

Implicit Bias in “Objective” Course Content:  
questioning “neutrality” in online technical writing courses.

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# What is technical writing?

- “It is a form of communication that is very direct and doesn't leave anything up for interpretation.”
- “Detailed, analytical, and concise.”
- “Straight to the point.”
- “Dry but precise.”
- “A concise, clear, and accurate communication of ideas without bias.”

# What is technical writing?

- “Informs on an objective level, rather than subjective.”
- “Successful transfer of knowledge.”
- “Factual, objective pieces of writing.”
- “Straight to the point and informative.”
- “Based on fact rather than opinion.”

But actually ...

“The field of technical and professional communication (TPC) is increasingly critiqued for pretending and/or believing that communication is neutral and objective (Jones, 2016; Jones & Williams, 2018; Mckoy et al., 2020). As social-justice-driven scholars in the field point out, TPC is never neutral or objective and, in fact, is frequently used to maintain and build structures of oppression”

(Frost, Gonzales, Moeller, Patterson, & Shelton, 2021).

# Objectives

- Become familiar with the terms **social justice** and **implicit bias** in communication practices
- Understand how visual and written language produces bias
- Critically assess technical documents for social justice and implicit bias
- Evaluate readability and accessibility of technical documents for intended users
- Consider how technical documents create audiences and configure inclusivity or exclusivity

# Activities

- Small-group online discussions sharing witnessing and experiencing implicit bias
- Implicit Association Tests (IAPs) and discussion
- Discussions on resources and reading materials

## Resources and Reading Materials

- “Recognizing Microaggressions” chart (Sue, 2010, see handout)
- “Genre as Social Action” (Miller, 1984)
- “The Technical Communicator as Advocate” (Jones, 2016)
- “Reimagining the Boundaries of Health and Medical Discourse in Technical Communication” (Frost et al., 2021).
- [We all have implicit biases. So what can we do about it?](#) (Ted Talk, Dushaw Hockett, 2017)
- [How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Discussing Race](#) (Ted Talk, Jay Smooth, 2011)

# Guest Speaker

Dr. Paula Houston, Chief Equity Officer at the University of Washington School of Medicine.

## "Social Identities, Privilege, and Intersections"



Paula L. Houston, Chief Equity Officer at the University of Washington Office of Healthcare Equity and Associate Vice President for Medical Affairs, will be giving a virtual interactive presentation *Social Identities, Privilege and Intersection*. Her presentation will address implicit bias and inequity in technical, professional, and medical writing and communication, and she will provide strategies for identifying and challenging implicit bias in a variety of workplace documents and settings. Her interactive presentation (Zoom link below) will be followed by Q & A.

Dr. Houston has a B.S. from Syracuse University, a Master's degree in Health Administration from the University of Washington and a Doctorate in Educational Leadership from Seattle University.

Dr. Houston is an active community leader and serves on several non-profit boards and a City of Seattle Commission. Additionally, she is an eleven-time national and six-time world champion powerlifter and was inducted into the USA Powerlifting Hall of Fame in 2012.

Thursday, March 25, from 2:00-3:30 pm  
Join Zoom Meeting: <https://uwlax-edu.zoom.us/j/84886880735>





# Assignments

- Technical Writing, Genre, and Social Justice Mini-Assignment
- Genre Exploration Project

# Final Project

Create an infographic that describes Dr. Houston's presentation and persuades a designated audience to participate in implicit bias training.

## Advancing Healthcare Equity and Health Justice

Whether we talk about COVID-19, racism, classism and class, or about climate change, we know that we are living in a time of crisis. It is not just the crisis of the pandemic, but the crisis of the climate, the crisis of the economy, and the crisis of the environment.

Why Equity? The health of our people is directly related to the health of our planet. We cannot have one without the other. We need to address both.

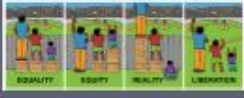
Key Concepts:

- Healthcare equity means that everyone has the opportunity to be as healthy as possible.
- Health justice means that everyone has the power to shape their own health and the health of their community.
- Healthcare equity and health justice are interconnected and cannot be achieved without the other.
- Healthcare equity and health justice are not just about access to care, but also about the quality of care and the experience of care.
- Healthcare equity and health justice are not just about individuals, but also about communities and populations.
- Healthcare equity and health justice are not just about the present, but also about the future.
- Healthcare equity and health justice are not just about the United States, but also about the world.

Author: Paula A. Braveman

## Diversity Training

### Racial prejudices and stereotypes are a major problem in our society leading to social injustices



**The basic facts:**

- We cannot remove any aspect of our identity.
- Black people are getting in trouble for doing non-problematic activities like baby-sitting or walking in a park.
- Black people are also being harassed simply because of their race.
- Black people, as well as other minorities, must navigate through the complexity more frequently than white people.
- Systemic racism is a major issue as institutions are "burying the bodies".
- The ones carrying the burden, want they do not even see it as an issue or do not know what they are doing.

