

## Student-Led Summer Diversity Workshops for Built-Environment Majors

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# **Student-Led Summer Diversity Workshops for Built-Environment Majors**

## **Abstract**

In response to the instances of racial injustice in Spring 2020, members of the College of Architecture & Environmental Design (CAED) Student Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (SDEI) committee at the authors' institution developed online summer workshops focused on topics of anti-racism titled the Unlearning Series. This series began with the mission of questioning practices and education in the built environment that are integrated in formal instruction. The goal is to utilize an alternative method of education where participants (students, faculty, staff, and administrators) recognize how their discipline shapes and supports systems of oppression, while giving them tools to combat it.

Before each session, videos and readings were provided to participants to establish an understanding of the new topic. The online workshop started with a brief lecture from an SDEI committee member expanding on the pre-workshop materials, then attendees shared their perspectives in discussion groups while SDEI members served as moderators and note-takers. This paper provides a model for other student groups of the planning, structure, content, and outcomes of an Unlearning Series. Responses from participant surveys conducted at the close of the summer and group reflections amongst SDEI committee leaders are also presented. This feedback has been translated into lessons learned presented at the conclusion of this paper.

## **Introduction**

Integrating diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) topics in university coursework intended to prepare future planners, designers, and builders has proven to be a challenge. Faculty members in these fields base their teaching on the expertise gained from the academic context where they were educated and industry environment where they have worked. Even in current day United States, professions like structural engineering have fewer female and minority industry leaders than those that are White Caucasian male [1], and the same follows for academics in this field. As a result, many faculty members have limited exposure to the notable published works, projects, and other contributions of under-represented individuals to share with students.

Historically, entry to professions in the built environment have been riddled by barriers due to gender, race, and class. This continues to negatively affect not only the number of women and minority students who choose to enroll in and ultimately graduate from programs like engineering, but also among those awarded a bachelor's degree there is a notable exodus of under-represented groups from careers in these fields [2]. All of this indicates a critical need for creating inclusive learning and workspaces. Diversity impacts not only the industry's culture, but how it can serve its clients and stakeholders through its products or services. There is clear evidence in structural engineering of a business case for diversity as it cultivates creativity and innovation [3], yet DEI often remains a missing piece in fields of higher education related to the built environment.

## Current State of Curricula

At the authors' institution, the College of Architecture & Environmental Design houses five majors related to the built environment: Architecture (ARCH), Architectural Engineering (ARCE), City & Regional Planning (CRP), Construction Management (CM), and Landscape Architecture (LARCH). These departments are highly ranked nationally, yet their curricula in some cases lacks coverage of diversity, equity, and inclusion topics as they have a prevailing focus on technical competence and problem solving. This is not surprising given that it has only been relatively recently where bodies like the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) have explicitly expressed commitment to diversity and inclusion due to recognizing its value to the profession and in shaping modern society [4].

The CAED departments focus on different DEI topics in their curriculum, which was captured through a survey conducted among members of the Student and Faculty/Staff DEI committees (henceforth, SDEI and FSDEI). The responses are compiled in Table 1, where topics are rank ordered by frequency that they appear in core courses required for the various degree programs.

**Table 1:** Matrix of DEI Issues Addressed by CAED Degree Program

<b>DEI Topics</b>	<b>ARCH</b>	<b>LARCH</b>	<b>CRP</b>	<b>ARCE</b>	<b>CM</b>
Sustainability	✓	✓		✓	✓
Gentrification	✓	✓	✓		
Social Justice	✓				✓
Identity (Gender, Race, Ability, etc.)	✓		✓		
Affordable Housing		✓	✓		
Indigenous Communities	✓	✓			
Highlighting UR* Professionals				✓	
Marginalization, Segregation			✓		
Food Deserts			✓		
Culture Districts			✓		

\*UR = under-represented

To explain why some topics in Table 1 appear with greater frequency than others it is useful to understand some fundamental differences in degree requirements. ARCH, LARCH, and CRP studies are more directly tied to spatial design and require multiple classes in architectural or landscape history to inform students' design studio work. These courses are students' first exposure to indigenous cultures across various time periods. CRP curriculum is more likely to address issues such as affordable housing, gentrification, and marginalization due to these topics' direct relationship with planning. CM and ARCE curriculum focus on structural design and construction, such that only ARCE has one class on the history of structural design. Even though there are architecture, landscape, and structural history classes these often do not equally represent world regions or feature marginalized communities and thus still lack a diversity of racial, ethnic, cultural, socio-economic, and other viewpoints. Also, it should be noted that some DEI topics shown in Table 1 are more difficult to incorporate in certain degree programs by

virtue of relevance. For example, food deserts may not initially seem connected to structural design or construction, so these concepts are not currently found in ARCE or CM curriculum.

The aforementioned DEI topics are formalized into departmental curriculum plans, yet there are many CAED faculty that have individually tailored their offering of core courses to investigate DEI concepts. Some examples are: selecting sites for ARCH, LARCH, CRP design studio projects in globally distributed locations to promote deep research and understanding of other cultures; teaching interdisciplinary design studios to encourage collaboration between ARCH, ARCE, and CM students; inviting diverse guest speakers to share their industry projects and lessons learned in all degree programs; or simply incorporating diverse figures in architectural renderings. The underlying goal of these faculty is to educate students on the implications of design decisions as they relate to those DEI issues listed in, but not limited to, Table 1.

Another means of exposure that students have to DEI topics, particularly in technical degree programs within the CAED, tends to be through co-curricular club activities or a senior capstone project. There are several clubs at the university that promote under-represented student participation in service-learning projects and competitions. Among them are chapters of the National Organization of Minority Architecture Students (NOMAS), Women in Construction (WIC), Society of Women Engineers (SWE), National Association of Minority Landscape Architects (NAMLA), and Community and Student Achievement (CASA). Other opportunities include Structural Engineering Students for Humanity (SESH) and Journeyman International, both of which are service projects that allows students and faculty to work on structural design projects in countries recently affected by earthquakes and in developing countries, respectively.

