

A Pedagogy of Kindness

Rutgers Active Learning Symposium

Cate Denial, Knox College
May 14, 2024

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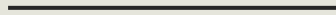
<https://bit.ly/PoKRutgers>



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For those who have vision or reading
difficulties, I will read the text on each
slide aloud



A photograph showing two hands shaking in a firm grip. The hand on the left is lighter-skinned, and the hand on the right is darker-skinned. The background is a soft, blurred sunset or sunrise sky with warm colors. The image is positioned on the left side of the slide.

My Teachers

- Everyone at the Digital Pedagogy Lab in 2017
 - Charles Behling and Roger Fisher
 - Karen Costa, Clea Mahoney, Judith Dutil, Melissa Wehler, Jessamyn Neuhaus
 - Gabrielle Raley-Karlin, Jennifer Foubert, Deirdre Dougherty, Hilary Lehman, Mary Armon
 - My students
-

Our Agenda

- 01 Introducing Myself
- 02 Academia and Kindness
- 03 A Pedagogy of Kindness
- 04 In Practice



01

Introducing
Myself
—

I'm Cate Denial



I'm originally
from Sheffield in
the north of
England



I'm a first-gen student



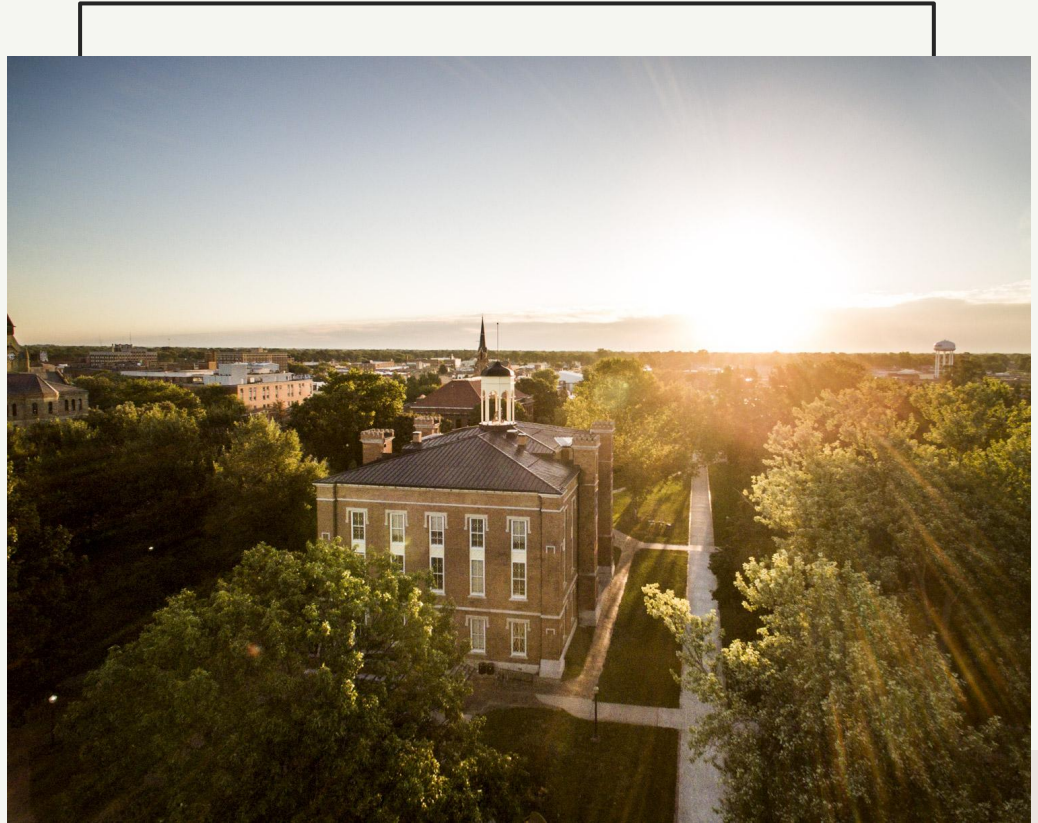
I emigrated to
the U.S. in 1994
to go to grad
school at the
University of
Wisconsin-
Milwaukee



I got my Ph.D. in
U.S. history from
the University of
Iowa in 2005



I am a professor
of American
history at Knox
College in
Galesburg, IL.

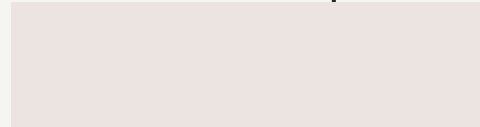


My specialities
are the histories
of women,
gender, and
sexuality, and
Indigenous
people



Credit: 2007 Powwow, Smithsonian Institution on Flickr
www.flickr.com/photos/smithsonian/2550182127/

I was a faculty
ombudsperson
for six years



I co-direct our
Social Justice
Dialogues
program

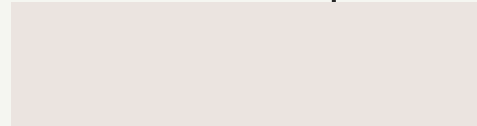
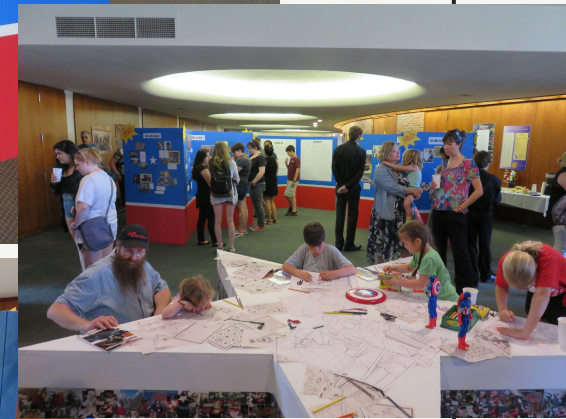


