Intersections Fellow Highlights: Oluwadamilola Opayemi, Cree Taylor, Hannah Stevens

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Research Fellow

Oluwadamilola Opayemi is a postdoctoral teaching fellow in the department of Communication Studies and Philosophy.

CIGSR: How has intersectionality shaped you as a researcher, teacher, or student?

As a teacher-scholar, using an intersectionality framework for designing my course syllabus and activities allows me to recognize the diverse experience of my students. More importantly, using an intersectional approach has encouraged me to incorporate active reflection in my course requirements. Through active reflections about social and cultural identities in and outside of the classroom, my teaching style allows students to create thoughtful write-ups and analyses of how social and cultural identities facilitate privilege and oppression. I used the same approach for my research; my work moves the stressful experiences of neglected minority groups and families lingering at the margins to the center of supportive communication research.

Link to department page: https://chass.usu.edu/communication-studies/directory/postdoc/oluwadamilola-opayemi

Teaching Fellow

Cree Taylor is a lecturer in the English department who is particularly interested in research concerning Rhetoric and Composition, Social Constructivism, Pedagogy, Critical Race Theory, Black Feminist Thought, and Pedagogies of Care.

CIGSR: How has intersectionality shaped you as a teacher?

Intersectionality has played an integral part in my teaching. First, I recognize the role that my own intersectional identity plays in how I am perceived by students in the classroom. As a young, Black, female teacher, I am subject to subtle forms of oppression by students. This could show up in my course reviews and in the way students recognize or do not recognize my expertise...
and qualifications in the classroom. Knowing this, I take advantage of opportunities to talk to students about implicit bias and their previous instructors. I invite them to reflect on their own behaviors and interactions with individuals who may be different from them or from what they are used to. I consistently discuss the importance of individual identity by providing students with pictures and biographical information about the authors of the texts we read. We also talk about the role lived experience plays in knowledge creation and meaning making.

CIGSR: What is one specific practice that you use in the classroom that is impactful?

One specific practice I use in the classroom that I feel is particularly impactful is Rhetorical Listening. This is a term coined by Krista Ratcliffe and the practice invites students to listen to a text before they respond to it. Often, when we are reading a text, we read to respond or argue. Rhetorical Listening practice allows us to read to understand. It invites students to acknowledge the role their identity, background, and belief systems play in how they internalize information. When reading something new, I ask students to take a step back and consider their first responses to this new information. How does this writer’s work make them feel? Why? What about their background or beliefs is causing them to feel this way? Whether you agree or disagree, what argument is this writer trying to make? Is this argument well structured? If I find myself agreeing with the text? Why? What about my background or beliefs is influencing that agreement?

I have found that introducing students to Rhetorical Listening early on in the semester increases their capacity to engage with ideas that might differ or even come in conflict with their own. I encourage them to first understand the message the author is trying to portray, consider what feelings they are having about the text and why, and then take time to respond.

Links to intersectional research: https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/gradreports/1434/

Link to department page: https://chass.usu.edu/english/directory/cree-taylor

Graduate Fellow

Hannah Stevens is a PhD student in the technical communication and rhetoric program. Her most recent research investigates the intersections of race, police violence, and public policy.

CIGSR: How has intersectionality shaped you as a researcher and student?

When I first started my journey in higher education, I identified as simply a student, and was under the impression that I needed to hide the parts of my identity that I felt made me weak or incapable of pursuing academic work. Now, I’m beginning to come to terms with the different parts of my identity (as a woman, and as a first-gen, disabled college student) as they intersect, and that has helped me recognize the intersecting and diverse identities of others as I pursue research, particularly my research with public policy.

CIGSR: Can you share one specific practice you use in your research that is impactful?

One specific research practice that is most impactful to me is researching an idea from multiple, diverse angles, which requires actively and rhetorically reading and listening to other perspectives. For example, in academic publishing, which is a research area that I’ve explored recently, there are many disparities regarding inclusion and equity ranging from citation gaps (particularly for women of color), first author disparities (more BIPOC appearing as second authors), and fewer women serving on editorial boards and participating in the peer-review process. Many of these issues of inclusion would not have been ones that I had considered initially, and this research has illuminated
(particularly for me) the areas that need to be reevaluated and changed within academic publishing.

Link to intersectional research: https://hannahleighstevens.com/ (personal/professional website)

Link to department page: https://chass.usu.edu/english/directory/graduate-instructors/hannah-stevens