Even given the current curricular activities as well as co-curricular opportunities described previously, it remains an arduous process for faculty to integrate critical DEI topics more fully into core courses in the CAED degree programs. As each program stands, there is already a high number of undergraduate course units to meet graduation criteria set by accreditation bodies, offering little flexibility in a department's curriculum flowchart to create new courses to address DEI. At present, some students take on extra elective courses in ethnic studies and related fields (beyond their degree's general education requirements) to further their knowledge on DEI issues.

The authors anticipate that similar challenges are experienced across faculty in built environment programs (and more broadly science, technology, engineering, and math - STEM) regardless of the U.S. region they serve or presence in a teaching or research-oriented institution. It is at this point where it becomes relevant for a student organization to organize events and spaces to foster student learning, inclusion, and belonging. The remainder of this paper provides a detailed summary of the planning and execution of the SDEI Committee's Unlearning Series to serve as model for students at other universities.

## **Overview of Unlearning Series**

### *Summary*

Following the killing of George Floyd in May 2020 and the rise in activity of the Black Lives Matter Movement, the CAED SDEI committee began researching anti-racism and reflecting on

ways to support the Black community. To take immediate action, the committee organized a series of online hour-long workshops titled the Unlearning Series during Summer 2020 that connected DEI topics with the built environment. In a slide at the start of each of the workshops the SDEI committee members define unlearning as “an alternative method of education where we recognize that our disciplines [planners, designers, and builders] have shaped and supported systems of oppression and that each of us have the tools to be critical of this through discussion, processing, and activism.” The SDEI committee have continued the series in the 2020-21 academic year; however, this paper focuses on Summer 2020 sessions.

### *Session Structure*

The CAED SDEI committee formed a student team to organize, plan, and conduct the Unlearning Series sessions relevant to departments across the college. A single Summer 2020 workshop required involvement of up to six students (one speaker, 4-5 discussion moderators/note-takers; including SDEI student co-chairs) and the committee’s faculty advisor. Each of the five hour-long sessions listed in Table 2 consisted of a brief lecture followed by group discussion to inform and uncover truths about the built environment as it contributes to or hinders social justice. This section of the paper details the process of carrying out the workshops.

Advertising and Registration: The Unlearning Series was advertised to all students, faculty, staff, and administration across the college through the SDEI Instagram account [5], an email invitation from the CAED Associate Dean of Academic Affairs, reminder emails from faculty representatives on the FSDEI committee to their home departments, and word-of-mouth. Advertisements were sent out at least one week in advance of each session to bring together participants that represented a broad cross-section of the entire CAED population. These advertisement messages included the session title, date and time, Zoom meeting registration link, session description, recommended resources, and a link to an informational document titled the CAED Unlearning Series Info Page [6]. This page contained the series schedule with all the information sent out in email advertising, and after the event, a link to the recording on the SDEI YouTube channel [7]. An entry from this page is shown in Figure 1.

**What is Anti-Racist Design, Planning and Building?**

**Date:** Friday 6/26 @ 5pm PST

**RECORDING (16 min)**

A summary of what our professions have done to support systems of oppression and what our vision of anti-racist design, planning, and building look like. It is important to recognize that while things say “Architecture,” it applies to all five departments in CAED.

**Reading:** [An Anti-Racist Manifesto | WAI Thinktank](#)

**Video:** [Why I'm an architect that designs for social impact, not buildings | Liz Ogbu](#)

**Lecture:** [Black in Design: Session 3, Mobilizing and Organizing](#) (recommended 0:00-21:57)

**Figure 1:** Unlearning Series Session 1 Details

Topic and Pre-Workshop Resource Selection: To determine the theme of each session, the Unlearning Series student team compiled a list of DEI topics relevant to the built environment by drawing on their own prior knowledge and participant surveys from past SDEI events. Next, the team researched each topic through the lens of planners, designers, and builders by seeking out project case studies and stories of notable individuals in the repositories of professional

organizations, other academic institutions, firms, and individual practitioners or researchers. Ultimately, the student team selected a minimum of three resources on each DEI topic ranging from introductory material to case studies. The time to investigate and thoughtfully select pre-workshop materials for each session was around 3 hours. These resources were distributed in advance with the event advertisements to help orient attendees to the DEI topic and associated vocabulary.

Lecture Preparation: For Summer 2020 sessions, typically a single student presenter prepared a slide-set with ten minutes of content on the DEI topic that delved deeper into the projects and individuals introduced in pre-workshop resources. Prior to the session, the presenter shared their materials with other SDEI members and the committee's faculty advisor for feedback on content and accessibility (color contrast, font size, etc.). The time for preparation, peer/advisor review, and revision of slides and talking points for each session was around 5 hours. A sample slide-set is shown in the *Appendix*.

Workshop - Introduction and Lecture: At the start of each hour-long Zoom online video conference meeting for each Unlearning Series session, a SDEI committee co-chair would welcome attendees, invite them to update their names with pronouns, and inquire about needed accessibility accommodations such as closed captioning. Then the co-chair would briefly discuss any recent campus or community DEI-related events before introducing the session presenter.

Acknowledging that attendees entered a workshop with different levels of exposure to DEI topics and the prior summer sessions, each presenter would start their lecture by defining the title "Unlearning Series" and provide a motivation for thinking critically about the DEI implications of professions in planning, design, and construction of the built environment. The introduction also included clarifying vocabulary surrounding the session topic (e.g., G-word = gentrification).

