

Privileged Logics NSF Conference Descriptive Summary

Prepared February 25-27, 2024, edited 4/16/24

Descriptive Summary

This one-day conference was held on February 25, 2024, at the end of the APPE Annual Conference in Cincinnati, Ohio. The conference consisted of a keynote presentation, three workshop sessions, a working lunch focused on discussion of barriers to change, and a concluding session prompting participants to identify one action drawing on the day's conversations that they could try at their own institutions or organizations.

The three co-investigators wrote a descriptive summary of the day's events, and this report is an effort to combine those into a single synthetic account. Two main principles were operative: 1) description rather than interpretation was emphasized and 2) apart from the organizers and presenters, names and other obviously identifying characteristics were avoided.

General Observations

All three observers noted that the diversity of participants and of their home institutions was a great benefit. So too was the willingness to share – to contribute and to listen to the contributions of others. In part because many of these contributions were practical and forward-looking, we believe participants walked away with something positive. Engagement was high throughout the day, and participants expressed interest in being part of the continuing engagement and even the proposed grant discussion, which were among the projected next steps of the conference.

Keynote

Dr. Sarina Saturn provided the keynote with themes that included neuroscience; DEI terminology; holistic mindfulness; contemplative resilience, self-regulation and stress; a multi-faceted and grounded attention to well-being; allyship based at least in part on compassion; and, of course, privilege. Dr. Saturn's presentation also focused on mentorship, particularly reciprocal mentorship, and the difference between cultural competence and cultural humility.

The following notes provide more detail from the presentation:

Saturn noted the difficulty of DEI work and the need for self-care. In particular, she developed insights from trauma-informed care and repeatedly stressed the role of well-being in equity – as through attention to protection from harm, creating connection to community, work-life harmony, “mattering” at work and opportunity for growth. These are both concerns and values – things to be honored and worked toward. These aspects of a more holistic valuing were drawn on significantly in later discussions on metrics and learning communities.

Saturn contrasted cultural competence with cultural humility. The former assumes there is an endpoint to your knowledge and can foster stereotyping based on essentialist assumptions

about cultures. The latter focuses on self-reflection, personal critique, sensitivity to historical realities, and compassionate listening. It therefore encourages movement from the ability to engage across cultures to dynamic lifelong learning about cultures.

Similarly, Saturn's presentation of reverse and reciprocal mentorship highlighted the need for attention to non-hierarchical and humble relationships. She advised to seek interinstitutional mentors if there are no good mentors available at your institution. And to seek out mentees; don't wait until they come to you. Otherwise, you'll get all the "alphas" who already have opportunity advantages.

Across the keynote, there was a consistent theme - Doing better by doing things differently - that resonated with many. But this thematic unity was grounded in the particular discussions already mentioned and by a consistent presentation of experiences and of more formal resources, such as articles and websites.

For example, while making the opening point that taking stock in local area and history is important, she shared valuable web resources pertaining to Native land. and her discussion of mentoring was linked to references such as, "Peer, reverse and reciprocal mentorship" – Murray, S.A., Hinton, A. Jr., Spencer E.C. (2022, April) and, "Developing cultural humility in immunology and STEMM mentoring." *Trends in Immunology*, 43(4):259-261. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.it.2022.01.010>.

Finally, Saturn's attention to privilege drew on and extended these themes. She noted that higher ed began as a privileged institution and much of that legacy remains. There is a pervasiveness of privilege, and dismantling it is difficult. It is helpful to think about privilege vs. oppression. Again, she noted orienting articles ("Systemic racism in science" - Fuentes, A. (2023, July 20); "Systemic racism in science: Reactions matter". *Science*, 381(6655). <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.adj7675>) and highlighted that both individualized and institutional work are needed.

In time and substance, therefore, the keynote provided a welcoming start to our work together.

Highlights of Workshop Session on Use of Metrics

There was broad agreement that metrics currently used are unfair and reproduce privilege. Reasons include adherence to a competitive scientific culture, perceptions that these metrics are objective, their usefulness in appealing to outsiders for engagement and recruitment, and inertia and/or mistaken notions of rigor from those who have been at the institution for a long time and don't want to change the way things are done.

Examples of metrics that have affected outcomes for individuals due to privilege included: the demand for novelty and transformation (although there can also be an anti-innovation bias denying merit to delivery modes such as podcasts as well as to core expanding substantive

areas and a focus on community impact) over replication and incremental gains; statistical significance as a measure for worthwhile research; tenure as a status attached to financial stability; grades as measures of learning and achievement; differential treatment based on your field or major; the demand for grants and differential value attached to different kinds of grants (e.g., federal), and different methodologies (e.g., community-based research takes more time, and this is not accounted for when counting publications).

We also talked about “memorable messages”: E.g., “Don’t focus too much on teaching,” which undergird the existing hierarchies of advantage.

Strategies for mitigating negative outcomes of metrics because of privilege included: flexible appointment scheduling for research participants; appropriate financial compensation for research participants; workshops for informal peer review of methodology that assigns value before publication; expansion of promotion and tenure criteria (e.g., categories for community engagement and DEI work); recognition of integration of teaching/service/research; recognizing planning, engagement and other types of grants as worthwhile deliverables; equity audits.