Photo courtesy of Cornell University

I'm a giant
Captain
America fan



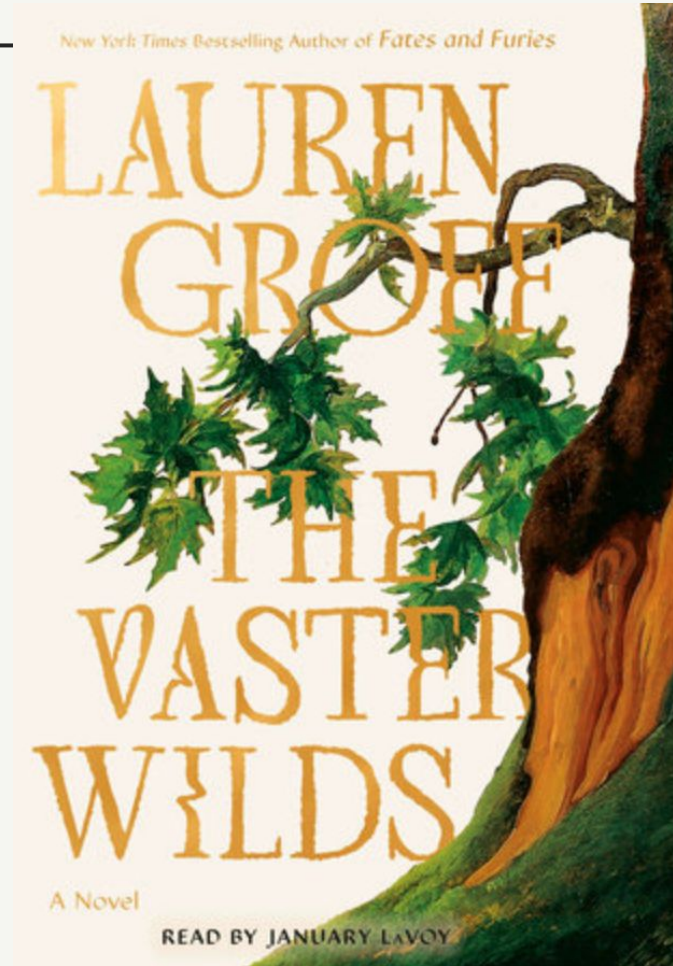
So much so that I had my public history students make a whole exhibit on Cap in historical perspective



I love to bake,
and hate to cook



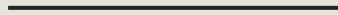
I am half-way
through *The
Vaster Wilds* by
Lauren Groff



I love to paint
watercolors,
play the banjo
(very badly), and
knit



Pleased to meet you!



02

Academia and
Kindness

A Pedagogy of Kindness

A Pedagogy of Kindness

Most people aren't setting out to be unkind in their teaching practices.

A Pedagogy of Kindness

Most people aren't setting out to be unkind in their teaching practices.

The problem is the culture of higher ed in which we're swimming.

A Pedagogy of Kindness

A Pedagogy of Kindness helps to keep us oriented toward compassion, despite the pressures around us.

A Pedagogy of Kindness

A Pedagogy of Kindness helps to keep us oriented toward compassion, despite the pressures around us.

It provides structure to make our innate kindness visible and practical.

A Pedagogy of Kindness



Justice

A Pedagogy of Kindness



Justice



Believing
students

A Pedagogy of Kindness



Justice



Believing
students



Believing *in*
students



Let's define our terms

What does kindness mean to me?



What does kindness mean to me?

First: what it's not



Kindness is not “being nice”



Kindness is not “being nice”

- Nice puts band aids over deep wounds. It lies about:



Kindness is not “being nice”

- Nice puts band aids over deep wounds. It lies about:
 - a. Precarity



Kindness is not “being nice”

- Nice puts band aids over deep wounds. It lies about:
 - a. Precarity
 - b. Power imbalances



Kindness is not “being nice”

- Nice puts band aids over deep wounds. It lies about:
 - a. Precarity
 - b. Power imbalances
 - c. Tradition / “rigor”



Kindness is not “being nice”

- Nice puts band aids over deep wounds. It lies about:
 - a. Precarity
 - b. Power imbalances
 - c. Tradition / “rigor”
 - d. Burnout / exhaustion



Kindness is honest



Kindness is honest

- Positionality

Academia continues to be hostile to so many of us along axes of race, gender, sexuality, religion, nationality, citizenship, disability, and class.

Where do we have power, and where do we suffer from its lack?



Kindness is honest

- Accountability

To dismiss the places where we trip in word, thought, or action without reflecting on the impact of each is nothing more than being nice—relieving ourselves of responsibility, and prioritizing feeling good over being just.



Kindness is honest

- A discipline

We will not always *feel* like being compassionate. . . We do not need to direct our energy into niceness. Instead, we need to remind ourselves that we believe in compassion and act upon that belief, even on the days when we are spitting mad, hollowed out, and heartsore.

Is academia kind?



Is academia kind?



At large? No.

We're socialized into distrust

We're socialized into distrust

Solitary Genius

We're socialized into distrust

Solitary Genius

Competition

We're socialized into distrust

Solitary Genius

Competition

Ableism

We're socialized into distrust

Solitary Genius

Competition

Ableism

Exclusion

We're socialized into distrust

Solitary Genius

Competition

Ableism

Exclusion

Antagonism

Take me as an example

As a graduate student I was taught:



Take me as an example

As a graduate student I was taught:

- Students are our antagonists



Take me as an example

As a graduate student I was taught:

- Students are our antagonists
- Students plagiarize



Take me as an example

As a graduate student I was taught:

- Students are our antagonists
- Students plagiarize
- Students cheat



Take me as an example

As a graduate student I was taught:

- Students are our antagonists
- Students plagiarize
- Students cheat
- Students won't do the reading



Take me as an example

As a graduate student I was taught:

- Students are our antagonists
- Students plagiarize
- Students cheat
- Students won't do the reading
- Students will challenge their grades



Take me as an example

As a graduate student I was taught:

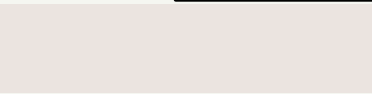
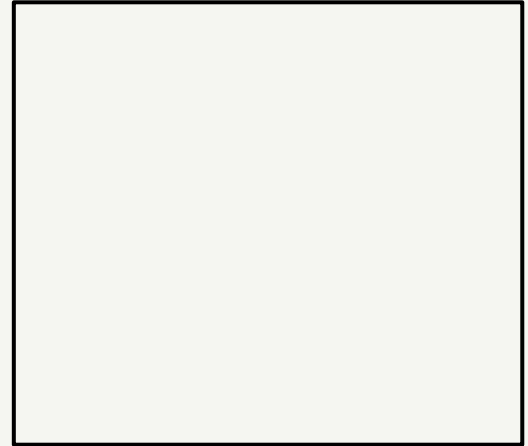
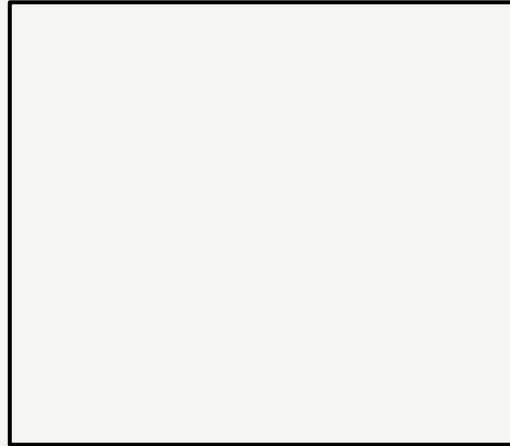
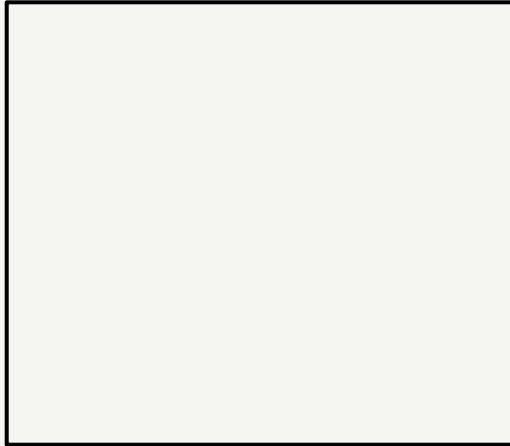
- Students are our antagonists
- Students plagiarize
- Students cheat
- Students won't do the reading
- Students will challenge their grades
- Suspect students at all times



How did I learn to do things differently?



Four things:



Four things:



Bringing
History
Home



Four things:



Bringing
History
Home



Intergroup
Dialogue



Four things:



Bringing
History
Home



Intergroup
Dialogue



Living with
PTSD

A map of Virginia showing county boundaries. The map is color-coded: some counties are shaded in a light tan color, while others are white. A semi-transparent grey rectangular box is centered over the map, containing the text "Digital Pedagogy Lab 2017" in a black serif font. The text is arranged in two lines: "Digital Pedagogy Lab" on the top line and "2017" on the bottom line.

Digital Pedagogy Lab 2017

Asked to critically question everything



Asked to critically question everything

“DPL was the first time I had been asked so bluntly to defend my pedagogical choices, and once I reflected, I found much of my pedagogy indefensible. At the time I felt regret and no small amount of embarrassment. My teaching was undone by the presence of a question that was never articulated quite this directly but was everywhere around me.”



“Why not be kind?”

Turn to someone sitting near you.

Reflect on a time that someone demonstrated to you that kindness makes a difference in academia

Take a few minutes. I will keep time.



03

A Pedagogy of
Kindness

A Pedagogy of Kindness



Justice



Believing
students



Believing *in*
students

A Pedagogy of Kindness



Justice



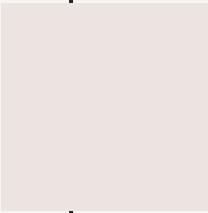
Believing
students



Believing *in*
students



Justice



Justice

71%
Undergrads
(nationally)

Kris MacDonald, "A Review of the Literature: The Needs of Non-Traditional Students in Post-Secondary Education," *Strategic Enrollment Management Quarterly*, 5:4 (2018): 159

“at least 25 years old, attend school part-time, work full-time . . . a veteran, have children, wait at least one year after high school before entering college, have a GED instead of a high school diploma . . . [are] a first-generation student (FGS), are enrolled in non-degree programs, or have reentered a college program”

Justice

53%: Camden

54%: Newark

29%: NB

Rutgers Admissions

First-gen students

Justice

~ 16K

Students at
Rutgers

Federal Student Aid: Rutgers

Received Pell Grants in fall 2022

Justice

~41.8%
Students at
Rutgers

Facts and Figures: Rutgers

Identify as Black, Indigenous, or
Persons of Color (BIPOC)

Justice

~19%
Undergrads
(nationally)

Postsecondary National Policy
Institute

Identified as LGBTQIA+ in 2020.
The reality is much higher.

Justice

21%
Undergrads
(nationally)

National Center for Educational
Statistics, "Students With
Disabilities," 2019-2020

Identified as disabled in 2019.
(The reality is much higher)

Justice

43%
4-year
undergrads
(nationally)

Experienced housing insecurity
while seeking their degree

The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice,
“The Hope Center Survey 2021: Basic Needs Insecurity
in the Ongoing Pandemic,” March 21, 2021, 26,
[https://hope.temple.edu/sites/hope/files/media/docu
ment/HopeSurveyReport2021.pdf](https://hope.temple.edu/sites/hope/files/media/document/HopeSurveyReport2021.pdf)

Justice

29%
4-year
undergrads
(nationally)

Experienced food insecurity while
seeking their degree

The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice,
“The Hope Center Survey 2021: Basic Needs Insecurity
in the Ongoing Pandemic,” March 21, 2021, 26,
[https://hope.temple.edu/sites/hope/files/media/docu
ment/HopeSurveyReport2021.pdf](https://hope.temple.edu/sites/hope/files/media/document/HopeSurveyReport2021.pdf)

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What does this have to do
with kindness?



Rethinking Engagement

“When I ask faculty who I work with what they most want for their teaching, hands-down, the most common answer is ‘student engagement.’”

Karen Costa





Costa: It's not that students are disengaged, but that they are engaged with and by other things.

Too often we want students to replicate our own patterns of engagement.

We want them to be students in the ways that we were students.




Central Carolina Community College, 1992

Costa: “Our students are deeply engaged in learning, in activism, in dreaming and enacting a better world for all life on this planet.”



Costa: “Are we willing to pave that desire path with them? Are we willing to broaden our understanding of student engagement?”





“[This] is not about bad people, it’s
about bad systems.”

Karen Costa

We must take into account our students' kinship responsibilities, work commitments, financial obligations, disabilities, and reaction to global politics and climate change, and meet them in that space.





We cannot assume that the things that seem apparent to us about education (or our fields) are apparent to them.