The presenter spent around ten minutes highlighting real-world case studies to identify instances of social justice or injustice within the built environment in combination with the portraits and viewpoints of a diverse group of expert professionals and academics. These examples cultivated discussion of the appropriateness of design solutions, enabled attendees to question the traditional pedagogy in the CAED fields, and brainstorm how they as individuals can contribute to change. These presentations were videorecorded and made available on YouTube [7].

Workshop - Discussion: After the lecture presentation, session participants were assigned to breakout rooms to achieve an assortment of department affiliations and roles (SDEI committee member, student, faculty, staff, or administrator), thus bringing together different perspectives. In this setting, attendees had around 40-50 minutes to discuss a set of questions sharing their thoughts and experiences relevant to the session topic. The online format facilitated participants to engage at their own comfort level via Zoom tools: text chat to everyone or individual moderators and voice chat. To start the conversation, each participant was invited to introduce themselves by name, pronouns, department affiliation, and role within the CAED or university.

A SDEI committee member or faculty advisor was designated for each of the 4-5 breakout rooms. Their responsibilities included: introducing ground rules to ensure the breakout room was a safe space to communicate, moderating or motivating discussion, as well as taking anonymized

written notes that captured group dialogue (there was intentionally no audio or video recording of discussions for attendee privacy). Specifically, the moderators listed any recommendations from participants for DEI resources and topic ideas for future sessions. Moderator notes were compiled at the end of each session to allow the SDEI committee to summarize the important discussion points. A sample note-taking template has been provided in the *Appendix*.

Post-Workshop Documentation: After the summer Unlearning Series, two SDEI committee members reviewed the lecture video recordings and corresponding presenter notes to create detailed summaries of each session as presented in the *Lecture Summaries* section of this paper. The process of synthesizing this information allows for critical reflection on what and how concepts were presented, aids in the development of future Unlearning Series topics, and provides future event organizers with a historical record to reference. These post-workshop documentation activities required about 2 hours per workshop.

The SDEI committee members also compiled moderator notes from all the group discussions, specifically aggregating the suggested DEI resources and topics for future Unlearning Series events as well as recurring comments that arose. This documentation was able to provide a clear and comprehensive picture to the FSDEI committee of feedback on curriculum and college culture. A selection of main take-aways from the group discussions are summarized in the *Discussion Summaries* section of this paper.

Post-Series Survey: A brief online survey was created by SDEI committee members to collect participant feedback related to the structure, flow, and subject matter of the Unlearning Series to inform future workshops of this type. The survey was administered after the last session in the Summer 2020 series; the questions as well as quantitative and qualitative responses are described in further detail in the *Attendee Feedback* section of this paper.

Advocacy: The attendance of college-level administrators (Dean, Associate Dean of Student Affairs, and Director of Development) at the summer Unlearning Series sessions helped the SDEI committee focus attention on inclusion issues amongst parties at all levels of the CAED. The Dean's participation importantly led to a request that the SDEI committee co-chairs and their faculty advisor present about the Unlearning Series at a Dean's Leadership Council meeting. This report garnered the Council's encouragement along with consideration for future avenues of advocacy and financial support for DEI in the study of the built environment.

**Table 2:** Summary Matrix of Unlearning Series

Meeting	Date/ Time	Session Title	Speaker Affiliation	Attendees*				Resources
				S	F/S	A	Total	
1	Fri 6/26/20 5-6 PM	<a href="#">What is Anti-Racist Design, Planning and Building?</a>	ARCH student	-	-	-	-	<a href="#">An Anti-Racist Manifesto</a> [8] <a href="#">Why I'm an architect that designs for social impact, not buildings   Liz Ogbu TED Talk</a> [9] <a href="#">Black in Design Session 3, Mobilizing and Organizing</a> [10]
2	Wed 7/22/20 2-3 PM	<a href="#">Placemaking as a Transformative Act</a>	CRP Student	32	9	0	41	<a href="#">Placemaking and the Politics of Belonging</a> [11] <a href="#">PLACEMAKING What if we built our cities around places?</a> [12] <a href="#">What is Transformative Placemaking</a> [13]
3	Thurs 7/30/20 3-4 PM	<a href="#">The G-Word Defined</a>	LARCH Student	25	5	2	32	<a href="#">The G Word: Gentrification and Its Many Meanings</a> [14] <a href="#">What we don't understand about gentrification   Stacey Sutton TED Talk</a> [15] <a href="#">Pretty Park, Affordable Rent: Making Neighborhoods "Just Green Enough"</a> [16]
4	Wed 8/12/20 6-7 PM	<a href="#">Queer Spaces</a>	ARCH Student	22	4	2	29	<a href="#">San Francisco Creates World's First Ever Transgender Cultural District</a> [17] <a href="#">Gabrielle Esperdy: Queer Space in the City – The Footprint of Escape</a> [18] <a href="#">Gender Space Architecture: An Interdisciplinary Introduction</a> [19]
5	Thurs 8/20/20 7-8 PM	<a href="#">Black Landscapes Matter</a>	ARCH Student	25	9	4	38	<a href="#">Black Landscapes Matter</a> [20] <a href="#">How Urban Spaces Can Preserve History and Build Community   Walter Hood TED Talk</a> [21] <a href="#">The Bottom: The Emergence and Erasure of Black American Urban Landscapes</a> [22]

\*S = Student; F/S = Faculty/Staff; A = Administrator  
Hyperlinks provided where text is blue and underlined.



## Lecture Summaries

This section of the paper contains summaries of each Unlearning Series lecture with a focus on the case study projects that were presented (see Table 2 for additional details).

### *What is Anti-Racist Design, Planning and Building?*

This session underscored that anti-racist design, planning and building requires an investigation of what these professions have historically done to support systems of oppression and to develop a new anti-racist vision for the future. The examples highlighted affordable housing efforts in the United States.

