



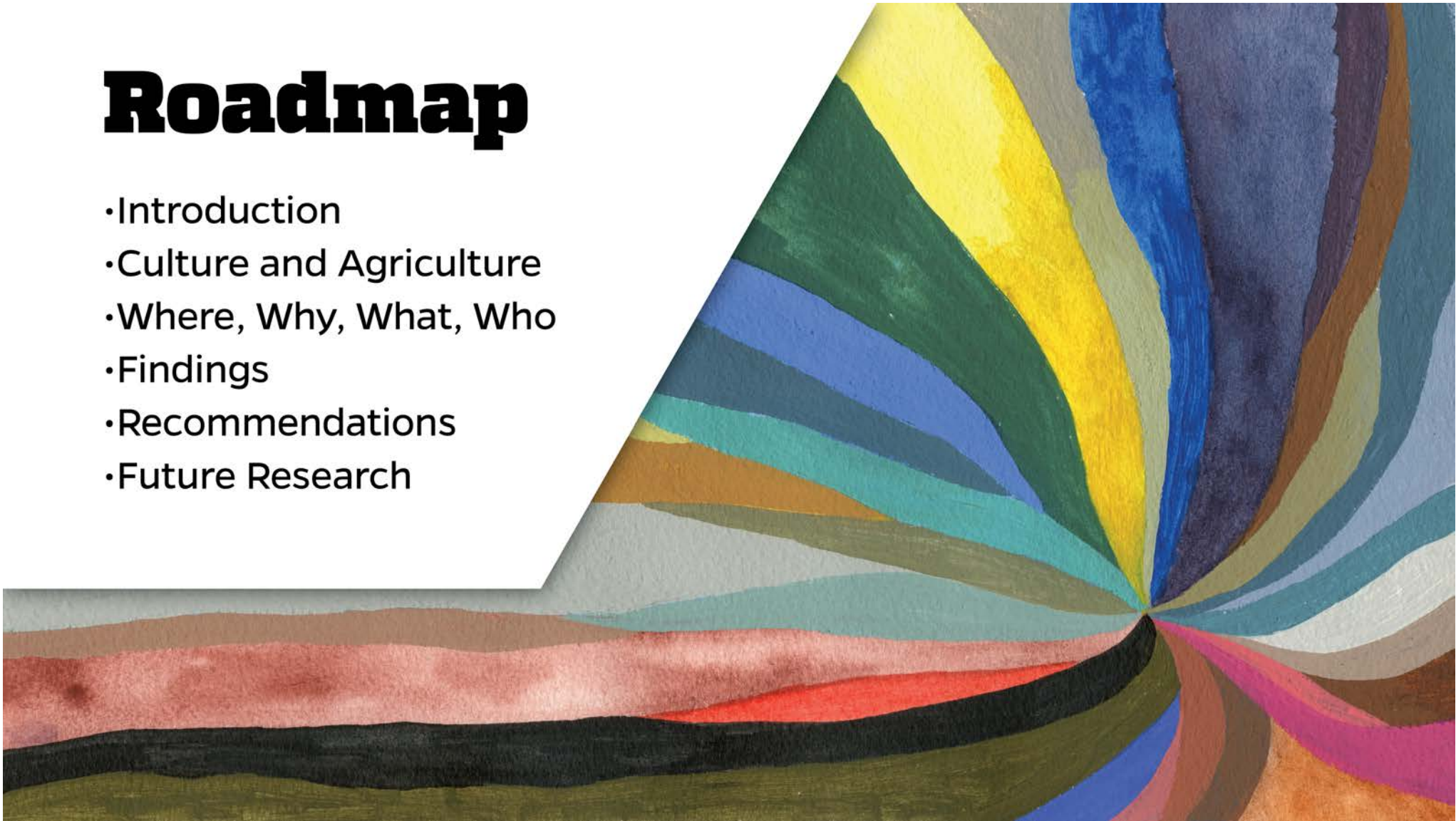
# **No Longer Black and White:**

Understanding the Experiences of White  
Agriculture Students Learning about Culture  
and Agriculture

Dr. Cecilia E. Suarez  
Jarred A. Shellhouse  
Annie Ferguson Muscato  
***University of Florida***