“The pandemic has done more than make us ill, grief-stricken, and overloaded; it has prompted people to reconsider their relationship to work, to office spaces, to education, and to life goals.”

A Pedagogy of Kindness

“Now more than ever, we cannot rely on our own belief that our disciplines are full of useful and worthy information and automatically expect students to agree and find meaning in our assignments.”

A Pedagogy of Kindness

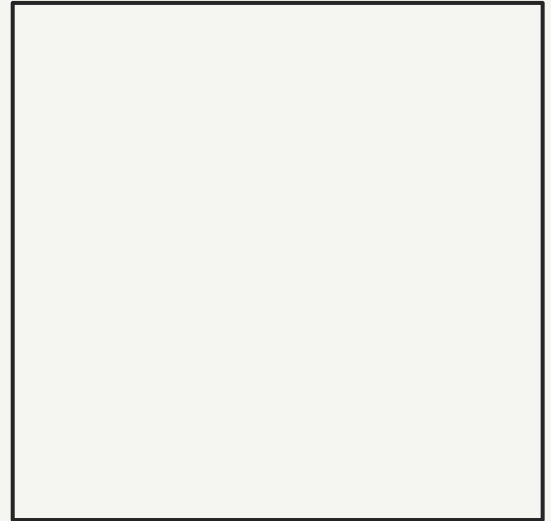
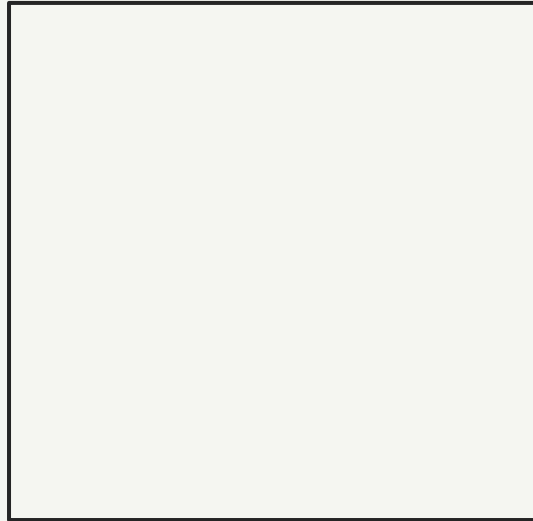
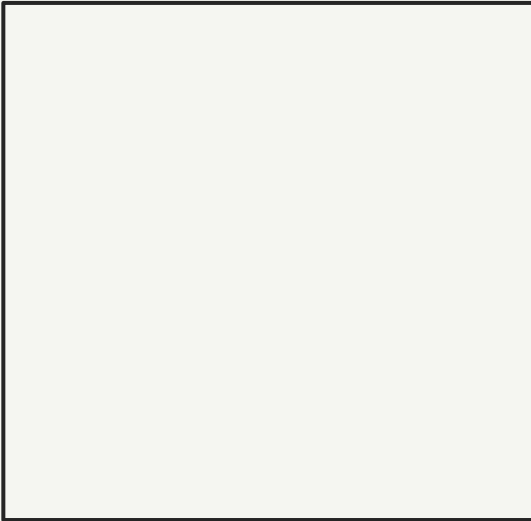


“We must take a hard look at what we’re asking students to do and then identify if there is value in it. . . . If there is, we need to be able to explain that value to students as clearly and directly as we can”

A Pedagogy of Kindness



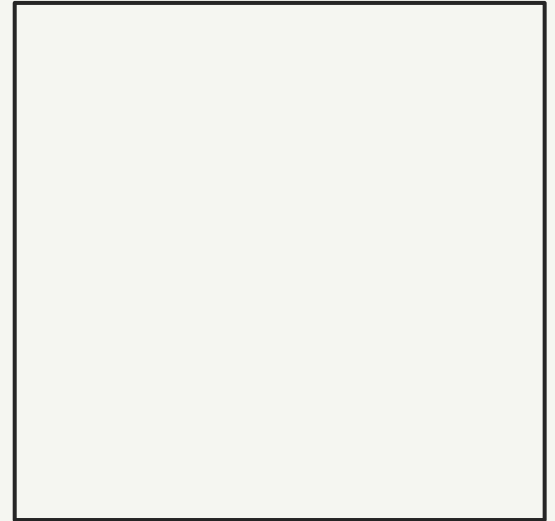
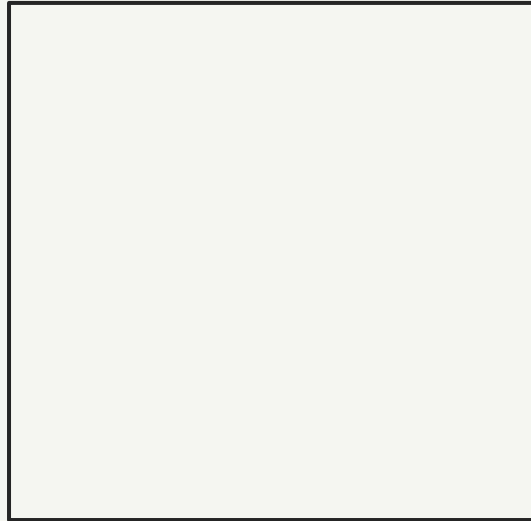
Justice and Kindness



Justice and Kindness

Question Assumptions

Do we know who our
students are and are not?



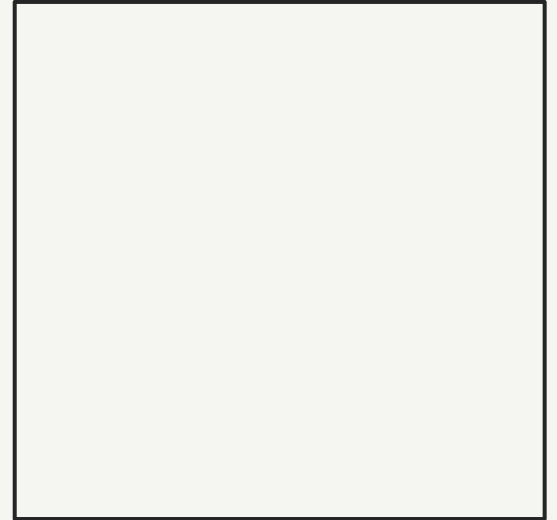
Justice and Kindness

Question Assumptions

Do we know who our
students are and are not?