Burning of Midtown Corner: An affordable housing building in Minneapolis, Minnesota shown in Figure 2A, was connected to a development agency with many income-restricted projects in the city. In May of 2020, the unfinished building was set on fire and burned through the night. Rather than mourning the loss of material, we need to ask why a community would do this and what the building represented to them. As a project with only 20% affordable units, the remainder were to be market-rate and luxury housing, this building represented gentrification and a community of people who have been uprooted by affluent outsiders [23].



Figure 2A (left): Affordable Housing Building in Minneapolis [24]

Figure 2B (right): The Partial Demolition of Pruitt-Igoe [25]

The Shortcomings of Pruitt-Igoe: Pruitt Igoe was established to house low-income tenants in St. Louis, Missouri during the 1950s. The housing project was funded, but tenants had to pay maintenance fees even though they did not have sizable incomes. As a result, building repairs could not be completed and the building started to deteriorate, which led to the city of St. Louis' decision to demolish three of the project's towers in 1976, see Figure 2B. Many blame the residents for not paying maintenance fees, but Pruitt-Igoe was flawed from the start. In order to receive federal funding, there could not be an able-bodied man in the home – a clause meant to aid single mothers and their children. This clause, which was based upon the harmful stereotype that fathers in Black communities are 'out of the picture,' led to fathers hiding or temporarily leaving their families in order for their loved ones to receive aid [26].

### *Placemaking as a Transformative Act*

This session introduced placemaking as a way of leading, planning, and designing spaces for communities that seeks to transform areas within the built environment to be more inclusive.

Public Space at the Crossroads: There are many issues to be considered when creating a space, which makes it impossible for one entity to foster a totally inclusive environment. Consider the multidimensionality of public spaces, portrayed in Figure 3A. An initial step in placemaking is understanding users' values, needs, and talents. In transformative placemaking, the voices of underrepresented, marginalized people in the community must be intentionally supported [12].



Figure 3A (left): Public Space at the Crossroads [12]

Figure 3B (right): Proposed Plan for New Orleans [27]

Rebuilding After A Natural Disaster: The documentary, “A Village Called Versailles”, covers how architects, planners, and designers left the neighborhood of Versailles, New Orleans out of the planning process when rebuilding after Hurricane Katrina. The film later explains that the Vietnamese refugee community was left out of the design process because their neighborhood was assigned to become a landfill for the hurricane debris. The planning process sacrificed 60% of the city’s landmass and residents for the creation of a green space, as shown in Figure 3B. Against all odds, the residents returned to what was left of their homes after the being told to simply “look and leave” [27]. This was after a period of time when community members would work on repairing their flood-damaged homes during the day and sleep in the West Side’s public spaces at night. A truly resilient community, over half of its prior inhabitants were able to return to their homes after rebuilding [27].

### *The G-Word Defined*

This session provided an explanation and exploration of gentrification (G-word) in the United States, specifically analyzing examples in cities motivated by environmental efforts. In essence, gentrification is the process of low-income urban areas changing in response to wealthier individuals moving and often displacing the community’s original residents.

The High Line: Prior to the 2006 opening of The High Line in Manhattan, New York shown in Figure 4A, the area was home to an elevated railway that was abandoned for years. This space was later reimagined into a park meant to revitalize the neighborhood and quickly became a tourist attraction due to its popularity. Since its inception, The High Line has raised property value in what was previously considered an affordable area of Manhattan [28]. Robert

Hammond, co-founder of The High Line, acknowledged in a recent interview that not only did the green space fail to serve the local community, but also demographically divided it [29]. The High Line serves as an example of environmental gentrification, which is when green space is constructed to make the neighborhood more desirable. This drives up the property value of that neighborhood and consequently displaces original residents. A productive method of revitalizing a community will reduce environmental inequity without displacing its residents.



Figure 4A (left): The High Line [30]



Figure 4B (right): Nature Trail Along Newtown Creek in Brooklyn [31]

Nature Trail: The “Just Green Enough” model, coined by urban geographer Winifred Curran, seeks to fix injustices without introducing the costly amenities that transform neighborhoods. As an example, Curran highlights the case study of a historically Polish neighborhood located on the waterfront close to an industrial area in Greenpoint, Brooklyn. Residents and nonprofit organizations engaged in community activism to create a greener neighborhood while maintaining its industrial character. They sought to avoid the “parks, cafes, and river walk” model and instead opted to create green space along Newton Creek shown in Figure 4B, which is next to a sewage treatment plant. The project sought to expand the neighborhood’s access to water and preserve working-class jobs in order to serve its residents [32].

### *Queer Spaces*

This session provided an understanding of queerness as it relates the built environment and how those who identify as queer use urban spaces and objects to protect their queerness.

Spaces: Members of the queer community have historically gravitated towards one another for support, oftentimes seeking refuge from a harsh environment of anti-gay politics and violence [33]. These safe spaces for members of the LGBTQ+ community, or “queer spaces,” can be found within urban neighborhoods or other communities that offer inclusivity and openness. It is important to recognize that queer spaces are not perfect, especially when intersectional identities are at play (consider people of color in the queer community). A contemporary example of safe spaces created for, and by, people who feel ‘othered’ is shown in Figure 5. This is the first legally recognized Transgender Cultural District located in San Francisco, California that was founded by Honey Mahogany, Aria Sa’id, & Janetta Johnson and established via ordinance by the San Francisco Board of Supervisors in 2017 and provided development funding in 2019 [34].





Figure 5: Founders of the first Trans Cultural District [35]

Objects: The built environment, and objects within it, are continually adapted to serve different communities. Much like the “queering” of spaces, objects can be reconfigured to be inclusive towards members of diverse groups. The Disobedient Object Series (shown in figure 6) redefines the function of existing objects to serve an alternate purpose. The series of graphics educates protestors by demonstrating the transformation of accessible resources into safety devices and effective demonstration set-ups [36].