**note:**

Every person in America needs to learn, discuss, and fix their explicit and implicit biases. Whether you agree or not, you have something to work on to fix this issue.

To learn more information:

Click Here to watch the training: [Anti-Bias Training: A Key to Reducing Bias in the Workplace](#)



## SOCIAL IDENTITIES, PRIVILEGE, & INTERSECTION

DR. PAULA HOUSTON

Open discussion, effective education, and training on social justice, anti-racism, and implicit bias in the workplace

05.16.2021 | 1-3 PM  
TEAMS VIRTUAL PRESENTATION

ACCESSIBILITY OPTIONS: YES  
EMAIL LINK TO FOLLOW

### IMPLICIT BIAS

It is an automatic and unconscious attribution of particular qualities to a member of a certain social group such as race, gender, or age, which we are not aware of because we have internalized them. WE ALL HAVE THEM.

Examples include:  
Gender bias,  
Racial bias,  
Age bias and  
other "isms."

### MORE ABOUT IMPLICIT BIAS

As humans we have the distinct ability to identify (and react to) change (whether it be the entrance we hold, the more we walk, dance, and listen something the more they are not to notice, but we have learned over time).

### MICROAGGRESSIONS

The small and everyday slights, insults, and snubs that are often subtle, but they are not always intentional. They are the small, everyday slights, insults, and snubs that are often subtle, but they are not always intentional.

Everyday Example: I don't see you, all these matter, and I love your hair!

There are 3 types of Microaggressions

- Micro-assault:** Just the conventional racism where an individual uses explicit or derogatory actions that are harmful to a group.
- Micro-insult:** Insultive communication that demeans a person's identity group.
- Micro-invalidation:** Invalidating communication that dismisses the feelings or experiences of a person of color.

### INTERSECTIONALITY

It is a framework for conceptualizing a person, a group of people, or a social problem as affected by a number of characteristics and disadvantages.

Coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, the intersectional theory of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender, reported as creating the overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination and disadvantage.

## FURTHERING Social Justice

Whether benefiting or exploiting, we are subject to racism and sexism in our everyday lives. It is up to us to determine what we do with our lives. By consistently working toward a more inclusive and diverse world, we can combat racism, sexism, homophobia, and other hardships that may be faced by our community.

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### WHAT SHOULD I BE AWARE OF?

- Implicit bias is an unconscious attribution of particular qualities to a member of a certain social group.
- Explicit bias is the awareness of an evaluation of a group and behaving to be correct.
- Discrimination is the unfair treatment of a person based on race, ethnicity, or perceived notions of other individuals within their social group.

### OBSERVE BEHAVIOR

Microaggressions can be divided into 3 categories: Micro-assaults, Micro-insults, and Micro-invalidation. Micro-assaults are the most obvious and most harmful, targeting a person's race, gender, or sexual orientation. Micro-insults are the most subtle and most harmful, targeting a person's intelligence, ability, or competence. Micro-invalidation is the most insidious and most harmful, targeting a person's identity and experience.

### DISRUPT BEHAVIOR

Microaggressions can be disrupted by using the following strategies: 1. Interrupt the microaggression. 2. Call out the microaggression. 3. Educate the perpetrator. 4. Support the victim. 5. Create a safe space for discussion. 6. Encourage self-reflection. 7. Promote allyship. 8. Foster a culture of respect and inclusion.

### MODERN CHALLENGES

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the health care system's racial disparities, with people of color being less likely to receive care and more likely to die. This has led to a renewed focus on addressing these disparities and promoting health equity.

Author: Paula A. Braveman

Online Resources: <https://www.npr.org/2020/04/14/828944200/coronavirus-race-ethnicity>

# Feedback from Students

“I appreciated learning about social justice topics. I learned more about how to ensure I am addressing my audience ethically and inclusively in writing.”

“This project showed me how significant the role of technical communicator is.”

“This helped me to develop a broader, more open perspective to approaching a community.”

“I recognized that I must consider the effects of my writing and how my writing might be received in different ways.”

“I realized the importance of looking at information and being aware of biases a writer may have as well to ensure that the information provided is as inclusive as possible.”

“This taught me that technical writers need to be chameleons. They need to step into the shoes of the audience in order to help them enact their goals. This includes understanding their needs, wants, and attitudes toward a subject.”

“I enjoyed this project and do believe it helped me think more deeply.”

## In Conclusion ...

- Students began to understand the ways that Technical Writing is implicit in producing bias
- Students began to develop ways to counter that implicit bias in their own writing
- Students finished the class with new ideas about what Technical Writing is, what it historically has been, and what it can be