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A Partnership Rubric

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Antiracist Praxis in Community Engagement

A Partnership Rubric

Joyce Bennett and Kimberly Sanchez

Abstract

This article argues for the need for a partnership evaluation rubric focused on antiracist praxis, the application of theory into practice. Such a rubric is critical given that service-learning and community engagement now exist under the neoliberal university, which uses assessment to justify program existence. Furthermore, many of our community partners work under the nonprofit industrial complex, where it is difficult to challenge racial inequity. Community-engaged scholars have identified antiracist best practices, including using a place-based approach, partnering with constituent-led organizations, making conflict productive, using an asset-oriented approach, and building solidarity. However, the analysis of our community-engaged partnership reveals that many existing equity-based partnership rubrics do not measure antiracist praxis explicitly. We thus developed and proposed a partnership rubric to assess antiracist praxis.

Keywords: *antiracist, assessment, partnership, rubric*

Praxis antirracista en el trabajo comunitario

Una rúbrica para relaciones con socios comunitarios

Joyce Bennett y Kimberly Sanchez

Resumen

Este artículo argumenta la necesidad de una rúbrica de evaluación de relaciones comunitarias centrada en la praxis antirracista y la aplicación de la teoría a la práctica. Esta rúbrica es fundamental dado que el aprendizaje-servicio y el trabajo comunitario ahora existen bajo el modelo de universidad neoliberal, que utiliza la evaluación para justificar la existencia de sus programas. Además, muchos de nuestros socios comunitarios trabajan en el área de organizaciones sin fines de lucro, donde es difícil desafiar la desigualdad racial. Los académicos involucrados en el trabajo comunitario han identificado las mejores prácticas antirracistas, incluido el uso de un enfoque basado en el contexto, la asociación con organizaciones lideradas por electores, hacer que el conflicto sea productivo, el uso de un enfoque orientado en las fortalezas y la construcción de solidaridad. Sin embargo, el análisis de nuestra relación con socios comunitarios revela que muchas rúbricas existentes de asociaciones basadas en la equidad no miden explícitamente la praxis antirracista. Por lo tanto, desarrollamos y proponemos una rúbrica para relaciones con socios comunitarios para evaluar la praxis antirracista.

Palabras clave: *Palabras clave: antirracista, evaluación, asociación, rúbrica*

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In this article, we question the effectiveness of existing community partnership rubrics to measure community-engaged practitioners' implementation of antiracist praxis. Antiracist theory within service-learning and community engagement (SLCE) critiques the White supremacist structures in which most of us work; as leading antiracist scholar, Saad writes, "White supremacy is a racist ideology that is based upon the belief that White people are superior in many ways to people of other races and that therefore, White people should be dominant over other races" (2020, p. 22). Antiracist praxis, which puts antiracist theory into practice, is particularly difficult because university and nonprofit structures reproduce White supremacy (INCITE!, 2017; Kunreuther & Thomas-Breitfeld, 2020; Sen, 2020; Stoecker, 2016; Urciuoli, 2018). Accordingly, much recent scholarship has outlined antiracist best practices for combating White supremacy for use by university-based SLCE practitioners working with community partners (Gilbert & Masucci, 2004; Harkins et al., 2020; Mitchell, 2008; Mitchell et al., 2012; Morton & Bergbauer, 2015; Santiago-Ortiz, 2019; Stanlick & Sell, 2016; Stoecker, 2016).¹ Although SLCE scholars have developed a robust antiracist scholarship and best practices, the need for assessment in universities has also increased (Brackmann, 2015; Mitchell & Chavous, 2021; Sgoutas-Emch & Guerrieri, 2020). As SLCE practitioners must justify our work to administration, so too have SLCE scholars developed several rubrics focused on community partnerships to support such reporting. However, this article's analysis of such rubrics found disconnects between antiracist best practices from SLCE literature and existing partnership assessment rubrics.

We examined the effectiveness of existing community partnership rubrics in measuring community-engaged practitioners' implementation of antiracist praxis by surveying existing partnership rubrics. Many such rubrics center equity-based, but not explicitly antiracist, praxis. Equity-based rubrics are those that focus on creating collaborative partnerships in which community partners and universities have shared power, whereas an antiracist partnership rubric would center measuring work that addresses or erodes White supremacist structures. After surveying existing equity-oriented partnership rubrics, we attempted to map SLCE antiracist best practices onto partnership rubrics. We did so using our own case study of our partnership with the New London Area Food Coalition (NLAFC), a small nonprofit that provides emergency food assistance in our community. We found that SLCE antiracist best practices were not well represented on existing equity-oriented partnership rubrics. We conclude this article by proposing a partnership rubric for use by university-based practitioners that centers on antiracist best practices.