Benefit of the Doubt

When we encounter
something we think is
outlandish



Justice and Kindness

Question Assumptions

Do we know who our students are and are not?

Benefit of the Doubt

When we encounter something we think is outlandish

Suspend Disbelief

Believe in what - and how much- students are telling us about their educational experience

A Pedagogy of Kindness



Justice



Believing
students



Believing *in*
students

Believing Students

Believing Students

Printer broke

Believing Students

Printer broke
I was sick

Believing Students

Printer broke

I was sick

Someone died

Believing Students

Printer broke

I was sick

Someone died

Laptop crashed



Believe them





Cultivate Trust

Cultivate Trust





Cultivate Trust

Will I disbelieve a student in
genuine crisis?



Cultivate Trust

Deal with outlying situations as
and when they arise rather than
suspect everyone




Cultivate Trust

Even if a student is lying about this particular thing, there's an underlying problem to address



Cultivate Trust

What about generative AI?



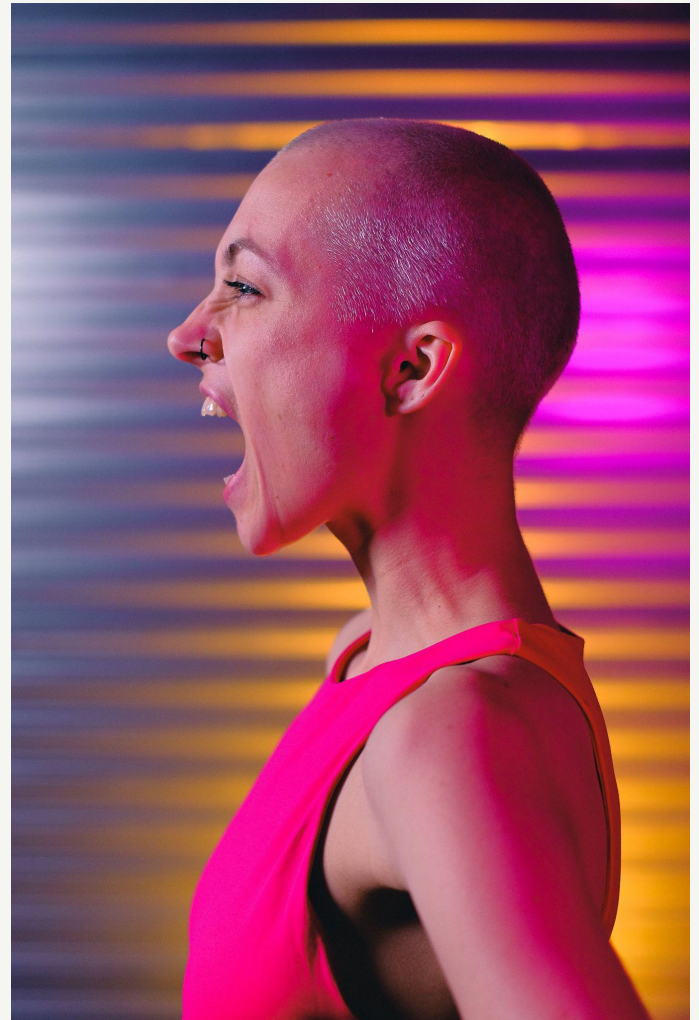
If we want students to make ethical choices, we
have to discuss the ethical issues

Many students don't know the context in which
generative AI operates.

Labor practices

“To teach Bard, Bing or ChatGPT to recognize prompts that would generate harmful materials, algorithms must be fed examples of hate speech, violence and sexual abuse.”

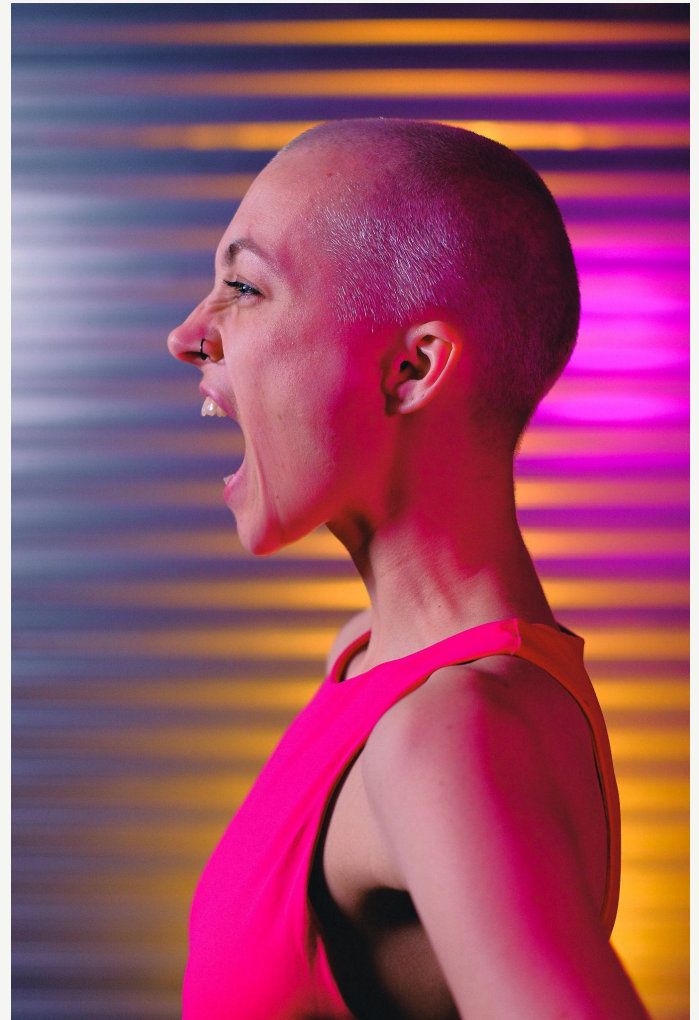
Niamh Rowe, *The Guardian*



Labor practices

“Stress, low pay, minimal instructions, inconsistent tasks, and tight deadlines—the sheer volume of data needed to train AI models almost necessitates a rush job—are a recipe for human error.”