# Roadmap

- Introduction
- Culture and Agriculture
- Where, Why, What, Who
- Findings
- Recommendations
- Future Research





# Culture & Agriculture

First 3 things that come to mind when you hear:

- Agriculture
- Culture



# Culture & Agriculture

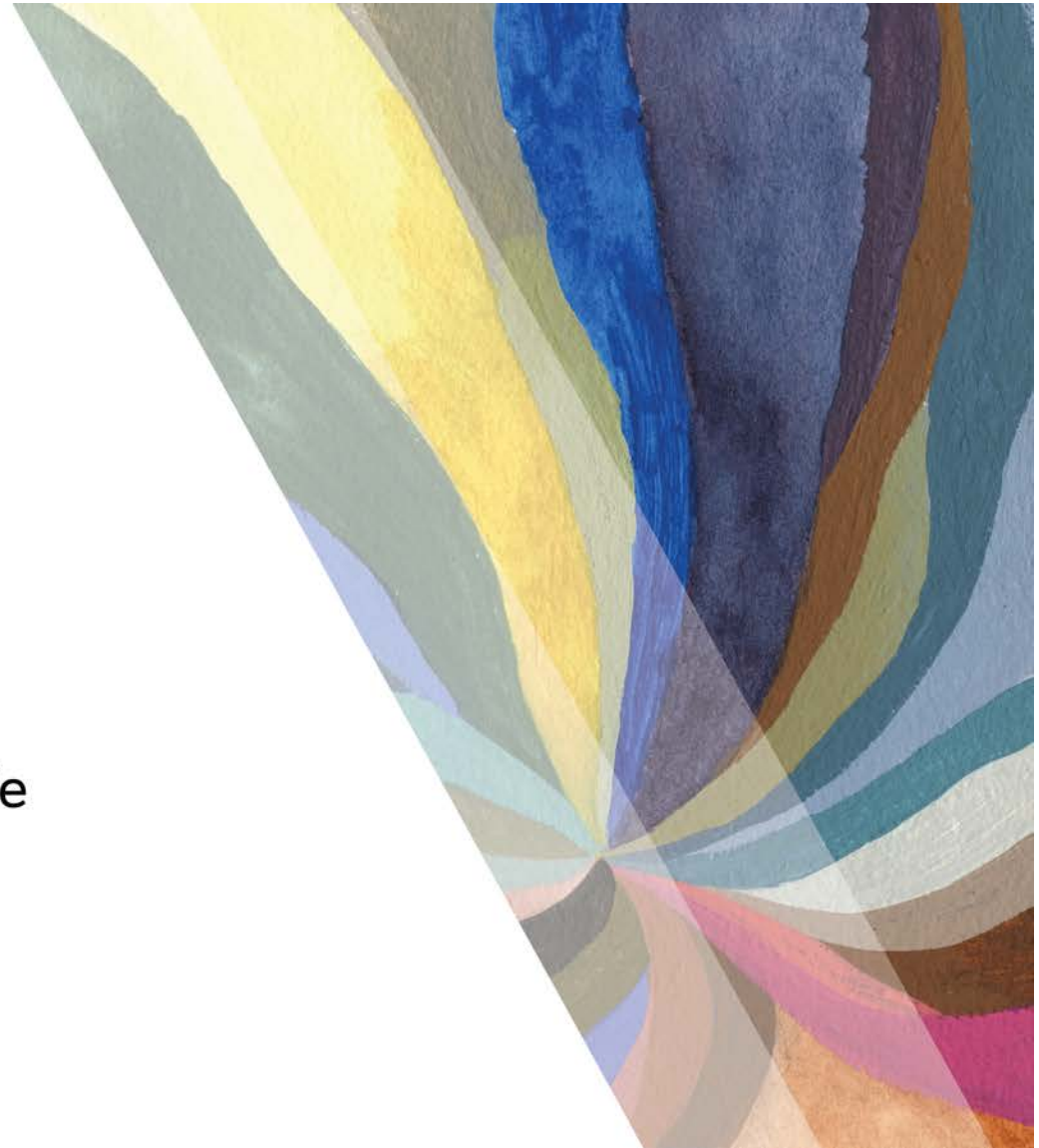
First 3 things that come to mind when you hear:

- Agriculture
- Culture

“Agriculture” – Latin roots

“agri” = field

“culture” = cultivate / way of life



# Culture & Agriculture

First 3 things that come to mind when you hear:

- Agriculture
- Culture

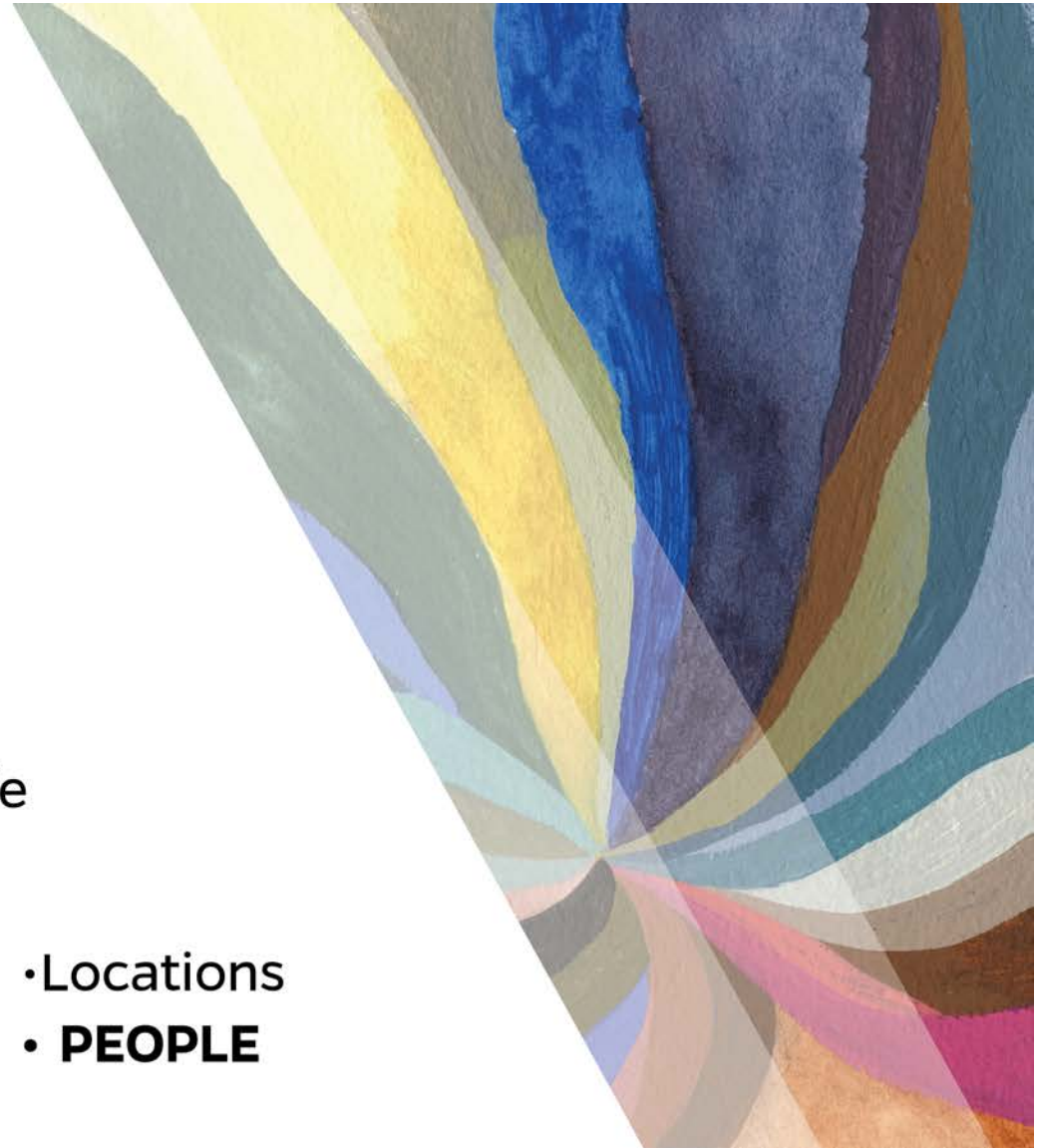
“Agriculture” – Latin roots

“agri” = field

“culture” = cultivate / way of life

Both have:

- Specific practices/traditions
- Specific times of year
- Locations
- **PEOPLE**





# Where It All Started

Intercultural Communication

**Required course** for undergraduate AEC students

3 credits, offered **in person** or **online**

## **THE FOCUS:**

- Identity development
- Understanding role of culture within self, society, and agriculture
- Understand how bias and perceptions impact communication
- Learn how to engage with difference with respect and civility
- Historical events in U.S. that impact intercultural communication
- Dialogue within dissonance





# Start With the “Why”

## IN THE BEGINNING

“Something” was going on

- Challenging
- Dissonance
- Push-back



# Start With the “Why”

## IN THE BEGINNING

“Something” was going on

- Challenging
- Dissonance
- Push-back

“We don’t talk about race ‘round these parts.”

“Why are we talking about social justice when we’re suppose to be learning about ag and communication?”





# Start With the “Why”

## IN THE THICK OF IT

- Debate turned to dialogue
- Questions increased
- Relationships formed

## AFTER THE COURSE


- Students came back for more
- Relationships continued
- Personal stories about how they applied course



# Our Questions

What are the experiences of White agriculture major students with diversity education?

## ADDITIONAL INQUIRIES

- How do students experience content in intercultural communication course?
  - How can we improve the course?
  - How can we create an experience that supports learning around this area?
- 



# Our Questions

What are the experiences of White agriculture major students with diversity education?

## METHOD

- Demographic survey
  - Individual interview
  - Semi-structured interviews
- 



# Total: 9 students

## QUALIFICATIONS

- Completed intercultural communication course at UF
- “Excelled” in course via overall grade, dialogue, assignments



# Total: 9 students

**5 women**

**4 men**

**9 from rural communities**

**8 from FL**

**1**

**9 identify as White**

**8 AEC majors**

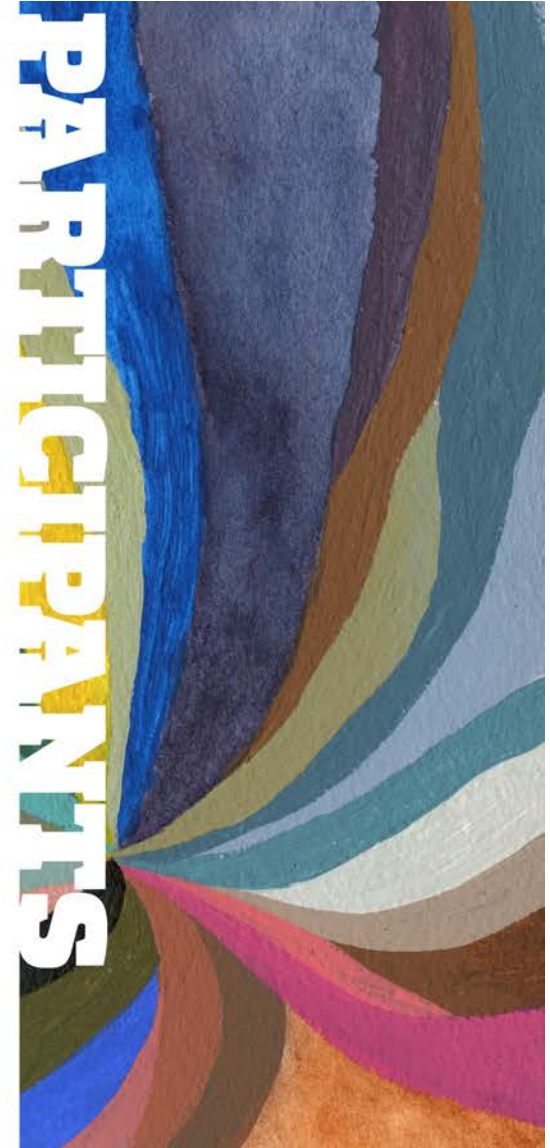
**1**

**4 srs**

**3 jrs**

**2 grad**

**PARTICIPANTS**



# Findings

## Four Themes

- Classroom Community
- Identity/Culture
- Value in & Need for Course
- Room to Grow





# Classroom Community

2 main subthemes:

- Trust
- Exposure to diverse perspectives
  
- Discussed by all 9 participants



# Classroom Community

“The one thing I did struggle with, which made me uncomfortable, is I never knew... **I didn't want to listen.** If I heard someone come at me I just, ‘see ya, bye, walk away.’ That was, I think, the toughest thing to learn, but Dr. Suarez made it adamant that you need to listen. You’ve gotta take it all in. And that helps in a bunch of different situations, not just when people are coming at you based on your privilege or what you have or, I mean it could be in the workplace.”