Assessment and Antiracist SLCE Best Practices

Assessment is increasingly important in SLCE, and many helpful equity-oriented SLCE partnership rubrics exist, particularly for university practitioners partnering with nonprofit organizations (Bandy et al., 2016; Brotzman et al., 2013; Clayton et al., 2010; Hartman, 2015; Hursh & Wall, 2011; Kecskes, 2008; Kniffin et al., 2020; Oregon State University Center for Civic Engagement, n.d.; Rhode Island Campus Compact, 2014). The rise in assessments in universities is linked to the development of the neoliberal university. In the latter half of the 20th century and continuing today, universities in the United States began to transform according to a neoliberal logic that administers universities as businesses, not public goods (Stoecker, 2016; Urciuoli, 2018). Under such governance models, assessment is an important means of articulating SLCE's significance in universities as SLCE programs increasingly struggle to survive (Brackmann, 2015; Clayton et al., 2010; Fleisher et al., 2022; Mitchell & Chavous, 2021; Sgoutas-Emch & Guerrieri, 2020). Having rubrics that highlight the value of SLCE is now fundamental to the survival and future of SLCE offices in neoliberal universities.

Increasingly, SLCE assessments are focused on equity-based and/or antiracist work because of calls for SLCE to be antiracist in application (Campus Compact, 2021; Mitchell & Chavous, 2021; Perrotti, 2021; Weisman, 2021). As noted above, antiracist theory identifies the ways in which our systems manifest White supremacist ideologies. Antiracist theory, then, works toward "an idea of racial equity,"

¹ In this article, we use "antiracist best practices" to refer to those identified within the SLCE literature.

with antiracist praxis being “actively supporting a policy that leads to racial equity or justice” (Kendi, 2019, p. 15).

Antiracist theory in SLCE recognizes that university systems, including SLCE, are built upon White supremacist ideologies. Leading SLCE scholars’ analyses show how SLCE programs often unwittingly reinforce White supremacy (Augustine et al., 2017; Dunlap, 2013; Liston & Rahimi, 2017; Mitchell & Chavous, 2021; Mitchell & Donahue, 2009; Mitchell et al., 2012; Santiago-Ortiz, 2019). Such scholars have clarified the ways in which SLCE can inadvertently reproduce racial inequity by allowing mostly White students to inequitably benefit from engagement with communities of color. Accordingly, antiracist work is now a critical component of many university and SLCE office missions (Center for Community-Engaged Learning, 2023; Risam et al., 2021; Swetland Center for Environmental Health, 2023; University of South Florida, 2023).

SLCE scholars have identified a number of antiracist best practices for practitioners that include partnering with constituent-led organizations, using an asset-oriented approach, making conflict productive, and building solidarity. For example, a well-known antiracist best practice is to partner with a constituent-led organization (Gilbert & Masucci, 2004; Harkins et al., 2020; Mitchell, 2008; Mitchell et al., 2012; Morton & Bergbauer, 2015; Santiago-Ortiz, 2019; Stanlick & Sell, 2016; Stoecker, 2016). Constituent-led organizations are those that are led by the population who access their services. Working with a constituent-led organization helps subvert White supremacy by placing marginalized communities in positions of power regarding community change. As Gilbert and Masucci (2004) argue, community empowerment resulting from SLCE is successful when “social change in the community is led by the community” (p. 154).

Another antiracist best practice is using an asset-oriented approach (Harkins et al., 2020; Morton & Bergbauer, 2015; Stanlick & Sell, 2016; Stoecker, 2016). As Rogeaux Shabazz and Cooks (2014) explain, assets are “the strengths and talents already present in communities that often go unrecognized in a server-client or needs-based framework. Assets are not merely a code word for resources but are the result of a strategy that requires the identification of deeply held values and defining problems and developing solutions from within the community” (p. 74). The focus on assets is a reaction to problem-based work that identifies a specific issue in a community that university partners will work to “solve” (Rogeaux Shabazz & Cooks, 2014; Tuck, 2009). As Tuck articulates, “the danger in damage-centered research is that it is a pathologizing approach in which oppression singularly defines a community” (2009, p. 413). On the other hand, an asset-oriented approach resists pathologizing communities through deficit-based work. This is a key aspect of antiracist work in SLCE because an asset-oriented approach counteracts the White saviors’ nature of the traditional problem-centered approach (Santiago-Ortiz, 2019). Recognizing that all communities have valuable assets that have helped them survive counteracts ideologies that blame marginalized communities for their own plight.