Among the unquestioned assumptions that maintain privilege are the superior “rigor” of quantitative versus qualitative designs - science is even thought to be “by its nature” quantitative - hence we set our review standards similarly. Similarly, there is a conservative bias in that those in power get to define quality (what “counts”) as well as when and how and who gets to be involved in those normative conversations. Questions fostering inclusion and change would push toward more holistic and expansive metrics; ex., success of students/faculty/staff whom we have mentored; contributions to the institution and community (can we elevate service more?).

A two-tiered system (research vs teaching faculty) perpetuates the hierarchy even while ostensibly recognizing contributions that are not traditional. These hierarchies of merit and reward, including status and financial rewards, are present in hiring, promotion, funding agencies, publishers (e.g., journal rankings) and most of the peer review systems surrounding those arenas.

[Highlights of the Workshop Session on Learning Communities](#)

Several participants were not sure what a learning community was or had not taken part in one, so early discussion focused on differences/similarities among learning communities v. less focused groups v. facilitations v. student organizations while recognizing that these boundaries can be blurred.

Learning communities can be built around both institutional and interinstitutional goals and target populations. Within institutions, current voices can be supplemented by purposive expansions through cohort hires and other strategies to foster inclusive, and usually,

interdisciplinary conversations. In addition to multiple disciplines, multiple institutional roles are often usefully present in the learning communities that effect institutional change. The dialogue across, rather than among, supposed interests also encourages plain speaking and a focus on “facts” of the situation.

Strategies for avoiding the reproduction of inequities in learning communities included: intentionally bring in a variety of experiences and views; make sure there’s a seat for everyone, open dialogue, identify and address barriers to participation (e.g., provide financial or in-kind compensation like time off work or course release time).

Possibilities for impacting change included: creating new policies and recommendations, creating low-commitment opportunities for participation, hosting public events, encouraging both top-down and bottom-up participation. Participants said they thought avoiding inequity and impacting change kind of blended together in our discussion.

For allyship, one strategy was to attract hesitant participants (who might be precisely who needs to be involved in these discussions) by targeting role models, mentors and distinguished professionals who can demonstrate that this work is valuable and needed.

To leverage power, learning communities can ally with students and collect data from them as well as all employee categories at the institution (don’t leave anyone out). Be strategic about process; e.g., provide a narrower vision at first to focus the group, then expand the vision as the group learns more. The nature of the community may change from more homogenous membership for affinity to a more heterogeneous membership for bridging. Use scaffolding: start at one level of the institution, then move up to the next level, and so on.

Learning communities are a broad and flexible category - they don’t have to be formally convened to be effective. Their subject matter can be varied and can evolve over time. They can be about learning new things (ex., teaching online, teaching graduate courses; discovering new research methodologies, etc.) or about building community (creating a sense of belonging; providing support, etc.).

Successful outcomes of some learning communities were shared and included: creating resources for student success; leading to a discussion of how to treat the issue of sex/gender in a bio class; including updating lab manuals; changing the way a forensic scientist classified gender as “with or without a Y chromosome”; helping international students become more competitive for summer teaching assignments; and helping folks understand the need for professional development around how to talk with and listen to underrepresented students struggling with recent hate crimes.

Highlights from the Workshop Session on Research Ethics

Examples of what's done now at participants' institutions regarding research ethics ranged from nothing and bare minimum CITI modules focused on compliance for those with federally funded grants to monthly town halls and resources provided across campus and weekly face-to-face trainings to supplement CITI required for all researchers, whether or not they are federally funded (the most comprehensive program resulted from disciplinary action by a federal granting agency).

Examples of research ethics topics most directly related to privilege included sexual harassment and Indigenous student mentoring. But there was wide agreement that the orientation to understanding and addressing privilege was largely absent from most institutional training.

A narrow focus on research integrity ignores the social benefits of research and equity and generally leads to rather superficial topics and a focus on compliance. The emphasis on "sins" of commission versus omission is also rooted in a liability attitude.

Participants thought historical background and the case study method were valuable if done right, but they had also seen ineffective uses of such strategies. Other problems included pushback from privileged professors who think they don't need or have time for RCR training. Disregard for research impacts was linked to a "pure science" philosophy (though participants noted that caring about impacts and caring about pure science are not mutually exclusive).

Suggestions for improving RCR training included: be more transparent about the origins of research ethics training in harms to marginalized communities, emphasize cultural humility in instruction regarding historical background, highlight how these problems are still relevant today.

For assessment, this group liked the idea of a pre-test using a qualitative approach to test changing language and attitudes about topics such as What is evidence?

There was a desire to move beyond online-only experiences such as CITI to at least supplement those trainings with in-person learning community meetings. For example, you can't move on to the next CITI module until/unless you attend an in-person learning community meeting to process/reflect on that module. These kinds of interventions also could take the form of internal conferences inside labs to discuss good lab practices. This group also thought it was important for researchers to attend "booster" F2F meetings on an annual basis.