

## Ways of Knowing

Fall 2023, Thursdays \*2-5:50, Posvar 4318 and web-based

**Instructor:** [Leigh Patel](#), Ph.D.

**Office hours:** by appointment

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In person meetings (first session of each month): Posvar 4318

Web-based meetings: (other Thursdays after the first week)

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81064513645?pwd=WVFNeGFrSnZyaFZpaGU1cklyb0NvUT09>

Password: Unknowing

\*\*\*We will meet in person the first Thursday of every month from 2-5:50 in Posvar 5404 (except for first week of the semester, in which our first Thursday lands on August 31st). We will have shorter check-ins via zoom, no more than 90 minutes, the other Thursdays in the month. After the first month, we will revisit this course structure as a collective (more about this in the syllabus about co-design)

### Knowing and knowability in social science research

“Theory is not inherently healing, liberatory, or revolutionary. It fulfills this function only when we ask it to do so and direct our theories towards this end.” bell hooks

“We went to the public hospital but it was private, but we went through the door marked ‘private’ to the nurses’ coffee room, and it was public. We went to the public university but it was private, but we went to the barber shop on campus and it was public. We went into the hospital, into the university, into the library, into the park. We were offered credit for our debt. We were granted citizenship. We were given the credit of the state, the right to make private any public gone bad. Good citizens can match credit and debt. They get credit for knowing the difference, for knowing their place. We rated the service, scored the cleanliness, and paid our fees.” Harney and Moten

“How will I know?”

Whitney Houston

## Course Overview

This hybrid course is initially designed as a seminar and a space for co-designing how we know ourselves, society, oppression and freedom. Grounded in engaged dreaming our wildest dreams, rigorous reading, writing, revising, and dialogue to think and step into the various ways that knowledge is conceptualized, practiced, and towards what ends. Because human beings, and all entities do not experience phenomena through a single discipline, how we know and unknow is a transdisciplinary, continuous practice. We will collectively define and problematize the necessary and relative definitions of epistemology, ontology, methodology, and axiology. This course is also designed to be a collaborative and supportive learning space for everyone enrolled. *This is a reading and writing intensive course, in which rigorous reading, writing, and engagement with others' ideas is expected and shared each week.*

This course will also embody co-design as a principle of making places. Places where we can learn, unlearn, make mistakes, and make freedom. As Ruth Wilson Gilmore says, “Freedom is a place. We make it, and we make it, and we make it.” In co-designing the course, your ways of knowing are essential to our collective knowing. This is a course in which the false binary of theory and practice and the Cartesian split between mind and body will get of our way to work transdisciplinarily on trenchant problems that require permeable ways of knowing. Education has myriad problems that both are created by and feed into an inequitable society. Education’s problems are also much bigger than education. We will ask transdisciplinary, hard questions. We will build ways of knowing that draw on our experiences, various knowledge traditions, and do so for a reason. Expect to learn and to unlearn. Unlearning is often difficult because it shakes our worldview. Expect to ask early and often what is the purpose of knowing? What is the point? And for whom? Your participation not only as a thinker and person who knows and perhaps needs to unknow something is vital to this learning community as we co-design ways of knowing individually and in community to address longstanding problems of stratified learning, or as the late Bob Moses referred to U.S. schooling: “sharecropper education.” But to do all of this, we need two essential, intertwined practices: dreaming freedom and having a critical analysis of our conditions.

If you're more used to planning and ‘studenting’ than dreaming and analyzing reality in higher ed courses, this may feel a bit shaky at first for you. Don’t worry. We’ll practice. We will make mistakes, and we’ll learn from those mistakes.

EDUC 3107 will provide students with opportunities to:

- Distinguish and understand the interrelationships among various ways of knowing necessary for equity and freedom
- Engage in co-design for learning experiences that centers knowledge as more a verb than noun
- Interrogate and marshall metaphors that are used to symbolize knowledge
- Interrogate the potentials, tensions and issues that cut across various ways of knowing
- Design ways of knowing that are explicitly connected to a goal: justice, emancipation, liberation, freedom...
- Create and share an individually or co-designed, publicly available project, or tentative plan for a project that is designed for a specific group or groups of people.
- Write and revise a critical and speculative autobiography of how you have been taught to know and what ways of knowing speculatively engage our ability to create futures of freedom.