Making conflict productive is yet another important antiracist best practice. Doing racially equitable SLCE work inevitably generates conflict, but far from shying from this conflict, community organizers have long acknowledged the role that it can play in facilitating real change (Alinsky, 1971; Grain & Lund, 2016; Harkins et al., 2020). Given the difficult nature of antiracist work, one might argue that conflict is a sign that the work is actually happening. Ensuring that it is productive means that the conflict makes people uncomfortable enough to enact change.

Many of the above-listed best practices are promoted as a means for SLCE practitioners to build solidarity with community partners. Building solidarity is working to create understanding across identities for an increased awareness of how marginalization works and impacts people’s daily, lived realities (Freire, 1993). Such work is important because “solidarity presents a possibility for more reciprocity and mutually beneficial relationship building between students and communities” (Santiago-Ortiz, 2019, p. 49). Building solidarity is a fundamental component of antiracist work, especially work that involves more privileged, often White students connecting with marginalized community members; so all parties increase their understanding of the other, thereby breaking down racial stereotypes.

However, such antiracist best practices are often difficult to locate on existing partnership evaluation rubrics in part because of assumptions that antiracist SLCE theory makes about the contexts in which SLCE practitioners work and in part because most community partnerships are often with nonprofit organizations. Nonprofit organizations operate within the nonprofit industrial complex (NPIC), which is global in nature but has specific ramifications in the United States. Within the United States, the NPIC is akin to the neoliberalized university, but in the nonprofit industry. The NPIC is “the industrialized incorporation of pro-state liberal and progressive campaigns and movements into a spectrum of government-proctored nonprofit organizations” (Rodriguez, 2017, p. 22). Under the NPIC, nonprofit work professionalized, creating a class divide between those who lead nonprofits and those who access their services (INCITE!, 2017; Kunreuther & Thomas-Breitfeld, 2020; Sen, 2020). The professionalization of nonprofit work replicates the class and race divisions inherent in U.S. society; managerial, professionalized nonprofit staffs who earn the most in the industry are overwhelmingly White (Kunreuther & Thomas-Breitfeld, 2020). The ways in which the NPIC replicates White supremacist structures makes it difficult to enact and measure antiracist work in SLCE community partnerships.

Despite the difficulties of enacting antiracist best practices, SLCE scholars have developed many rubrics to support equity-oriented SLCE partnerships. Early rubrics for assessment in SLCE centered the student experience as the most important factor (Clayton et al., 2010; Stoecker, 2016). As SLCE offices began to focus on community impact as well as student outcomes, numerous partnership rubrics developed. The publication of the Transformational Relationship Evaluation Scale (TRES) (Clayton et al., 2010), which centered on the university–community partnership as the focus of evaluation, was a major advancement in partnership rubrics as many previous assessments focused on student experience and outcomes without considering the implications for community partners. TRES brought equitable partnerships to the forefront of assessment conversations in areas such as partnership goals, decision-making processes, use of resources, and conflict management (Clayton et al., 2010). Other important rubrics advancing concerns of partnerships include the Portland State University Institutionalization Rubric (Kecskes, 2008), the Community Engagement Partnership Rubric from Loyola University (Brotzman et al., 2013), the Rhode Island Campus Compact Rubric (2014), the Fair Trade Learning Rubric (Hartman, 2015), and the Community Engagement Pilot Rubric from Missouri State (Saltmarsh, 2019). Such rubrics include various aspects of the partnership such as goals of the partnership, communication, and partner voice in the relationship. Categories are evaluated in progression, usually from beginning or entry-level work to more advanced, idealized work, with two to four categories of progression. We analyze these rubrics’ ability to capture and support antiracist best practices through our case study below. The analysis reveals difficulty in locating antiracist best practices on equity-oriented partnership rubrics and led to the development of our own antiracist partnership rubric, which we propose below.

Methods

In this article, we propose a new partnership rubric that centers antiracist best practices. The development of our proposed rubric required multiple stages. First and foremost, we engaged in long-term participant-observation research by engaging in our own antiracist, community partnership. After identifying antiracist best practices in the literature, we sought to establish a community partnership with the NLAFC from 2015 to 2021. During this time, we primarily engaged in participant-observation research, the mainstay of anthropological work and a key means by which scholars connect theory to lived reality (Cohen, 2015; Naples, 2003). This is especially important in SLCE, where most of our scholarship has practical application and lived consequences not just for scholars, but for our students and our community partners. During participant observation, we paid particular attention to how White supremacy manifested in our partnership, and we attempted to implement the antiracist SLCE best practices identified in the literature above. We kept detailed field notes about our experiences and attempted implementations, documenting board meetings, interactions with board members outside of meetings, and any hours we spent volunteering at the Pantry during operating hours. We coded our field

notes using the antiracist best practices outlined above. We completed our coding in Taguette, a textual analysis software (Rampin et al., 2023). Doing so revealed the disconnects between assumptions made in SLCE antiracist best practices and the reality of implementing best practices. We also gathered 35 interviews with volunteers and conducted two surveys with clients, together totaling more than 250 participants, but we do not rely on that data in this article. All of our data for this article come from our field notes. We obtained and renewed Institutional Review Board permissions for our research throughout our partnership.