Figure 6: Disobedient Object Series [36]

### *Black Landscapes Matter*

This session provided an exploration and reflection on how the legacies of Black landscapes are poorly documented and the roles landscapes play in the movement for Black lives.

Seneca Village Case Study: Seneca Village, a thriving small farm town, was one of the first free towns in the United States when chattel slavery was still a major contributor to the country’s economy. During the mid-1800s, New York City’s Common Council quickly sought to implement a major green space, Central Park, in place of Seneca Village (enclosed by the red rectangle in Figure 7). To accomplish this, advocates and media outlets sensationalized Seneca Village as a town full of “squatters,” “vagabonds,” and “scoundrels” [37].

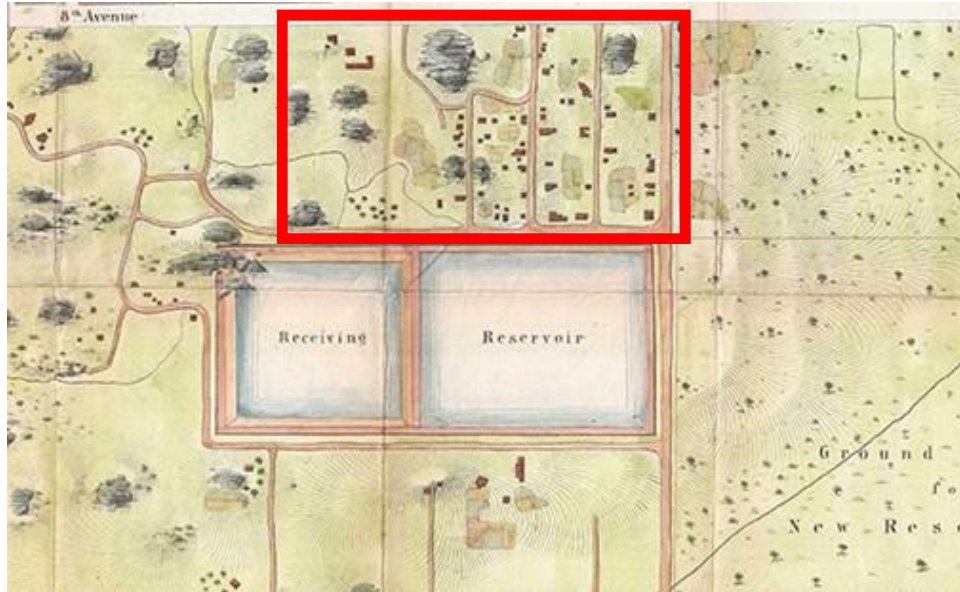


Figure 7: Seneca Village in 1856 [37]

Ultimately, because racial and ethnic minorities were not legally recognized as citizens, New York City leveraged eminent domain in 1857 to evict Village residents and usurp its private property. Designed by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, construction on Central Park began soon after Seneca Village residents were displaced from their homes. Now in that location, there is a 106-acre reservoir, the Great Lawn (show in Figure 7 as the “Receiving Reservoir”), and other smaller playgrounds. To commemorate Seneca Village, there is a single sign [37].

## Discussion Summaries

After a brief lecture presentation to introduce each DEI topic, members of the SDEI committee moderated conversations between participants (faculty, staff, administration, and students) in breakout rooms. The subsections below list action items related to DEI concerns in the built environment industry, in the local community, and at the university that arose throughout discussions between participants during sessions two through five of the Summer Unlearning Series. As a note, the (#)’s following each bullet point indicates the associated Summer Unlearning Series session based upon numbering in Table 2.

### *Designing the Built Environment*

- Exceed existing accessibility standards in Americans with Disabilities Act (4)
- Cultivate relationships with community stakeholders in project development (5)
- Transform spaces with the mindset of intersectional inclusion (4)
- Explore responsive vs hostile architecture related to housing crisis and food deserts (2)

### *Social Responsibility*

- Increase awareness of microaggressions and how to respond to them (2)
- Collaborate with employers and peers who value social justice/injustice (3)
- Validate fear and estrangement experienced by those who are “othered” (2)
- Resist colonialism/gentrification; empower marginalized groups (3, 5)

### *Campus Climate*

- Integrate topics of social justice into curriculum and create safe space to discuss (2, 3, 5)
- Respond unambiguously to instances of social injustice and social movements (2)
- Train faculty to provide equitable accommodations to students (4)
- Empower students in need to access campus resources for health and well-being (4)

The themes listed above are general in nature across all the Summer 2020 DEI workshops. To provide depth, below is a summary of notes from one of the sessions on Queer Spaces where breakout room participants were asked to identify any spaces that can make them feel uncomfortable because of their identity, as well as suggestions for how to make these spaces more welcoming. Participants tended to focus on issues at university campuses and associated local communities.

- Barriers at health and well-being centers: prior to setting up an initial appointment there are many forms where users must disclose identity information without knowledge of who will receive this information. This can deter students from getting help they deserve.
- Barriers at dining facilities: staff training and greater offering of meal varieties with respect to allergen and religious dietary compliance are necessary to avoid “othering” of individuals who must seek out food alternatives at other locations than their peers.
- Barriers at campus food pantries: the combination of incognizance and stigma can impact accessibility and use by students.
- Barriers with disability resources: this campus unit may be supportive to students but limited by capacity constraints such as space to provide testing accommodations, transportation for mobility impairments, or assistive technologies.
- Barriers of mobility: housing and classroom buildings need adequate elevator and/or ramp and on-campus transportation accessibility for students with mobility limitations.
- Lack of visibility of gathering spaces for diverse groups: students identified that affinity groups with visually prominent and well-designed center point of the student union or campus should be emulated by other campus centers. Students also communicate benefits of multifaith gathering hall for multi-denominational religious services and activities.
- Gendered safety concerns with walking at night: females often note the need of extra safety measures for walking at night like adequate lighting, removal of vegetation near paths, spacing of emergency blue light poles, and frequently circulating night bus.
- Gendered concerns with restrooms: need for more and better designed female facilities in STEM buildings as they are often fewer and inadequately modified from male facilities, also need to provide more all gender (single use or otherwise) restrooms.
- Concerns with community messaging: presence of flags/signs affiliated with anti-BIPOC messages generates concern while allied BIPOC visuals provide positive affirmation.
- Concerns with engaging in DEI topics at home: students indicate discomfort during remote learning with engaging in DEI discussion groups where parents and other family members are aware of or monitoring their participation.
- Unfamiliarity with career-related affinity groups: it is necessary to communicate to students the various gender, racial/ethnic, LGBTQ+, and other identity-oriented organizations directly affiliated with their professions.