Matteo Wong, *The Atlantic*



The environment

AI needs water to generate the electricity that powers servers, and water to cool them. The ethical considerations are enormous when we consider global water shortages, climate change, and profit motives. See:

Vishwam Sankaran, *The Independent*



How LLMs work

ChatGPT and other similar products do not generate knowledge, but instead work by means of sophisticated predictive text operations. See:

Mark Riedl, [Medium](#)



Access

Products like ChatGPT are rarely designed with disabled users in mind, meaning whatever benefits a given LLM might offer are inequitably distributed across our campuses. See:

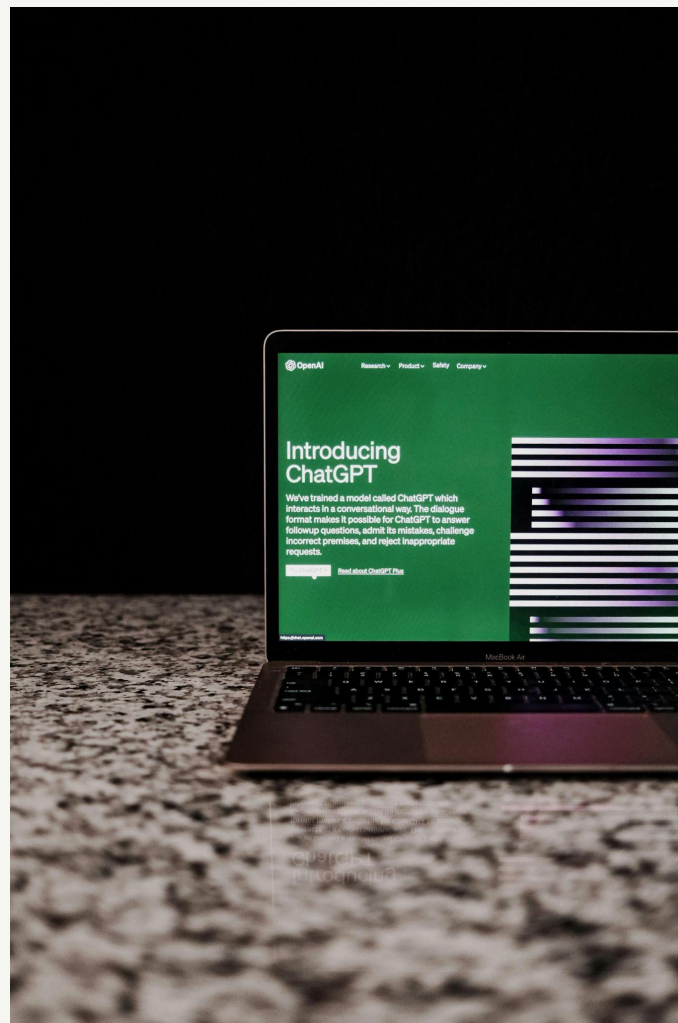
Macharia Waruingi, [LinkedIn](#)



Access

Developers are moving to become the first in the field, not to think about access. See:

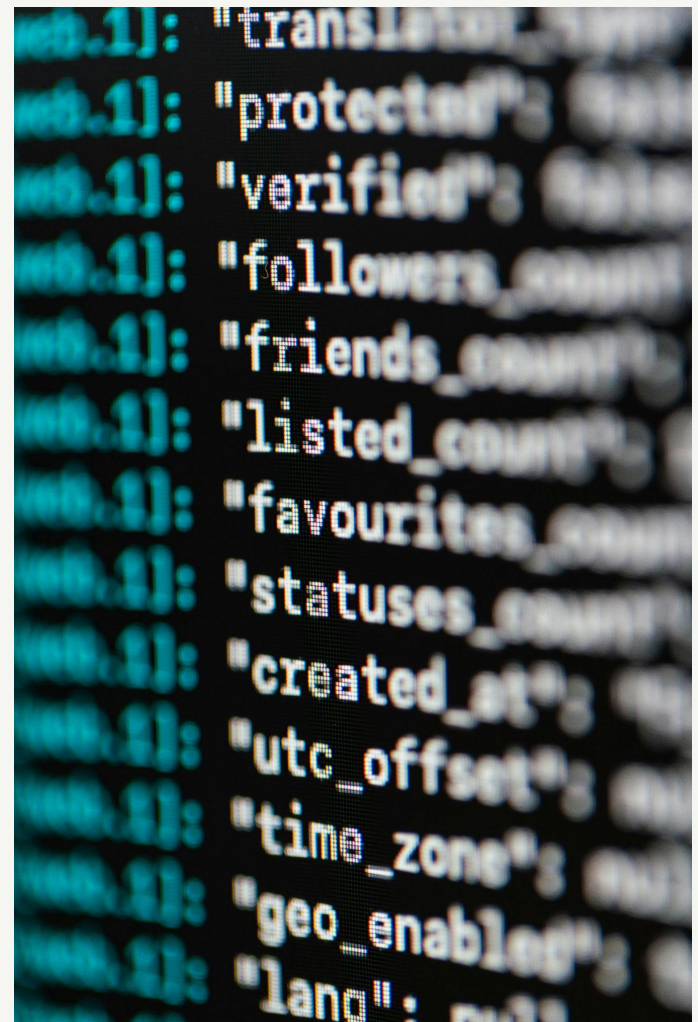
Laurie Henneborn, *Harvard Business Review*



Data Mining

It's important that students know what happens to the data that they provide to AI systems. See:

Matt Burgess, [Wired](#)



A Pedagogy of Kindness



Justice



Believing
students



Believing *in*
students

Believing *in*

Believing *in*

Students'
creativity,
thoughtfulness,
and capacity to
learn

Believing *in*

Students'
creativity,
thoughtfulness,
and capacity to
learn

Collaborating with
students on their
learning

04

In Practice

—

HIST 160, Spring Term 2017
Power and Inequity in America to 1865



Credit: Wesley VanDinter E+ Getty Images

Syllabi

Professor: Cate Denial
Office: OM 305
Office Phone: (309) 341-7382
Office Hours: Tuesday and Wednesday, 11am-noon
Email: cdenial@knox.edu (9am to 9pm, except 5pm Friday to 5pm Sat.)

This class will follow American history from before the landing of Columbus at Guanahani to the end of the U.S. Civil War in 1865. Along the way we'll explore what liberty has meant to different groups at different times; how the denial of liberty to some groups by others has helped defined power relations in an American world; and how appeals to liberty can change a whole nation.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Eric Foner, *Give Me Liberty!: An American History*. Fifth edition. (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2016). E-book: <https://digital.wwnorton.com/givemeliberty5sv1>

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At DPL I was asked:

- Who is the student you're imagining as you write?

