Indigenous Perspectives on the Past and the Future**

- In Biology: At least one guest speaker from indigenous community to deepen understanding of traditional ecological knowledge from 1st unit and connect it to indigenous perspectives more broadly; focus on indigenous ecological practices and their effects on biological diversity and ecosystem health
- In English: Moving beyond settler colonialism -- Throughout the unit, students should read excerpts from U.S. history textbooks from the past 100 years used in Fairfax County, together with *An indigenous peoples' history of the United States*, Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz
  - Key question: How do indigenous perspectives frame the past, the present, and the future differently from White narratives?
- In TEC: Students will create digital archives of the land where they live and where TJ sits in accordance with the indigenous tribes to whom these lands belong.

### **Third quarter (January-March)**

#### **5th Unit: Making change**

- In Biology: critical ecosystem change; in groups, students should explore how one of several key ecosystem changes (e.g., extinction of keystone species; climate change; land-use change) affects inhabitants of that ecosystem as well as impacts beyond
- In English: discussion of types of change, factors that lead to change, and how humans (as individuals, in groups, and within institutions) can affect change; suggested readings *Frankenstein*, *The Lathe of Heaven*
- In TEC: Throughout the unit, follow the history of the internal combustion engine as a solution to the problem of deforestation, and the new problems it created
  - Key questions: Is change good? How can we know? Who decides? It may be helpful to refer back to *Parable of the Sower* in the 2nd unit

#### **6th Unit: Lifelong learning**

- In Biology: fundamentals of biological observation; students learn how to keep observation notebooks and will select local biological topic of interest to observe and conduct research on

- In English: students read and debate excerpts from a book such as *The new lifetime reading plan*; each student should create personal reading principles, as well as clear reading goals and a plan for the rest of the year
  - Key questions: What do I not know? Where can I go to find out more?
- In TEC, learn self-pedagogical methods and conduct independent research on current global crises to present at the end of the unit

**Fourth quarter (March-June)**

- By the fourth quarter, it is hoped that students will co-design units and lessons with teachers. Teachers may look over the year's learning goals to determine what focus to provide here. Ideally, some level of effort will be devoted to research, with an equivalent effort toward projects with the community and related to students' own interests.
- Students will work with teachers to evaluate quarters one-three

For questions, please contact:

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