- Barriers at career fairs and job interviews: BIPOC and/or LGBTQ+ students may feel unwelcome when interacting with representatives that project a corporate culture dominated by a white male Baby Boomer and Gen X perspective.

Related to the Discussion Summaries, refinements were made to the note-taking approach throughout the summer. Note-taking was first implemented in the second Unlearning Series session and by latter workshops notes averaged 3-5 pages in length; for this reason, only the Queer Spaces discussion notes summary was presented as a sample, and the remainder are not included with this paper. A note-taking template was developed and is shown in the *Appendix*.

## **Attendee Feedback**

Formal attendee feedback on the Unlearning Series was collected after the last session through a ten-question survey distributed to registrants via email, hence the relatively low survey response rate compared to number of attendees. It was comprised of a mix of multiple choice, 5-point Likert scale, and free-response questions which are summarized below. For multiple choice questions the (#) indicates the number of individuals that selected a given choice. For coded free response answers, an individual's free response submission may be described by more than one code, hence the (#) represents the frequency a theme appears across all respondents' answers.

1. Which current affiliation applies to you?
  - Undergraduate Student (10)
  - Graduate Student (0)
  - Faculty Member (2)
  - Staff Member (0)
  - Administration (1)
2. What department affiliation applies to you?
  - Architecture (5)
  - Architectural Engineering (3)
  - City & Regional Planning (1)
  - Construction Management (0)
  - Landscape Architecture (4)
3. Are you a member of either the Student or Faculty Diversity, Equity & Inclusion committees?
  - Yes (3)
  - No (10)
4. Rate the overall quality of the series on a scale of 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest).
  - Average (4.38)
5. Rate the quality of content/topics on a scale of 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest).
  - Average (4.77)

6. Describe what you found most valuable about attending the series.
  - Exposure to new DEI topics and resources not discussed in class (5)
  - In-depth conversations between students and faculty in different departments (4)
  - Environment that accommodates attendees at all levels of learning (2)
  - Opportunity to question existing curriculum or design approaches (2)
  - Hearing different perspectives (2)
  - Students leading a lecture (1)
  - Meeting other members of the college interested in DEI topics (1)
  
7. What topics would you like to see in future Unlearning Series events? Do you have any other suggestions to improve the event?
 

Topics

  - Overcoming dominant design viewpoints to consider multiple narratives of people and their experiences (3)
  - Status of DEI curriculum is in CAED programs nationwide and in recognizing marginalized groups within this environment (1)
  - Shaping landscapes through the prison industrial complex (1)
  - Erasure in historically religious communities (1)
  - Indigenous/Native American landscapes and the “Land Back” movement (1)
  - Environmental justice (1)
  - Intersectionality between ethnicity and sexuality (1)
  - Undesigning event (1)

Suggested Improvements

  - Engage more individuals from the CM and ARCE departments in the events, in part by topic selection that is more directly applicable to these fields (2)
  - Engage more faculty/staff in the events (1)
  - Modify workshop time and length to accommodate working students (1)
  - Suggest relevant documentary films to watch after events to further learning (1)
  
8. Do you have any suggestions for how to improve the breakout room experience?
  - Provide more questions (in specificity and number) related to the session topic for discussion moderators to select from to keep conversation engaging (5)
  - Insure more even distribution of students and faculty in discussion groups (2)
  - Post questions in the breakout room or even before the session date to encourage critical thinking and drive discussion (2)
  - Facilitate an interactive activity for group members such as a draw and share (1)
  - Schedule time to share out with the main group after breakout room discussion (1)
  - Provide more time for group discussion (1)
  
9. Would you be interested in facilitating a lecture for the Unlearning Series?
  - Yes (6)
  - No (7)



10. Would you be interested in joining either the Student or Faculty Diversity, Equity & Inclusion committees? (Email requested if yes.)
- Yes (6)
  - Maybe in the future (2)
  - No (2)
  - Already members (3)

Examination of responses to the 5-point Likert scale and qualitative questions indicate that the Unlearning Series cultivated a high level of interest in DEI topics amongst student, faculty, and administrators. Participants had particularly positive feedback about group discussions that followed the brief lectures. This opportunity enabled participants to engage with individuals they had not met before in the CAED (with respect to department and role) in an engaging discourse about personal experiences and social issues related to professions that impact the built environment. The surveys have also provided a wealth of new themes for future DEI sessions, and further improvements to facilitate even more interactive discussion.

## **Lessons Learned**

To conclude this paper this final section describes the lessons learned from the Summer 2020 Unlearning Series (that have been incorporated and refined in series' continuation in the 2020-21 academic year) and is organized based on each stage of the planning, execution, and follow-up of the workshop series as previously laid out in the *Session Structure* section of this paper.

Before making these closing comments, it is important to underscore the importance of student self-efficacy in creating and driving these DEI workshops to facilitate the unlearning process: from the selection of topics, speakers, and discussion questions to developing survey questions.