Our positionalities consistently informed this work. We engaged with the NLAFC as board members during our partnership, at the request of NLAFC leadership. Bennett identifies as a middle-class White woman with fluctuating physical abilities. Bennett has more than 15 years of experience working with Latinx communities in Central America and in the United States, which helps her connect with some of the Pantry clients. Sanchez identifies as an intercultural staff woman with ample personal and professional experience working with Latinx communities and communities of color in the Northeast United States. Our affiliation with Connecticut College, a private liberal arts school that sits on the hill above New London, was significant. Connecticut College has approximately 2,000 undergraduate students and is located in New London, Connecticut, a town of about 27,400 people, of whom 58% are people of color (Seaberry et al., 2021). New London is a place of extreme income inequality: the United Way of Southeastern Connecticut reports that in New London County, the top 1% has an average income of \$822,069, whereas the bottom 99% have an average income of \$56,443 (2022). A 2019 analysis found that 24% of New London's population lives below the federal poverty level (Seaberry et al., 2021). Connecticut College, although founded by New London community members, is an institution that does not pay taxes to New London. Locally, the college is often considered extractivist.

During our partnership, we needed ways to account for our work through our annual reports and assessment structures at our institution. We employed existing partnership rubrics to assess our progress and account for our work. Unfortunately, we were unable to locate much of our implementation of antiracist best practices on existing partnership rubrics.

Our next step in developing the rubric proposed below was to survey existing partnership-focused rubrics. We conducted a literature review of published partnership rubrics in August 2021 and again in July 2022 using Google Scholar and our library's search engines (OneSearch and WorldCat). We searched for "partnership rubrics," "SLCE partnership rubric," "community-engaged partnership rubric," and "service-learning partnership rubric." We focused on partnership rubrics claiming to be equity-oriented and/or antiracist in their descriptions. We then analyzed the compiled rubrics to determine the most salient points of analysis and assessment among the rubrics focused on equity. We compared these nodes of assessment with antiracist best practices identified above from the literature. The results of this analysis are discussed below and synthesized in Table 1.

To develop the proposed rubric, we began with antiracist best practices detailed above. We then mapped those best practices onto the most salient assessment nodes in partnership rubrics, particularly those set out by the Fair Trade Learning Rubric because it was most closely aligned with antiracist praxis. We then applied our disjunctures between theory and practice from our own work, creating new categories and rewriting criteria to center antiracist praxis for partnerships between university practitioners and nonprofit organizations. In some cases, such as using an asset-based approach, the antiracist best practice became the assessment node because it is a practice that can and should be integrated across diverse aspects of a partnership. In other cases, we adapted antiracist best practices to be represented under traditional partnership assessment nodes, such as Operations Models and Leadership. The result is a more holistic rubric that retains readability within the existing field of partnership assessment rubrics but centers on antiracist best practices.

Bringing Antiracist Theory to Partnership Rubrics: A Case Study

Antiracist theory identifies how our systems manifest White supremacist ideologies and proposes several best practices to combat White supremacy. In this section, we analyze SLCE antiracist best practices

using data gathered through our participant-observation work in a community partnership. We then map our implementation of antiracist best practices onto existing partnership rubrics. Our analysis reveals assumptions made in antiracist SLCE theories and the ways in which existing partnership rubrics are not explicitly geared toward antiracist best practices. We thus bring antiracist praxis to bear on existing partnership rubrics; this analysis is also presented in Table 1.

Table 1.

Mapping Antiracist Best Practices Onto Equity-Oriented Partnership Rubrics.

Rubric/Best Practice	Partner with Constituent-led Organization	Asset-Oriented Approach	Make Conflict Productive	Build Solidarity
TRES (Clayton et al., 2010)	Not present	Not present	Explicitly accounted for and realistically measured	Implicit in some categories
Rhode Island (RI) Campus Compact (2014)	Not present	Not present	Not present	Not present
Fair Trade Learning (FTL) Rubric (Hartman, 2015)	Do no harm approach only; no support for community partner transformation	Integrated into some categories; no explicit measurement	Implicit in one category; unrealistic goals	Not present
Missouri State (Saltmarsh, 2019)	Not present	Measurements out of reach/expectations not realistic	Not present	Not present
Loyola (Brotzman et al., 2013)	Not present	Integrated into some categories; no explicit measurement	Not present	Not present

TRES Transformational Relationship Evaluation Scale

Partnering With Constituent-Led Organizations

For example, partnering with a constituent-led organization makes several assumptions about the context in which SLCE practitioners work. Many SLCE practitioners work in contexts where constituent-led organizations are scant and/or they do not wish to partner with universities. When initiating our partnership, we sought to partner with a constituent-led organization. In New London, there are 97 nonprofits—only a handful of which are constituent-led. The existing constituent-led organizations were not interested in a partnership with us. Instead, we partnered with an established nonprofit that sought to stabilize its organization by diversifying its leadership and operation—the NLAFC or the Pantry.

