



BAME Awarding Gap Case Study

Decolonising Law Public Lectures open to
UG students

Ralph Wilde

What did you do/who's involved? What evidence/rationale underpinned your choice?

I have set up a new interdisciplinary public lecture series, with the much-appreciated organisational support of Lisa Penfold, Events Manager at UCL Laws, on topics concerned with the relationships between law, race, imperialism, colonialism, anti-imperialism and de-/anti-/post-colonialism. The topics address, in different ways, racism, and lecturers include Tendayi Achiume, the UN Special Rapporteur on Racism and Xenophobia, and Mindy Chen Wishart, Dean of Oxford Law Faculty and a prominent voice on twitter on the subject of racism and sexism in universities (#racemetoo).

As a way of raising the profile of my Ph.D. students, Alonso Gurmendi Dunkelberg, who is from Chile, to enhance his career prospects in the acutely competitive field of international law, I have involved him as host of half the events. Because of this, I have described him as co-convenor in the publicity for the events. However, the co-hosting is his only role – all the business of determining the speakers, topics, dates, inviting people etc was done by me alone. This is a very different model from the more typical approach whereby junior scholars/doctoral students are included by more established scholars in order for the latter to offload time-consuming work.

The series seeks to counter racism not only in the content of the lectures, but through the representation of world-class speakers from diverse heritages whose contributions may be otherwise overlooked on mainstream platforms. The decision was made to convene an all-female lecture series, particularly women from diverse ethnic and national backgrounds, to challenge inequalities/injustices in the field of law, and academia generally, in the UK and other western countries, which traditionally prioritize the contributions of white, male scholars. The only men involved are Alonso and myself as hosts, a reversal of the more usual format

where women are in the minority and/or involved in a secondary chairing, i.e., facilitating, function vis a vis male speakers. The only white European person on the programme is myself, as chair of half the lectures. Whilst I have attended many all-male, all-white events/panels, I have not come across an event series like this, which is all-women, and all non-white, speakers on a general topic (i.e. not a topic specifically concerned with women and/or people of colour) in law throughout my more than two-decades career as an academic.

Events like this often take place in the evening, however, the decision was made to schedule the lectures from 15:00 – 16:00 UK time, and hold them online, in order to accommodate as many attendees, including students, as possible, for example, people in other countries in different time-zones, and people in the UK with caring responsibilities who may not be able to attend in-person evening events. Most of the events will be recorded and posted online so that they can reach an even broader audience.

Information about each of the talks in this series can be found at:

<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/laws/events/decolonising-law>

and

<https://twitter.com/ralphwilde/status/1451125572285964290>

What would you tell someone who is interested in doing something similar?

From an events management perspective, I would recommend reaching out to potential speakers in good time. If you don't know the speaker first hand, consider approaching them through a colleague/contact who has an existing relationship with them to increase the likelihood of the speaker accepting the invitation. I would encourage others to think about the relevance of diversity and access to

programming in multiple respects--for example, looking beyond only considering the content of the lecture (but of course to address this), to who is speaking and who can/cannot access the event—and to adopt an intersectional approach, i.e. considering not only issues of race but also sex/gender and other significant identity characteristics such as caring responsibilities and disability.

Putting together the series required a lot of work, and, having administrative support from the Events Team in my Faculty to set up the logistics, and the Communications and Marketing Team to publicise the lectures, once I had invited all the speakers and set the schedule, was vital. Often the work of professional service colleagues is not sufficiently acknowledged and appreciated. I have made a point of prominently including reference to, and thanks for, these roles, notably when it comes to the Events Team, on the events website, publicity etc. This acknowledgment can also be seen in my social media posts about the events, e.g. <https://twitter.com/ralphwilde/status/1451125586601054214>. I would encourage anyone putting together a series like this to thank and publicly acknowledge the work of all staff involved.

As mentioned, this is the first time I have seen an all-women, all-BAME speaker series on a general academic subject in any field in the UK, including law. However, putting together such a line-up was not difficult in terms of identifying outstanding global speakers who would be free. This has demonstrated to me that it really isn't difficult to achieve a sex/gender balance and racial diversity in events programming, and prompted me to reflect on why, despite this, such programming in the UK and the west more generally is often not balanced or diverse. Given this, I would encourage colleagues to reflect on the gatekeepers of events in their own disciplines and the role they play in who students are exposed to during their time at university, and the potential impact this might have on students' experiences/worldviews.

What difference has this made to staff and students?

So far the series has been well received by staff and students alike at UCL, and more broadly (the series has a global reach). I hope it will serve to inspire BAME and women students that there are people like them making significant contributions to the field and that prominent global lectures like this are not just platforms reserved for white males. If you can't see it, you can't be it – and what students see in this lecture series are nine outstanding women of colour at the top of their game given a global platform.

I also hope the series serves to persuade colleagues, especially men, and white people, of the existence and merit of people who have been hitherto overlooked in the field, in terms of both sex/gender and race. And to reflect on when, and why, they have themselves been involved in overlooking women, and people of colour, perhaps sometimes unconsciously, and to be more mindful of this, and take corrective action, in the future. Students and academics can now point to this events series and ask of others why they are not doing more to address issues of sex/gender balance and racial diversity in their programming. Although things can always be improved (and I welcome feedback in this regard), I think this series has shown what can be done and offers a powerful rebuke to any excuses people might make to justify doing things in the usual manner.

What are your plans for the future?

We have events scheduled until March 2022. I will be on sabbatical for the following year, but when I come back, the series will resume. Onwards and upwards!

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank and acknowledge the hard work of Lisa Penfold, Events Manager at

UCL Laws for her logistical support, Danielle MacFarlane and Jessica Luong for help with publicity, and Alonso Gurmendi Dunkelberg, Ph.D. student at laws, who is acting as host of half the events. And to Professors Alison Diduck and Prince Saprai at Laws, who agreed to and supported the creation of these events

For more information on this case study (and to offer feedback!), please contact Ralph Wilde ralph.wilde@ucl.ac.uk