### *Advertising and Registration*

- Provide 1+ week of notice for each session and consider time of day to allow greater participation to those with school, work, and family commitments or in other time zones.
- Utilize multiple advertising methods: Associate Dean of Student Affairs email to college; FSDEI member email to faculty and students in their home department; SDEI messaging to students via social media posts, in-class announcements, and word-of-mouth.
- Utilize Zoom registration option to take attendance and track impact among departments and role (students, faculty, staff, and administrators). Also, can be used to plan out breakout room groups in advance to improve distribution of departments and roles.
- Reach out to individuals at the institution from outside the college and alumni to broaden participation and viewpoints.

### *Topic and Pre-Workshop Resource Selection*

- Select topics by considering suggestions by attendees from past events and student committee members' DEI learning experiences in technical or general education courses.
- Consider topic's relevance to multiple departments in the built environment, particularly to ARCE and CM, since attendance from these departments has been notably lower.

- Investigate professional organizations, firms, and academic units that engage in DEI as it specifically relates the built environment when seeking out pre-workshop resources and project case studies (rather than just conducting a general Google search on a DEI topic).
- Expand on lecture content beyond a timeframe of 10 minutes, to provide more built environment case studies related to DEI topics and describe them with greater depth.
- Ensure that the storyline shared in the lecture for each project case study provides closure either by indicating progress or final outcomes for current and past projects, respectively.

#### *Lecture Preparation*

- Recruit multiple student speakers from different departments to collaborate on a lecture. This increases diversity of perspectives as well as engagement from students and faculty from the home departments of the speakers that attend to specifically support them.
- Engage faculty from the College of Liberal Arts or external topic experts (industry professionals or academic researchers) as presenters and breakout room moderators.
- Utilize presentation slide templates (see *Appendix*) for consistency between sessions, particularly if recordings are presented as collection via YouTube or similar platform. These should also provide reminders about accessibility (color contrast and font size).
- Conduct a practice lecture where speaker(s) meet to record the presentation and then view the recording to provide feedback to one another (content, formatting, and timing).

#### *Workshop - Introduction and Lecture*

- Encourage participants to include their name, pronouns, department abbreviation, and role abbreviation (S = student, F/S = faculty or staff, and A = Administrator).
- For accessibility, utilize Zoom live transcription service to show closed captioning during the session. Also, share a PDF of the slide-set so an attendee can download locally.
- Designate a student committee member (not those lecturing) to actively send links to resources in the Zoom chat box as they are mentioned during the presentation.
- Poll audience at the beginning and conclusion of the lecture to evaluate attendee awareness of session topic and learning gains.

#### *Workshop – Discussion*

- Refer to responses to question #8 in the *Attendee Feedback* section of this paper.

#### *Post-Workshop Documentation*

- Distribute documentation tasks of summarizing lecture/discussions and uploading YouTube videos to student committee members to provide a record of the event.
- Provide training to student committee members on moderating (setting ground rules, facilitating safe space, and helping keep up conversation) and note-taking in discussion groups (information privacy, tracking major themes and useful DEI resources).

#### *Post-Series Survey*

- Prepare a set of survey questions to gather feedback on attendee experience and suggestions for future sessions. Refer to questions in *Attendee Feedback* section.
- Utilize the poll feature within the Zoom interface to conduct surveys during the workshop rather than online surveys distributed after the fact to promote response rate.

- Send a follow-up email to thank participants for attending with pre-workshop resources, PDF of the slide-set, link to YouTube recording, and announcement of next session.

### *Advocacy*

- Invite college leadership to participate in sessions, so they can be informed of DEI topics and communicate value of these events to advisory boards and donors. They are also critical to driving forward the institution's built environment curriculum to include DEI.

## **Conclusions**

The Unlearning Series was successful as a rapid and meaningful response in Summer 2020 to create a safe space to help students, faculty/staff, and administrators to learn, process ideas, and participate in challenging discussions in response to race-based social unrest that had come to the fore in the preceding weeks with George Floyd's killing. The Unlearning Series was seen as especially necessary in a time where students had limited connection to peers and the university (it was outside of the normal academic calendar and early during the COVID-19 pandemic when students were isolated due to a state stay-at-home order such that all interactions were virtual).

Furthermore, the workshops provided a critical educational supplement to any students that may be unexperienced with DEI. Exposing them to social justice concepts directly related to their built environment studies in ways they had not ever (or, not often) seen in their formal course curriculum. At the same time, students knowledgeable on DEI topics were granted a platform and elevated to the role of educators and discussion moderators.

The faculty co-author of this paper would like to note that the level of preparation, professionalism, and passion of the student leaders impressed other faculty and administrators to the extent where the student leaders were invited to speak at the CAED Dean's Leadership Council. Also, the College has been responsive this call to action from students and established a number of teacher-scholar grants focusing on updating curriculum to better integrate topics of DEI in the built environment, with funds earmarked to support student assistants in these efforts.

The authors hope that other student groups use the structure and resources presented in this paper as a starting point for developing workshops that illustrate the intersection between built environment (or, STEM topics) with diversity, equity, and inclusion concerns. They recommend interested student groups investigate what students at their specific institution and degree programs need, while being responsive to events that are currently taking place at the national and international scale.