We then focused on supporting the NLAFC in becoming more constituent-led. For example, when we needed more board members in 2018, the authors nominated two volunteers who are also clients. These volunteers acted as managers at the Pantry over the years, overseeing daily operations such as the packaging and distribution of food, managing labor, and daily operations problem-solving. As native Spanish speakers, these volunteers provided an important connection to our client community and possessed language abilities that other board members and Pantry managers consistently requested. The board approved their nominations, but their integration into the board over the following years required significant support from the authors to encourage productive communication and relationships.

It is difficult to locate our achievements in existing partnership rubrics. Although TRES encourages practitioners to engage in equitable partnership practice, we struggled to locate a place to evaluate how we supported our partner in transforming into a constituent-led organization (Clayton et al., 2010). The Rhode Island Campus Compact Rubric approaches such issues under responsiveness to community needs,

saying, “Partnership has a bold vision that challenges conventional wisdom and practices to inspire institutional growth” (2014). However, there is no room or way to measure a transition to being constituent-led. Similarly, the Fair Trade Learning Rubric recenters SLCE partnership evaluation to be more inclusive of and responsible to community partners (Hartman, 2015). But the goal is not to achieve a power shift that being constituent-led would bring about but rather to take a “do no harm” approach that is rooted in reciprocity. It comes close to addressing this issue with the category “Host Community Program Leadership,” but this is limited to leadership within the SLCE activities, not the organization. The rubric’s approach is an important component of justice-oriented work, but it does not allow for measuring antiracist best practices such as encouraging partners to transform into constituent-led organizations.

Using an Asset-Oriented Approach

Implementing asset-oriented practice required reconceptualizing what first seemed like a problem as an opportunity and recognizing that sometimes small gains are better than no gains at all. English is the primary language of communication at the Pantry; however, we have significant percentages of clients who are more comfortable in other languages, including Spanish, Haitian Creole, and Mandarin. We regularly invite clients to interpret, thus reframing the number of non-native English speakers from a problem to an asset within the community. Although it would be ideal to have regular volunteers who speak such languages, it is difficult and even unfair to ask clients to spend significant time volunteering. It would be ideal to provide paid interpretation services, but the Pantry’s status as an all-volunteer organization with a limited budget does not allow this. Given the structural limitations of the Pantry’s operations, making space for clients to aid in interpretation, instead of insisting all transactions take place only in English, is a small but significant step toward addressing racial inequity and centers the use of an asset-oriented approach.

Our asset-oriented approach was difficult to chart on partnership rubrics. On the Missouri State Rubric, which is “asset-based” according to the authors, our asset-oriented work would not have been registered (Saltmarsh, 2019). Using an asset-oriented approach is embedded in the ideology of the Fair Trade Learning Rubric in several places, such as in “Learning Integration” because it assumes that community members are a source of valuable, legitimate knowledge, but we do not find a place where our use of an asset-oriented approach is well represented (Hartman, 2015). The Loyola University Partnership Rubric could be read such that it has an asset-oriented approach embedded in several categories, such as in “Resource Sharing,” but the approach is not explicit (Brotzman et al., 2013).

Making Conflict Productive

Making conflict productive was challenging in its own ways. We placed students at the Pantry frequently, having them work shifts when the Pantry was open. Some of the students we placed were work–study students, others were interested in volunteering, and still others engaged with the NLAFC as part of an independent study course in anthropology. Students would come back from their Pantry engagements expressing concerns about the language Pantry volunteers used to talk about clients. Sanchez mentored them to understand the context. We practiced how to model inclusive language during their next shift. The authors attempted to bring such issues to the leadership at our institution and the Pantry, but we have yet to have a productive conversation. Regardless, we made important strides using conflict to aid student growth, pushed leadership for institutional change, and found ways to introduce more inclusive language use into the Pantry.

Making conflict productive is represented in a variety of ways in existing rubrics. For example, in TRES, “Conflict Management” is a category for assessment (Clayton et al., 2010, p. 9). However, other rubrics are much less explicit. In the Free Trade Rubric, advancing under “common purposes” includes increased levels of agreement. Although this is excellent, how to get there and how to use what is assumed as conflicting opinions in earlier steps is not elaborated, nor is there space to chart the incremental progress, the likes of which took a great deal of our work (Hartman, 2015). Similarly, the “Communications” category has no means for measuring how conflict is handled when it arises. The

Loyola University Rubric has a major section dedicated to the “relationship,” but there is no obvious space for assessing how conflict is handled within that relationship (Brotzman et al., 2013).

