Inclusive Reading Lists

Reading list review at the School of Religion, Theology, and Peace Studies

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Objective

- Aim: to create awareness and facilitate a conversation about ways to develop and implement inclusiveness of the curriculum on different levels.
- Objective: to inform the conversation, a review of the reading lists of all modules of the School of Religion, Theology and Peace Studies was conducted.

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Methodology

Criteria for the survey of reading lists initially focused on:

- Gender balance
- Geographic diversity (European vs. non-European authors)
- Diversity within the presentation of case studies
- Acknowledgement of Critical Perspectives

Additionally, criteria important for the different disciplines were considered, e.g., the representation of perspectives from diverse parties in conflict zones (Discipline of Peace Studies); or the meaning of critical perspectives in interreligious and intercultural theological studies, Ethics and the Study of Religion (Discipline of Religious Studies). Focus was placed on ensuring collected data would be as 'anonymous' as possible to protect the academic freedom while providing helpful metrics that could impact future reading lists.

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Recommendations

The following results and conclusions are drawn from a sample of approximately 180 reading list entries for a postgraduate course in the Peace Studies discipline of the School of Religion, Theology, and Peace Studies.

- There are differences in the gender structure of specific fields that need to be included in the conclusions drawn; it can be asked whether the gender of the author is the only way to apply the criterion or whether the use of gender as an approach in the studies should be included.
- Issues to consider in geographic diversity are the use of university affiliation to address the difficulty identifying author's nationality, relevance of the origin of the scholar (e.g., in understanding the situation in Palestine and Israel), and scholars from the global south working in the global north. The geographical cluster "European vs. Non-European" should be extended or changed; while all distinctions of geographies reflect problematic issues, "Global South/North" would be recommended.
- Clearer definitions of search categories are needed if quantitative data should be provided. These would also contribute to a nuanced discussion of how to interpret them.
- Further research on modules that cover a wide range of ideologies would give a better idea of the depth and breadth of study material than more confined topics. This is relevant for modules that include several religious traditions in particular.
- It can be noted that the criterion of religion – among gender, race, economic status etc. – is mentioned but rarely operationalised for the analysis of diversity in reading lists. This could be a task to be taken on in the School, looking in particular at modules that address variety of religions.
- More research is required on how each aspect affects the student's ability to form an understanding of the subject.

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Conclusion

The project as it developed can be characterised as a pilot project in an area that is only developing in universities across the globe. If we frame it in the wider debate about "decolonizing the university", targeting reading lists is but one aspect of a process with many more components, yet it is a central one. Reading lists represent both the individual choices of university teachers and the standards of the discipline or programme that are taught.

The project's impact on inclusivity in Trinity is ongoing as it unfolds through its communication on different levels. A major asset is that the concrete experience of the research – what it means to "actualize" decolonizing analysis – connects the theoretical and political discussions to the practical issues. Facing the challenges reveals both the dilemmas and opportunities, hence, encouraging concrete discussions about the "how" of developing an inclusive curriculum turns out to be essential if inclusivity is seen as a continuous process rather than a box-ticking activity, related to fixed criteria.

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