## **Acknowledgements**

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## Appendix - Sample Unlearning Series Slides

# unlearning series

The G-Word Defined


7.30 Thursday 3PM PST  
Zoom Info & Readings at  
[bit.ly/caed-unlearning](https://bit.ly/caed-unlearning)  
@caed\_at\_j

1

### Why Unlearning?

*The Unlearning Series is a series of discussions throughout that aim to question our practices and education in the built environment.*


*It is an alternative method of education where we recognize that our disciplines have shaped and supported systems of oppression and that each of us have the tools to be critical of this through discussion, processing, and activism.*



2

### Session 2 Recap: Placemaking as a Transformative Act

- Placemaking is about prioritizing the people's best interest in the environment.
- Prioritizing inclusivity of the entire community to create transformative places
- Typically used when talking about urban developments, but placemaking is relevant in other areas
- Acknowledging place matters to people and communities



3




Image by Grayson Perry, from "Gentrification examined from a wider time frame"  
<https://www.cnu.org/publicsquare/2017/07/26/gentrification-examined-wider-time-frame>




4

**"Gentrification is further confounded by the legacy of racial inequality in America."**

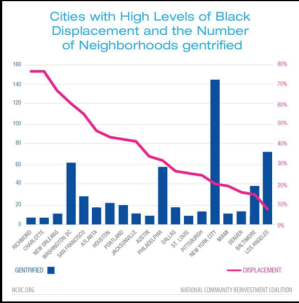


From Stacey Sutton, Assistant Professor of Urban Planning and Policy in "What we don't understand about gentrification" for TEDxNewYork.




5

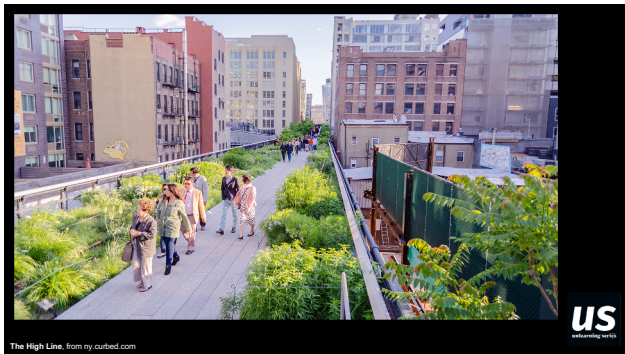
### Cities with High Levels of Black Displacement and the Number of Neighborhoods gentrified



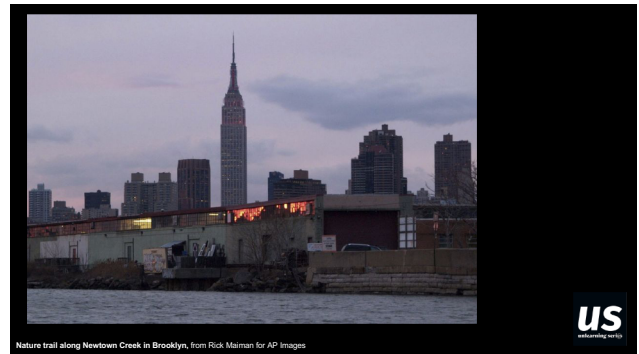
Graph from the National Community Reinvestment Coalition in "Shifting Neighborhoods: Gentrification and cultural displacement in American cities"  
<https://nccrc.org/gentrification/>



6




7




8

**“It’s about the people, it’s not about the place.”**




From Winifred Curran, Urban Geographer in “Pretty Park, Affordable Rent: Making Neighbourhoods Just Green Enough”



9

**Group Discussion (Breakout Rooms)**


- ☐ Challenge ourselves to be uncomfortable and be in the “space” to ask questions and hold discussion.
- ☐ Be here to communicate and learn, and understand we are here to support each other.
- ☐ Engage in discussion by turning on your camera and unmuting yourself if possible. Also, feel free to utilize the chat if that is more comfortable for you.



10

**Group Discussion (Breakout Rooms)**

- ☐ What are some examples of gentrification that you have seen in your community? What can be done to help that community?



11


## Appendix - Template Unlearning Series Slides

# unlearning series

Event Title

X.XX <DAY> XPM PST

Zoom info & readings at  
<link>  
<email/social media>




1

### Why Unlearning?

The Unlearning Series is a series of discussions that aim to question the practices and education within the built environment.

It is an alternative method of education where we recognize that our disciplines have shaped and supported systems of oppression and that each of us have the tools to be critical of this through discussion, processing, and activism.



2

### Session X Recap: <Title of Previous Session>


- ☐ Use this space to provide a few key points about the most recent lecture/session
- ☐ If this is the first lecture in the series, delete this slide



3

### What is <topic>?

- ☐ Briefly define the current topic
- ☐ Define key terms that will be used throughout this presentation




4

“Quote that is relevant to the lecture topic.”

PORTRAIT OF  
THE QUOTE'S  
AUTHOR


From (Name),  
(Profession/Title) in (Source)



5

IMAGE

(Description of Image), Courtesy of (Source as link, institution, or person)



6



### Goals of Group Discussion

- ☐ Challenge yourself to be uncomfortable and be in the “space” to ask questions and hold discussion.
- ☐ Be here to communicate, learn, and understand that we are here to support each other.
- ☐ Engage in discussion by turning on your camera and unmuting yourself if possible. Feel free to utilize the chat if that is more comfortable for you.



7

### Group Discussion

- ☐ <Insert the discussion questions, here>



8

### Let us hear what you think!

- ☐ Please take a few minutes to take this survey – it will help us improve upon the Unlearning Series and plan future events!
- ☐ <survey link>
- ☐ Feel free to provide feedback at the end of your group discussion
- ☐ Keep up to date!  
<social media tags>



9

## Appendix - Template Note Taking Sheet

### Unlearning Series Discussion Session Notes

Workshop Information	Attendees			
<u>Topic</u>	#	Affiliation*	Major	Year (if 'S')
Date/Time:	1			
	2			
Moderator Name:	3			
Breakout Room #:	4			
	5			
*Affiliation: S = Students, F/S = Faculty/Staff, A = Administrators, Al/F = Alumni/Friends				

**Resources – attendee indicates reading or multimedia reference that discusses DEI topic**

**Specific Responses to Discussion Questions**

**The Built Environment (or, STEM) – expressing concerns about career path, overall industry**

**Campus/Community – sharing anecdotes related to the university or local neighborhood**

**Social Responsibility – [not] addressing DEI in a daily context**