### **Course Scope and Sequence: Nonlinear**

Throughout the course, we will keep dynamic critical genealogies of knowledge and ways of knowing. For example, what does it mean that almost all of social science research in education takes place inside buildings? How does unhouse, so to speak, what we know about living in mutuality with living beings whose whole knowledge traditions have nothing to do with buildings?

We will also engage in co-design in this course. All spaces, such as the room where we meet in Posvar Hall and our online space, have been designed in certain ways for certain kinds of learning. Learning and study are also integral to social movements and social change. In the first phase of the course, we will learn together about the potential and power of co-design while continually asking the question: what kind of knowing is vital for what kind of future? Who gets to say so? While we engage in co-designing this course, the course will maintain a rigorous demand of critical genealogy. How did this way of knowing come to be? Whose histories have been vanished (Vaught, 2019) for some ways of knowing to hold power? Throughout the course, we will also attend to the ways that knowing and knowledge have been colonized through extractive logics of objectivity, ownership, and property rights.

## Course Readings

Materials for this course will include texts, films, videos, and audio recordings. Every effort will be made, by the instructor and the students, to use texts that are available freely or through Pitt's library system.

### Instructor-assigned

These texts will be read by all course participants. The purpose of these shared readings is to provide a shared vocabulary, foundation, and understanding of key concepts, issues, and tensions in ways of knowing

- Required Articles: hyperlinked in the syllabus or citation will be provided to locate via the e-library.
- Required Course Texts:

*Tuck, E., & Yang, K. W. (Eds.). (2018). Toward what justice?: Describing diverse dreams of justice in education. Routledge.*

We will read pdf versions of chapters out of these two texts, so reading the entire book is optional but highly recommended:

Kawagley, O. *A Yupiaq Worldview*

Rose, M. (2004). *The Mind at Work: Valuing the Intelligence of the American Worker*

- Recommended Course Texts:

Davis, T. (2022). *The Emancipation circuit: Black activism forging a culture of freedom*. Duke University Press.

DuBois, W. E. B. *The souls of black folk*. Oxford University Press, 2008.

Kelley, RDG. (2023). *Freedom Dreams, 2nd Edition*. Beacon Press: Boston

Tuck, E., & McKenzie, M. (2016). *Place in Research*. Routledge: New York

Grande, S. (2017). *Red Pedagogy: Native American social and political thought*. 2nd. Edition. Rowman Littlefield: Lanham, MD.

## **Course Requirements/Projects (*No late assignments will be accepted.*)**

Our work together in this course will be discursive, recursive, and iterative. Put another way, we will work on ways of knowing and co-design ways of knowing that help us to work on long-standing structures of inequity, violence, and extraction. Becoming a well-informed, theoretically rigorous, and reflective social scientist involves a great deal of inquiry into ways of knowing (sometimes call theory and research) and one's own experiences and assumptions. Core to any research is the question of how we know. To honor this, we will strive for praxis in the course's activities and requirements – engaging in practice to interrogate our stances towards knowledge traditions and using different ways of knowing to consider findings from practice. The following sets of requirements, both participatory and written, are designed to support your learning process. Class sessions typically will reflect a dual seminar and workshop format, with discussion of readings and topics facilitated during a seminar approach and hands-on analytic and writing work with your topical focus. Additionally, lectures, videos, and artifacts will be used to prompt class discussions. Think of this course as a formalized study group, but at core a study group where we roll up our sleeves and think hard with each other for the purposes of creating conditions today that will lead to, well, something different and better.

### In-Class Participation and weekly writing assignments (35% of final grade)

Much of being a social scientist is predicated upon a readiness, willingness, and passion to see the world from others' perspectives, even if that means changing one's own perspective. As such, discourse and dialogue will be mainstays of your work in this course, making class participation inseparable from your and others' learning. We will use perusall, through Canvas, to interact with each other and our texts. Additionally, you will participate in writing workshops regularly, revising, revising, and revising as you receive feedback from each other and as you engage with course texts. Lastly, we will use [an online discussion google doc](#) for a threaded conversation about each week's topics. The online discussion space will also us to make connections across texts. Class attendance is essential to learning in this course. Students are expected to come to class having done the reading(s), associated activities, interacted with the texts and each other via perusall and writing groups and poised to listen, pose questions as well as answer questions. Each student will also act as the discussion anchor for one week: providing a discussion prompt in our online discussion guide. Students are also expected to consider societal dominance and oppression in their contributions and be ready to step up and listen up. Essentially, the *consistency and quality* of participation is important. Contributions to class should reflect requisite knowledge, awareness of self, and regard for the larger learning community.

All of that said, guess what? People are still getting sick from COVID, struggling with a society in material and perhaps moral peril, and the planet is talking back to us, loudly. If life happens for you in such a way that you need to pause or need support, please reach out to me. I want all of us to be well. You start with you: be well and show up. Reach out if you need help.

Critical and Speculative Positionality Statement (25% of final grade)

Conceptualized with Dr. Camilla J. Bell for SOE Freedom Seminar: Goin' For Broke

Along with co-design and what *your* end game/goal/what you're willing to go broke for, this seminar will invite study and deliberation about being a subject, a person, a collective, a life form that is in relation to other life forms. You are a person who has agency, and among us all, we are differentially subject to population-level harms and dominance. Your critical positionality statement should be, like our course schedule, a living document. I encourage you to begin this statement prior to our first session with the questions in [our weekly schedule](#) and continue to revise it as you think about your subject positions including agency, in society, in your networks, and in your possible futures. In addition to it being critical, which means a rigorous intellectual examination of power, your statement should also include speculation. What do you and we need to do, how do we need to think, and how do we need to be with each other to reach [insert your firmest, sweeping goal for all here]. How do you think about, name, and work with that goal: freedom, justice, equity, and liberation? Racial justice? Intersectional justice?...you get the point.

Dr. Cynthia Dillard often encourages people to think about: "Who belongs to you and who do you belong to?" These questions are not meant in a sense of property, but important gathering questions for a Black woman grounded in her lineage from enslaved Black peoples and the ports of the trans-Atlantic slave trade where is now often called Ghana and the Gold Coast. Dr. Dillard's prompts shape our invitation and request for you to, yes, reflect, but to reflect critically about relation and to speculate what is possible and probably happening right now that embodies the kind of knowing you know and/or need to dream, to dare to dream freedom. None of us is an entity decontextualized from our many relations, including intergenerational harm, societal protection, and fugitive dreaming. In this living, ongoing paper for the class, your culminating critical reflection should address power, contexts, and the distinct contours of your understanding of yourself in relation to past, present and future projects of freedom dreaming. Freedom dreaming is bettered by speculation...what if we tried, for example, to learn through the lens of care rather than rules and carcerality? To bring Ruth Wilson Gilmore in again, "We only have to change one thing: everything." So what is your work in the world, where do you put your fingers in the soil and till, to paraphrase Ruha Benjamin? That is likely where you'll also dare to speculate how it could be different.

This paper is due October 19th via Canvas. Copy and paste your statement (no longer than five double-spaced pages) into the assignment space in Canvas.

Final project (40% of final grade)

*As part of our weekly workshop time that we will co-design, you will design and perhaps co-design a module or project that engages others in learning and knowledge making. Some example project formats include: a zine, a syllabus, an annotated bibliography, a book review, a book proposal, a learning module for intergenerational study groups. Because this project can and will vary across learners and groups, right-sizing it will be key. It is possible and strongly encouraged that this project be co-designed with others. That can be a way to collaborate, and collaborations can reach beyond our course enrollment. But don't worry, I won't force you into assigned groups.*

*We will discuss and workshop many ideas in the first two months of our class, including why it should be a publicly available project.*

GRADING, sigh.

Grading in many ways gets in the way of learning, and I am far more interested in learning than putting a number on what possibly has been learned and unlearned. Read [this short piece](#) that deftly explains how arbitrary while also intersectionally harmful grades are. And it must be true because a mathematician wrote it, and they best know numbers, right? By the way, Bob Moses used math as a language for freedom. But, back to grading, which is far afield of freedom.

You all know how to student. You have studented your way through many years of schooling, and for some of you, this has involved a good deal of harm. Let's get into learning. Let's aim for the strength that Prentis Hemphill says is found in the space between stability and vulnerability. Part of the rationale of co-designing our learning space is to be answerable while actively taking part in the design of how learning can take shape. That is partially why our reading/text schedule is not fully formed at the start of the semester. None of what I just described deserves to sit under the low ceiling of an arbitrary point system.

And I know you want to know how 'grading' will happen. In essence, you will either pass or fail this course. If you are in danger of failing because of lack of engagement or engaging in distracting ways of being, for example 'being the devil's advocate,' because you are evading responsibility for your arguments, you and I will talk. However, simply showing up isn't the same as 'passing,' in the many meanings that word has. To pass, to design, to try, you need to show up, listen up, engage in design, in dedicated study, and in thoughtful argumentation, again and again. Be willing to get something wrong to learn from that wrong. Be willing to dream. Why know if it doesn't include space to dream? Seek to know and knowledge for a clear purpose rather than status.

This statement on grading is heavily influenced by the intellectual work of Dr. Shanyce Campbell

If you are experiencing home/health/food insecurity, please contact me or another person/org you trust. You are not alone.

## Required Statements from the University of Pittsburgh

Lightly annotated by Prof Patel

### Academic Integrity

Students in this course will be expected to comply with the [University of Pittsburgh's Policy on Academic Integrity](#). Any student suspected of violating this obligation for any reason during the semester will be required to participate in the procedural process, initiated at the instructor level, as outlined in the University Guidelines on Academic Integrity. This may include, but is not limited to, the confiscation of the examination of any individual suspected of violating University Policy. Furthermore, no student may bring any unauthorized materials to an exam, including dictionaries and programmable calculators.

To learn more about Academic Integrity, visit the [Academic Integrity Guide](#) for an overview of the topic. For hands-on practice, complete the [Understanding and Avoiding Plagiarism tutorial](#).

### Dis/ability Services

If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both your instructor and [Disability Resources and Services](#) (DRS), 140 William Pitt Union, (412) 648-7890, [drsrecep@pitt.edu](mailto:drsrecep@pitt.edu), (412) 228-5347 for P3 ASL users, as early as possible in the term. DRS will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations for this course.

If you have an undocumented disability and/or an invisible disability, you are welcome to approach me at any time to talk about how I and others can best support your learning. Getting a disability documented is fully entrenched with the racial capitalism and ableism that runs rampant in many of society's healthcare systems.



## Optional statements, also lightly annotated by Prof Patel

### Accessibility

Canvas is ADA Compliant and has fully implemented the final accessibility standards for electronic and information technology covered by Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1998. Please note that, due to the flexibility provided in this product, it is possible for some material to inadvertently fall outside of these guidelines. Also, accessibility is about disability rights. Disability justice is something else entirely, but we'll get into that.

### Diversity and Inclusion

The University of Pittsburgh does not tolerate any form of discrimination, harassment, or retaliation based on disability, race, color, religion, national origin, ancestry, genetic information, marital status, familial status, sex, age, sexual orientation, veteran status or gender identity or other factors as stated in the University's Title IX policy. The University is committed to taking prompt action to end a hostile environment that interferes with the University's mission. For more information about policies, procedures, and practices, see: <http://diversity.pitt.edu/affirmative-action/policies-procedures-and-practices>.

If there are instances of the aforementioned issues, please contact the Title IX Coordinator, by calling 412-648-7860, or e-mailing [titleixcoordinator@pitt.edu](mailto:titleixcoordinator@pitt.edu). Reports can also be filed online: <https://www.diversity.pitt.edu/make-report/report-form>. You may also choose to report this to a faculty/staff member; they are required to communicate this to the University's Office of Diversity and Inclusion. If you wish to maintain complete confidentiality, you may also contact the University Counseling Center (412-648-7930).

Universities are inextricable from this nation's rapid economic growth through enslavement of African peoples and the dislocation and attempted genocide of Native peoples. This legacy now intertwines with many universities acting more like Univers-Cities where the university is the primary employer, labor contractor, landlord, law enforcement presence on campus, and healthcare provider, all while seeking to grow endowments at all costs. To quote Ruha Benjamin again, "Plantations were diverse and inclusive. So, what are we actually talking about?" She question is meant to draw attention to conditions of power as we say widely used words. Diversity and inclusion are topics we'll address in class, informed by knowing how such statements have come into being.

### Statement on Classroom Recording

To ensure the free and open discussion of ideas, students may not record classroom lectures, discussion and/or activities without the advance written permission of the instructor, and any such recording properly approved in advance can be used solely for the student's own private use.

It's fairly evident that we can control very little about how others may remember or narrate something we've said or done. So, when it comes to class discussions, be kind, be generous, be respectful. Let's not record each other without permission, ok? Thanks.