Building Solidarity

Building solidarity was challenging in our partnership because in our context, building solidarity would mean understanding more about the lives of those who access Pantry services. Yet, there were few means of creating opportunities for mutual increases in understanding between clients and Pantry leadership and volunteers. Instead, we used our available resources to increase understanding between all parties in a variety of ways. In 2015 and 2020, we conducted client surveys to determine what kind of foods clients at the Pantry want. As at most food-providing organizations, the foods offered at the Pantry were mostly foods that White people prefer, in large part because White people chose the foods to be distributed (Dacosta & Wilson, 1996; Li et al., 2017). Given that conceptions of healthy foods are culturally bound, we know that what is available is not always what will make people feel good about themselves and their diets (Lawless, 2009; Portnoy, 2016). Including diverse foods is a clear welcome sign for people of color, who comprise the majority of our constituency. Accordingly, we surveyed clients to understand more about their food preferences and the kinds of healthy foods they would like to access. The results of the surveys indicated that several foods we did not usually stock would be welcome, including dry beans, vegetables not stocked in the Pantry, dried fish, and more. Many of these foods were not items that the mostly White, middle-class board members or volunteers were familiar with or ate themselves. The inclusion of client preferences through the survey created space at the leadership level to learn what kinds of foods people preferred and would use.

Existing rubrics would not register our survey work as antiracist praxis through solidarity building. TRES does not explicitly address solidarity building although such issues are partially incorporated into analysis categories like “decision making” and “conflict management” (Clayton et al., 2010, pp. 9, 10). The Loyola Rubric has assessment categories around data collection and storing that address equity within the research process but is not focused on using the data for racial equity. For example, under “Assessment” and “Reason,” “Well-institutionalized partnerships” would gather data “to increase impact and inform long-term planning.” This is an excellent goal, but it is not specifically focused on moving toward racial justice (Brotzman et al., 2013). Similarly, the Fair Trade Learning Rubric has a category for “Rights of the Most Vulnerable,” which is about protecting those individuals, not increasing communication across differences as would be the goal for solidarity building (Hartman, 2015).

A New Rubric for Collaboration

The rubric we propose is composed of categories that touch many facets of a partnership: Operations Models; Partnership Strategies; Leadership; Asset-based Approach; Interactions with Higher Ed Institutions; Culture of Race, Power, and Privilege; Communications and Media Relations; and Institutional Assessment of Antiracist Praxis. The work moves from Entry to Developing, through Transformative, and into Ideal practices. The progress outlined in each category is based on the antiracist best practices identified and discussed above, but the starting places and progress are informed by our own case study. The antiracist best practices discussed above are reflected in the Ideal category. The stages of Entry to Ideal are demarcated into four stages, and we expect that practitioners may find themselves in between stages in any number of categories. We acknowledge that in our own work, we remain in the Entry and Developing categories after years of intentional, consistent practice. In rare instances, we have attained Transformative levels, but sometimes only fleetingly. We think this is normal and expect that achieving transformative, let alone ideal, levels across all categories will likely take decades, given the deeply entrenched nature of White supremacy and its corollaries. We discuss the limitations of the proposed rubric in more detail below.

In the first category (see Table 2), Operations Models, working with constituent-led organizations is ideal. However, we suggest beginning by recognizing that working with a direct service organization that serves a marginalized community is, in and of itself, part of antiracist praxis because such organizations

help communities survive. Given the fact that many such organizations replicate racial hierarchies in their own structures (Kunreuther & Thomas-Breitfeld, 2020), the presence of any conversation about racial justice is an entry-level success. As racial justice work advances, transforming the conversations into considerations of equitable practices marks a distinct transformation into the developing category, whereas moving into implementing equity-driven policies and mutual-aid practices constitutes transformative work.

In Partnership Strategies, we know that the best practice is to have constituent-led organizations, but this is not the reality for the vast majority of nonprofits in the United States (INCITE!, 2017; Kunreuther & Thomas-Breitfeld, 2020; Sen, 2020). An important first step in working toward racially informed practice is including any Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) in the leadership, even if their representation is not proportional to the community. Transformation of leadership is then gradually implemented as leadership structures become governed by equity practice and composed of people who reflect the demographics of the area served.