# Classroom Community

“I liked to sit there and listen and hear all these perspectives, I think that was probably my favorite part was just hearing **that everyone has a unique story** and you might believe this and I might believe something different but it’s ok, because at the end of the day we still have common ground somewhere and we have to find that common ground and work off of it, so I think that was my favorite part, hearing those perspectives and um realizing that **it’s ok to disagree as long as you can be respectful in the process.**”





# Classroom Community

“...she made me feel comfortable. But the class setting, you know, we jumped right into discussion and I was like “Oh boy,” you know I was a little intimidated. But when I realized she was...**open to everyone in the class expressing their opinions**, sharing their opinions freely and never, from what I can remember, held anything against anybody.”





# Identity/Culture

2 main subthemes:

- Intrapersonal development
- Dissonance



# Identity/Culture

“I think that’s one thing and just being a white male wearing jeans and boots and a cowboy hat, I feel like a lot of times that **fits the stereotype that is so often negatively looked at** which is unfortunate because I don’t feel that way at all.”





# Identity/Culture

“...just **recognizing who I am.** Recognizing **I do have an identity** and using my identity to not only move myself forward, but if I can, move others.”

“**I’m good with this, but maybe my family wouldn’t be. Or maybe my family would be, but my community or my religion wouldn’t be.**”

# Value In and Need for Course

2 main subthemes:

- Application in daily life
- Need for course in AEC



# Value In and Need for Course

“I’ve never experienced anything like that, and you know [his] story was bad, the reason he left Arkansas was because of the KKK... but hearing his story gave me a new outlook and you know **I didn’t realize that [racism] still happened today** and that was the biggest eye opener to me because you know you read about it and you hear about it but I didn’t know anybody- before, **prior to that, I didn’t know anybody who had that serious of an experience.**”





# Value In and Need for Course

“I think it should be required for any major. **You can’t Google this.** And so I think it should be required for most majors. Especially, the ag industry is really important. I think it should be required for anybody with an ag major but especially, you know business, journalism, everybody at some point is going to run into a situation where they’ll be uncomfortable or there’ll be privilege over one another and they need to recognize “how do I handle these situations?” and you know, you can’t Google that.”



# Value In and Need for Course

**“I think that your classes gave me the words, the tools, and also this is like, like I saw the map, but you were like, this is where this one leads. So I understood how to get to a place rather than just like wandering through it.”**





# Room to Grow

**“I never really thought much about privilege...** I believe in hard work. I’ve always been raised to be a hard worker and you can literally start from the bottom and work your way up. You can. Anyone. I don’t care who you are, where you come from. Some people say like, ‘Oh, people can’t get jobs because they don’t have an address’ or things like that... **but you can start out with a low job and you can work your way up.** You just have to want it. You have to want it.”





# Room to Grow

**“The transgenders.** I really didn’t understand transgenders because I was like, if you’re a boy or if you’re a girl, **be proud of who you are.** You know? Be proud of what you’re born as, but **for someone who is born with both parts to do that, it makes sense to me and I wouldn’t say anything negatively towards, or even have a negative opinion towards that at all because I understand that.”**

