Title: Racialism at Texas A&M: Student Preconceptions, Changing Minds, and Teaching Efficacy

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Abstract:

Racialism is the belief that humans can be divided into distinct “races” that are biological fact and can determine many traits of individuals. This concept, while persistent in much of the world, has been refuted by biological and social science, which indicates that the cultural conception of “race” is neither a biological reality nor determinant. The discipline of anthropology is well positioned to explain nuances in biological and cultural diversity, but employing the most effective strategies to teach these important, and sometimes controversial, concepts is crucial. Patterns and Efficacy in Teaching Concepts of Race in Anthropology (PETCRA) surveyed over 300 undergraduate students in introductory anthropology courses at Texas A&M University. In 8 sections of the same course, students were given two surveys to determine their perception of race: one before instruction and one after. The pre- and post-instructional surveys asked students simple conceptual questions about race, about their own experience of race, and demographic information; the post-survey included questions about the instruction in this subject area. While many students started with inaccurate perceptions about the nature of race, statistically significant numbers of students adopted a more anthropological view after instruction. The instructors of the sections were also surveyed, which allowed PETCRA to understand different instructional techniques. Including videos with lecture resulted in statistically significant improvement in students’ answers; adding an assignment related to the topic also resulted in slightly more student impact. This research underscores the importance of evidence-based pedagogical choices in diversity instruction.