Our approach to measuring asset-based approaches is similar. An important entry point is including community assets in any part of the organization's operation. Asset mapping should inform distinct components of the organization's model and operation, increasing over time to encompass all components, not just one or two distinct spheres. The goal, of course, is to integrate asset mapping into the purpose of the organization so that such assets are enhanced and strengthened through the partnership.

Regarding Interactions with Higher Ed Institutions, the ideal is for imbalances to be eliminated and for community partners, especially constituents, to feel free to critique the partnership. This is a lofty goal, particularly given the immense power, status, and resources of universities relative to community constituents. A more realistic starting place is first increasing the range of perspectives and positions represented by the institution of higher education, such as providing opportunities for the nonprofit's staff and leadership to interact not only with SLCE faculty but also with staff and students. A significant next step would be to include community members through exchanges such as inviting community members to be part of conversations and/or to be paid guest lecturers compensated for sharing their experiences and knowledge. At the transformative level, all parties would feel able to openly and regularly discuss the power relationships between participants and community members and to share resources that are not limited to lectures but instead include other assets from both organizations. An example might include something like connecting social media specialists on campus with students and organizational staff working on a social media campaign. This work would reach the ideal level when community members, organizational staff, and higher education representatives (faculty, staff, and students) could critique and discuss the partnership openly and regularly.

Communications and Media Relations is about the media coverage of the partnership. Most higher education institutions control the coverage of SLCE partnerships, highlighting how the university is doing good for the community by giving time, knowledge, and resources. Such coverage reinforces the inequities between institutions and community organizations. Instead, we advocate for shifting to a more equitable approach whereby the community partner collaborates with the institution to determine the content, messaging, and use of images regarding the partnership.

The Culture of Race, Power, and Privilege focuses on how people experience power and privilege in partnership on a daily basis. We recognize that in most partnerships, race, equity, and inclusion are not discussed. At that stage, talking about race and racial equity in any capacity is a big success. As those conversations progress, the next stage is integrating some training and development into the organization and partnership and having conversations about the resistance that will surely arise. The next and transformative stage is when all stakeholders in the partnership are equipped and willing to talk about race, power, and privilege, with the ideal being that race and power become part of regular conversation and inform operational models.

Institutional Assessment of Antiracist Praxis centers on university evaluation of antiracist praxis within the framework of higher education. This category is inherently more asset-oriented than the Culture of Race, Power, and Privilege. We find it important to distinguish between the two categories because we otherwise risk overlooking the challenges that partnerships face. We suggest first exploring

how antiracist praxis did or did not inform SLCE partnerships on campus, then progressing to required reporting on antiracist praxis as part of existing annual reporting structures, and moving on to analysis and discussion of such reports, with the ideal being open and public communication about how antiracist praxis is part of our work.

Table 2.

Proposed Partnership Rubric to Assess Antiracist Praxis.

Goal	Entry	Developing	Transformative	Ideal
Operations Models	Direct service work is prioritized; limited conversation around racial justice	Service work is prioritized; conversations around equitable practice develop	Equity concerns drive services provided; organizational shifts toward mutual-aid practices	Mutual-aid organizational theory model is practiced
Partnership Strategies	Service is determined in an insular high-level conversation; completely removed from the active needs being discussed	Partnerships with other organizations doing similar work in the same community are explored, especially when participant-led	In the context of fulfilling mutually agreed upon but ultimately community-identified needs, sweeping and multilevel systemic policy changes are pursued with oversight directed by and from the community at large	Constituent leaders determine direction of organization; shared language and understanding of structural racism
Leadership	Community leadership is primarily White individuals; rooted in colonialism	There are people of color in leadership and decision-making roles, but it is not proportional to the community	Equitable governance that reflects area demographics	Equitable governance, with full transparency and accountability regarding leadership structure
Asset-based Approach	Community assets are used only to support direct services	A siloed process of asset mapping has informed and determined the nature of the organization	Asset mapping breaks out of silos and informs operations model	Community-based process of asset mapping has informed purpose of the organization
Interactions with Higher Ed Institutions	Interactions are with organizational staff; Federal Work Study students placed at site	Community members (rather than program staff) are often consulted and are paid as guest lectures	Power hierarchy between participants and community is openly discussed; resource sharing extends beyond FWS and guest lectures	Power hierarchy has been eliminated; community participants and organizational staff regularly critique the partnership
Culture of Race, Power, and Privilege	No acknowledgment of identity or full participation; discourse addressing	Some training and development work connected to equity and inclusion; objections to racial	Understanding of structural racism, power, and privilege exists across all levels of stakeholders;	Race and racism is understood and continuously examined; continuous

	racial justice is surface level	justice efforts are talked about and identified	concepts of power, privilege, and oppression are actively discussed	conversation around structural forms of inequity and committed to continuously address any resistance
Communications and Media Relations	Materials include diverse populations but reinforce direct service models	Materials connected to the partnership are available in a range of inclusive formats	Values and commitments are clearly communicated in all materials	Media coverage is shifted and framed by the community
Institutional Assessment of Antiracist Praxis	Required and optional questions pertaining to equity and inclusion are part of the evaluation process	Faculty and staff include a description of full participation activities as part of departmental reports	Progress is evaluated and analyzed at the direct service level and the systemic change level	There is a clear timeline for publicly communicated racial equity goals and methods of accountability

Limitations

We provide this rubric as a way for university-based practitioners in the vortex of the NPIC/neoliberal university to engage in meaningful antiracist praxis and justify it to our assessment-oriented institutions. We hope this is especially helpful for those in unprotected positions, such as staff, untenured faculty, and nontenured stream faculty, so that such individuals, who increasingly comprise university instructors, might engage in explicitly antiracist SLCE partnerships in ways already institutionalized and thus less risky. This is important at a moment when SLCE programs and more politically oriented work in SLCE are under increasing scrutiny and attack from state legislations and funders (Fleisher et al., 2022).

It must be noted that the rubric has yet to be tested beyond our work. We also recognize that some strategies to move across this rubric will fail, resulting in years with little gains as measured on this rubric. However, we encourage active and continued conversations around such attempts as key learning moments and encourage practitioners to modify the rubric to best fit their institutional setting.

Finally, we developed this rubric with minimal consultation from our community partner. The rubric is meant to be used within the university side of a partnership; our community partner was not invested in developing a tool of little immediate use to them. Similarly, this rubric is not meant to assess the community partner and its organization but the work of university-based practitioners in partnerships.

Conclusions

Our case study analysis of implementing antiracist best practices revealed significant disjunctures between theory and practice. Such disjunctures meant that our antiracist praxis was not well represented on existing SLCE partnership rubrics. Accordingly, we propose a new partnership rubric focused on antiracist praxis for university-based practitioners working at the intersections of the neoliberal university and the NPIC.

When we began using the proposed partnership rubric to evaluate our own efforts, we found administration more receptive to supporting our collaboration. Although our institution generally values community-engaged and antiracist work, our inability to locate our antiracist efforts, which comprised much of the energy and time we invested in our partnership, meant that our work went unaccounted for and unrecognized by administration. Being able to clearly articulate our gains and how they correlated to antiracist praxis helped garner more respect for our work, allowed others to see results from our investments, and placed us in positions to further our work through seeking grant funding, more student

involvement, and new collaborators. We hope that these outcomes might also be true for other university-based practitioners who adopt this rubric for their work.

The findings of this article indicate that university-based practitioners and our nonprofit partners are interested in engaging in antiracist praxis. However, the disjunctures between antiracist best practices and the reality of antiracist praxis at the intersections of the neoliberal university and the NPIC indicate the need for adapting antiracist best practices to our unique contexts. Furthermore, the need for assessment in neoliberal universities is likely to increase, thus making the need for assessments focused on our goals imperative (Jackson, 2017; Troiani & Dutson, 2021; Urciuoli, 2018). If SLCE is dedicated to antiracist praxis, as current leading literature indicates, we must continue to revise and develop assessment tools to support that work (Augustine et al., 2017; Delve et al., 1990; Dunlap, 2013; Grain & Lund, 2016; Jacoby, 1996; Kliewer, 2013; Liston & Rahimi, 2017; Mitchell, 2008, p. 50; Mitchell & Chavous, 2021; Mitchell & Donahue, 2009; Mitchell et al., 2012; Perrotti, 2021; Rosenberger, 2000; Santiago-Ortiz, 2019; Stoecker, 2016; Wade, 2000, 2001; Warren, 1998).

Finally, and perhaps more importantly, university-based SLCE practitioners must work within our systems to increase the kinds and manners of assessment in which we engage. One of the critiques of assessment culture is that it is narrow and so focused on the goal that more holistic work is hard to support (Stoecker, 2016; Troiani & Dutson, 2021). Universities already know that the assessment of antiracist work is always flawed because of the ways in which bias plays out in assessment (Esarey & Valdes, 2020). This is also true for the assessment of antiracist work in SLCE partnerships. A rubric with predetermined fields cannot capture the nuance required of antiracist praxis. For example, student-teaching evaluations are inherently flawed because of the potential for bias, the limiting structure of the survey forms, and more (Esarey & Valdes, 2020). Pedagogical specialists already know that more wholistic assessment measures, including peer evaluation, syllabus analysis, and more, are tools that must be used together to truly assess an instructor's classroom skills. Similarly, in order to truly capture the rich contributions of antiracist efforts in SLCE community partnerships, we must expand the kinds of assessment in which we engage.

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