

Student Learning in American Cultures Courses at UC Berkeley

American Cultures

In 1989, UC Berkeley adopted the ground breaking American Cultures (AC) undergraduate education requirement: the only course all UC Berkeley undergraduates must take to graduate. Courses meeting the AC requirement are in more than forty departments across the UC Berkeley campus, and offer an exciting intellectual environment centered on the study of race, ethnicity and culture of the United States.

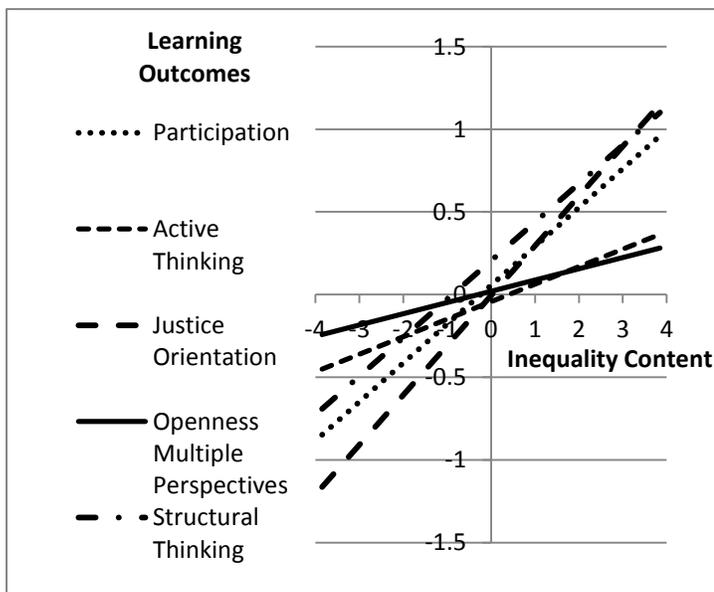
American Cultures Engaged Scholarship

Thanks to a generous grant from the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund, the American Cultures and the UC Public Service Centers were able to partner to infuse community-engaged scholarship into AC courses. The American Cultures Engaged Scholarship Program (ACES) provides support for faculty to incorporate community-based learning and research into new or revised AC courses. Since January 2011, ACES has enrolled 4138 students in 34 courses with 33 faculty members and collaborated with 47 community partners.

Student Learning in American Cultures Courses

Inequality content and community-engaged scholarship positively impact student learning for democratic/civic engagement.

Inequality content includes comprehensive analyses of how structural racism is reproduced through laws, policies, the economy, and social perceptions, with careful attention to the perspectives of individuals/groups who have historically been marginalized out of curricula (Gurin, Nagda, & Lopez, 2004; Lopez, Gurin, & Nagda, 1998; Mayhew & Fernandez, 2007; Nagda, Gurin, & Lopez, 2003; Sleeter, 1996).



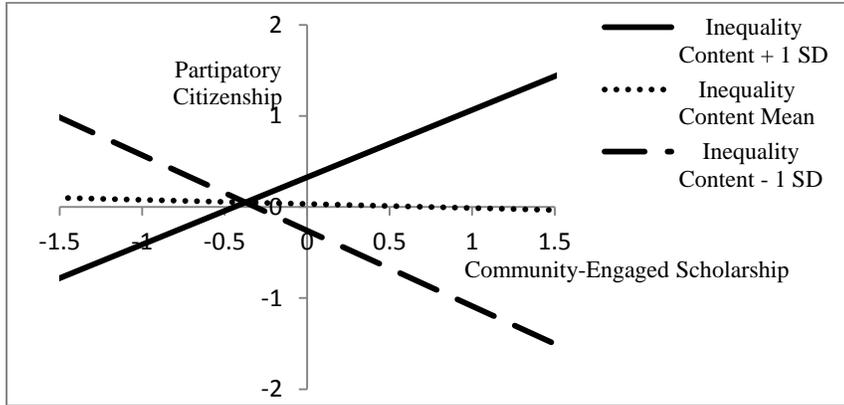
Students in AC courses with above-average levels of *inequality content* grew in multiple learning outcomes (Gordon da Cruz, 2013):

- Participation (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004)
- Openness to multiple perspectives (Gurin, Nagda, & Zuniga, 2011)
- Active thinking (Gurin et al., 2011)
- Justice-orientation (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004)
- Structural thinking about racial inequality (based on Lopez, Gurin, & Nagda, 1998 and Gurin et al., 2011).

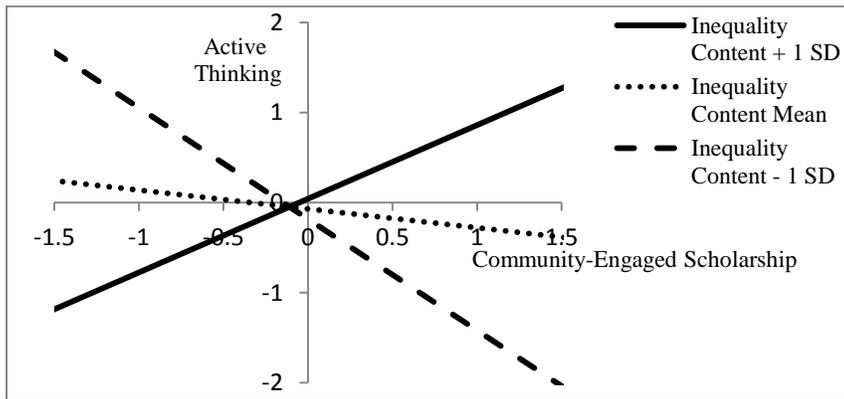
Community-engaged scholarship as a pedagogy incorporates authentic, mutually beneficial partnerships between universities and communities that focus on the collaborative development and application of knowledge to address consequential public issues. These public issues are defined with or by the community.

The presence of inequality content in community-engaged scholarship courses is crucial for student learning for civic engagement (Gordon da Cruz, 2013) because community-engaged scholarship impacts students differently depending on the amount of inequality content present in the course.

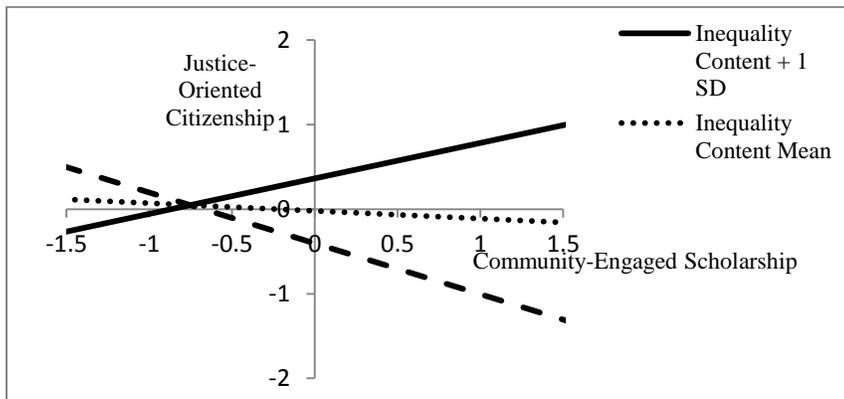
In AC courses with low (-1 standard deviation) or average levels of inequality content, community-engaged scholarship did not have a positive impact on civic learning outcomes (see below).



Students in AC classes with high levels of inequality content (+1 standard deviation) *and* high levels of community-engaged scholarship grew in multiple learning outcomes, such as their commitment to *participatory citizenship* (Gordon da Cruz, 2013). This same pattern was true for active thinking and a justice-orientation.



Students who experienced high levels of community-engaged scholarship in their AC courses grew in their commitment to active thinking (Gurin et al., 2011), *but only* when high levels of inequality content (+1 standard deviation) were also present.



Similarly, students who experienced high levels of community-engaged scholarship in their AC courses also illustrated higher commitments to justice-orientated citizenship (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004) *only* when high levels of inequality content (+1 standard deviation) were also present.

In short, AC and ACES courses are a unique opportunity to support student learning for democratic engagement. Community-engaged scholarship bolsters civic learning as long as inequality content is also present (Gordon da Cruz, 2013).

Gordon da Cruz, C. (2013). *Critical democratic citizenship: The effects of community-engaged scholarship and inequality content on student learning*. Dissertation article. Harvard Graduate School of Education. Cambridge, MA.

Gurin, P., Nagda, B. A., & Lopez, G. E. (2004). The benefits of diversity in education for democratic citizenship. *Journal of Social Issues*, 60(1), 17-34.

Gurin, P., Nagda, R., & Zuniga, X. (2011). Multi-university intergroup dialogue research project guidebook. Retrieved from http://sitemaker.umich.edu/migr/files/migr_guidebook.pdf

Lopez, G. E., Gurin, P., & Nagda, B. A. (1998). Education and understanding structural causes for group inequalities. *Political Psychology*, 19(2), 305-329.

Mayhew, M. J., & Fernandez, S. D. (2007). Pedagogical practices that contribute to social justice outcomes. *Review of Higher Education: Journal of the Association for the Study of Higher Education*, 31(1), 55-80.

Nagda, B. A., Gurin, P., & Lopez, G. E. (2003). Transformative pedagogy for democracy and social justice. *Race, Ethnicity & Education*, 6(2), 165.

Sleeter, C. E. (1996). *Multicultural Education as Social Activism*. Albany, NY: SUNY.

Westheimer, J., & Kahne, J. (2004). What kind of citizen? The politics of educating for democracy. *American Educational Research Journal*, 41(2), 237-269.