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Syllabi

At DPL I was asked:

- Who is the student you're imagining as you write?
- What do you communicate about who you are in the way you talk about policies?



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Syllabi

At DPL I was asked:

- Who is the student you're imagining as you write?
- What do you communicate about who you are in the way you talk about policies?
- Is your syllabus accessible to as many students as possible?



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Syllabi

At DPL I was asked:

- Who is the student you're imagining as you write?

Someone whom I do not trust



Credit: Wesley VanDinter E+ Getty Images

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Syllabi

At DPL I was asked:

- What do you communicate about who you are in the way you talk about policies?

That I am in a position
of unassailable
authority and am not
approachable



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REQUIRED TEXTS:

Eric Foner, *Give Me Liberty!: An American History*. Fifth edition. (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2016). E-book: <https://digital.wwnorton.com/givemeliberty5sv1>

Syllabi

At DPL I was asked:

- Is your syllabus accessible to as many students as possible?

Not in the slightest. It's a wall of text.

Professor: Cate Denial
Office: OM 305
Office Phone: (309) 341-7382
Office Hours: Tuesday and Wednesday, 11am-noon
Email: cdenial@knox.edu (9am to 9pm, except 5pm Friday to 5pm Sat.)

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Attendance and Participation

The outcome of this course relies on your informed, honest, and active involvement. You are allowed two unexcused absences during the course, but your attendance is expected at all other times. Excused absences include serious illness or family emergency, and cultural and religious holidays with notification. Though I hope no one experiences an illness or family emergency, if you do, please inform me as soon as possible—ideally, in advance of the class meeting. Make-up work may be assigned. If you have a religious or cultural holiday that conflicts with a class meeting or activity, notify me by Monday, March 27 so I can make sure that you have an excused absence for this day. If I do not hear from you by Monday, March 27 I will assume that you plan to attend all class sessions, and full attendance will be required.

Your active, engaged participation in this class is crucial. In determining your participation grade in this class, I will assess your contribution to the conversation each week. Asking questions of texts in class will be central to this endeavor. In making these assessments, I realize that modes of participation may vary, and that there are culturally specific norms about how to best engage in a conversation. In this course, we will recognize the varieties of ways that individuals and groups contribute to discussion. Quantity of talk is not in and of itself the basis for evaluating participation; the quality of input, the consistency and depth of reflection, and the demonstration of active listening are important components of conversation. Good participants also support and help others to participate.

GRADES

Paper One	20%
Paper Two	25%
Quizzes	15%
In-Class Writing	15%
Participation and Attendance	25%
Total	100%

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS

If you think you [need an accommodation](#) for a disability, please contact Stephanie Grimes (x7478) at the Center for Teaching and Learning at your earliest convenience. Some aspects of this course, such as the assignments, in-class activities, or the way I teach may be modified to facilitate your progress. As soon as Stephanie makes me aware of your needs, I can work with you and the Center for Teaching and Learning to help make appropriate

Injustice

- Hard for students with ADHD or reading comprehension difficulties to parse

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Disbelieving students



- Harsh, convoluted attendance policy

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Not believing *in* students

- Distant, authoritarian language
- 

Cheerful header with alt-text embedded



Welcome and pronoun modeling

HIST 167, Fall 2020
The History of Gender and Sexuality in the U.S.

Hi, I'm Cate Denial, and I'll be your professor this term. Welcome to the class!
My pronouns are she/her/hers.



You can reach me in the following ways:

Email: cdenial@knox.edu

I'm available by email from 9am-8pm M-Th and 9am to 4pm Friday.

Saturdays and Sundays are my recharge days, so I will occasionally check my email, but cannot guarantee you a quick reply on those days.

Clear font

Transparency and boundaries

Icons to help
students
navigate the
text



Need help?

If you find any aspect of this course challenging, please come talk to me. There are lots of reasons someone might experience a challenge: some people may not be familiar with the conventions of history as a discipline; some people find it hard to organize their thoughts; some people flourish when given early feedback on how their paper is shaping up. All these things – and all the other challenges it's possible to have – are things I can help with.

This fall, the Center for Teaching and Learning will also offer online tutoring, including writing help. I will update this syllabus with details as soon as they're released.

UDL framing



Accessibility:

I try to design my classes to be accessible to everyone, but there may be things I haven't thought of. Please let me know if there's something else that would help you succeed in class.



Don't use a lot
of red or
green

Maximize
means of
communication



Our classroom community:

Our social identities – such as our race/ethnicity, class, gender, sexual identity, religion, mental and physical ability, size, national origin, and citizenship status – can affect not only how we are understood, represented, and treated on campus and in society, but also the types of knowledge and learning seen as worthwhile and legitimate.

Before

HONOR CODE

The Knox College community expects its members to demonstrate a high degree of ethical integrity in all their actions, including their academic work. Examples of academic dishonesty include plagiarism, giving or receiving unauthorized help, voluntarily assisting another student in cheating, and dishonestly obtaining an extension. If you have any questions about this, or if you are panicking about your ability to meet deadlines, please come and talk with me.

Please re-acquaint yourself with the Knox College Honor Code at
<https://www.knox.edu/Documents/PDFs/Academics/Honor-System.pdf>

After



The Honor System at Knox College

We commit ourselves to act with academic integrity this term – to be ethical in what we say and write, and to offer credit to others for thinking of ideas before us. I believe that everyone in my course is fundamentally honest, and I will help you learn the conventions of academic integrity, such as citing sources correctly and being clear about where our own words begin and end.

If you'd like to read more about the college's Honor Code – which was written by students just like you, and which students co-govern with faculty – you can find a copy at this link:

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- Annotations could take place in class,
- Annotations could take place as homework
- Collect in the annotations and read them, or have a discussion with students about their thoughts
- In large lectures have students talk to a partner, or in a small group of three or four

The readings

The readings

Who is represented in our syllabi and who is not?

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Are the writers, artists, scholars, and scientists to whom we direct our students' attention a racially and ethnically diverse group of thinkers and creators?

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Are the writers, artists, scholars, and scientists to whom we direct our students' attention a racially and ethnically diverse group of thinkers and creators?

Do they come from varied class backgrounds, hold different gender identities, and include people with disabilities?

The readings

Who is represented in our syllabi and who is not?

Are the writers, artists, scholars, and scientists to whom we direct our students' attention a racially and ethnically diverse group of thinkers and creators?

Do they come from varied class backgrounds, hold different gender identities, and include people with disabilities?

Where are they located in the world? What relationship do they have to citizenship in the place(s) they live?

Who has a seat at the table?

Who has a seat at the table?

Will our students see themselves reflected back from the curriculum, or be implicitly told they come from cultures and traditions without knowledge the academy deems worthy of respect?

Belonging

Think back. How did you know:

- What a credit hour was?
- What office hours were for?
- How a journal article differs from a magazine?
- What deans do?
- How to navigate the library?

Belonging

- First gen students

Belonging

- First gen students
- Students from under-resourced high schools

Belonging

- First gen students
- Students from under-resourced high schools
- Students who've been out of college for a while

Belonging

- First gen students
- Students from under-resourced high schools
- Students who've been out of college for a while
- Students entering a new discipline

What's one thing you could tweak in your syllabus?



What's one thing you could tweak in your syllabus?

Turn to someone near you and chat.

Take a few minutes. I will keep time.



Generative AI and Ethics

Does discussing the issues work?



Reading reflections through a
Google form

What new things did you learn from the reading?





What new things did you learn from the reading?

What do you think it's important we talk about today?



What new things did you learn from the reading?

What do you think it's important we talk about today?

What left you confused? What questions do you have?



What new things did you learn from the reading?

What do you think it's important we talk about today?

What left you confused? What questions do you have?

Is there anything else you want to share?

Responses

(all names
anonymized and
quotes used with
permission)

Responses

(all names
anonymized and
quotes used with
permission)

“I have never heard
about this before.”
(Wendy)

Responses

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“I have never heard
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(Wendy)

“I did not know
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Responses

(all names
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“I have never heard
about this before.”
(Wendy)

“I did not know
anything about this
topic.” (Emily)

“Thank you for having
us learn about this!
I'm really glad that I
know about it now.”
(Vic)

Responses

(all names
anonymized and
quotes used with
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“I have never heard
about this before.”
(Wendy)

“I did not know
anything about this
topic.” (Emily)

“Thank you for having
us learn about this!
I'm really glad that I
know about it now.”
(Vic)

“Thank you for
bringing this issue to
my attention! I didn't
know anything about
it!” (Dakota)

Responses

“I think it's important that we go beyond the conversations about academic integrity surrounding ChatGPT to address the effects that AI is having on folks, including children, in the global south and think about why this is not a bigger part of the conversation around the ethics of AI.” (Dakota)



Responses

“Most of the time we only talk about AI in terms of academic integrity (which is important) but this information frames it in a new way”
(Jordan)



Responses

“As a society I feel like we never care about what goes on behind closed doors, instead we are content with the shiny new toy and want to see what it can do, and leave the rest for someone else to worry about.” (Jean)



Responses

“We are asking the wrong questions:
‘Can we do this’ instead of ‘should
we.’” (Alex)

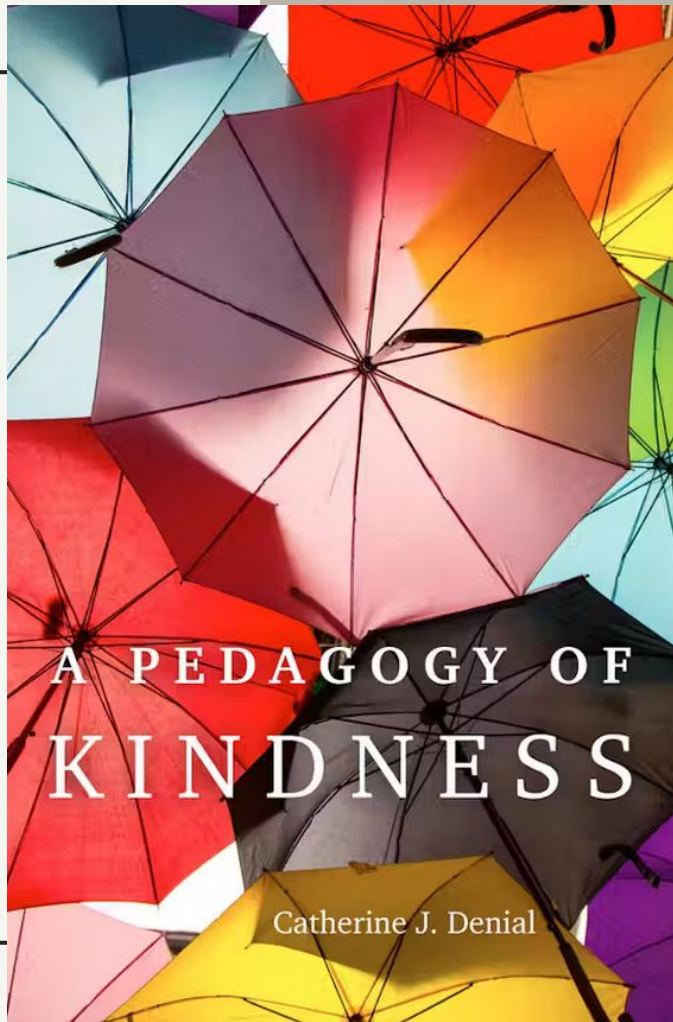




In conclusion

“Kindness” by Naomi Shihab Nye

Before you know kindness as the deepest thing inside,
you must know sorrow as the other deepest thing.
You must wake up with sorrow.
You must speak to it till your voice
catches the thread of all sorrows
and you see the size of the cloth.
Then it is only kindness that makes sense anymore,
only kindness that ties your shoes
and sends you out into the day to gaze at bread,
only kindness that raises its head
from the crowd of the world to say
It is I you have been looking for,
and then goes with you everywhere
like a shadow or a friend.



<https://bit.ly/PreOrderPoK>



Thank you

cdenial@knox.edu

@cjdenial on twitter
@cjdenial on bluesky

catherinedenial.org

CREDITS: This presentation template was created by **Slidesgo**,
including icons by **Flaticon**, infographics & images by **Freepik**

Additional photos from [pexels.com](https://www.pexels.com)