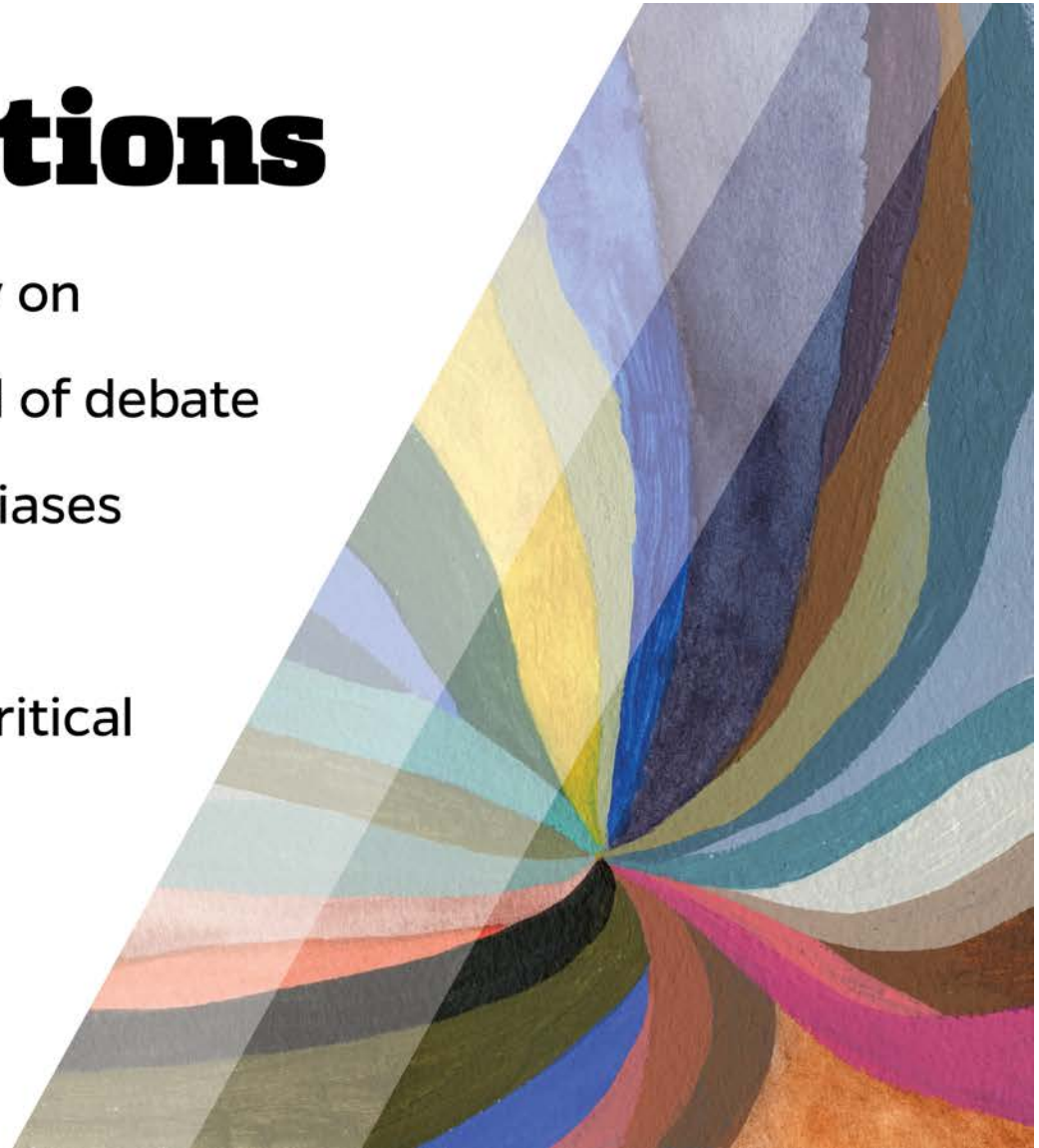


# Room to Grow

“For instance for school, our school was predominantly white students with also a few colored students and then... **[long pause]** Mexican, Venezuelan, and then black or colored would have been the lowest number.”

# Recommendations

- Build classroom community early on
- Create space for dialogue instead of debate
- Assess personal perspectives & biases
- Embrace uncomfotability
- Incorporate current events and critical thinking
- Allow for intrapersonal reflection





# Future Research

- Stereotypes of ANR students
- Relationship between religion and perspective
- Impact of specific classroom practices and course curriculum
- Inquiry on impact of gender in course



# Thank You

Dr. Cecilia E. Suarez  
suarez@ufl.edu

Jarred A. Shellhouse  
jshellhouse@ufl.edu

Annie Ferguson Muscato  
afmuscato@ufl.edu



**UF | IFAS**  
UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA