

Being Human in STEM

SCI 3900/HONOR 3990, Spring 2026 Syllabus

[updated 1/5/2026]

Click below to directly access the pertinent information.

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We reserve the right to change the policies stated in this syllabus at some point in the semester. If we do make a change, we will announce it in class and post a Canvas announcement about it.

Teaching Team

Instructors

The course is taught by two co-instructors:

- Claudia De Grandi [lead] (Physics & Astronomy): claudia.degrandi@utah.edu
- Jeanette Ducut-Sigala (Biomedical Research Education, UofU Health): j.ducutsigala@utah.edu

Community Engaged Learning Assistant (CELA): Kyle Cink kyle.cink@utah.edu

How to communicate with us:

- Please email Dr. De Grandi for questions/concerns on course logistics, grading, etc. For all other enquiries, feel free to email any of the co-instructors.
 - Email us from your [Umail](#) account
 - Please include “HSTEM” in the subject line (in addition to the topic of the message) Expect a 24-48 hour turnaround time
 - If you don’t hear from us after 2 days, please email us again

Lauren’s Promise: *We will listen and believe you if someone is threatening you.*

Quick Info on the Course

Class Meeting Time and Location

Tuesday and Thursday 2-3:55 pm in CSC 025 (link to campus map for Crocker Science Center [here](#))

- Tuesday: Generally devoted to class discussions of readings.
- Thursday: Geared to team project development, usually will include structured time for team projects.

Prerequisites

None. The course is aimed at students across STEM fields and pre-medical students.

Expected Student Workload

3 credits = average of 9 hours of work per week.

- 4 hours a week in class (Tue and Thu)
- 5 hours outside of class divided roughly among:
 - Outside reading per week: 2-3 hours
 - Outside writing per week: 1-2 hours
 - Outside work on projects: 1-2 hours
- Note: The above represents an approximate breakdown of how you will spend your outside of class time, there will be some variability each week throughout the semester.

Required Text

1. *How to Be an Antiracist* (Ibram X. Kendi). Options to read the book:
 - Online access available through the [Marriott Library](#) (2 copies available only at any given time)

- **You can borrow a book copy from the instructors: please email Claudia before the first class (1/6/26) to secure a copy.**
 - If you'd like to purchase your own copy: copies are available [online](#) (\$9-12 plus shipping)
 - Audible versions of the book are also available online at [Amazon](#) or other websites
2. Additional required readings will be posted and made available on Canvas at least a week in advance.
- We will provide PDF copies of articles and/or direct hyperlinks.
 - Some of the hyperlinks may be behind paywalls, but we'll make sure you'll have access to them. In particular, we ask that you activate your [University of Utah New York Times Account](#) by the end of the first week of classes. Please also refer to the [database website](#) of the Marriott Library, which provides instructions for gaining access to other journals.
 - If you need to remotely access campus to access resources, be sure to have your VPN configured (follow the directions on the [University VPN page](#)).

Course Website

All course materials will be accessible on the course Canvas site, and you should use that as a main source of information for this class. This is also where we will submit and you will turn in your assignments. Additional information on the course as a whole can be found at: <https://csme.utah.edu/beinghumaninstem/>. Unless we specifically refer you to this website, you are not expected to check it. This is, however, where we will post information on the final symposium, and so is a good website to share with family and friends!

Final Examination (Symposium)

The final exam for this course is scheduled for **Monday, April 27, 1-3pm**. This final exam will take the form of a symposium, where you will share the results of your final projects to a public audience. This is a mandatory component of the course and hence you are required to attend.

Course Description, Goals and Expected Learning Outcomes

Course Description

The course examines social and cultural factors which may impact awareness, participation, representation, and success in STEM fields. The course has two components:

- 1) **Reading and discussion:** during one of the two weekly class meetings (Tuesday), students and instructors analyze, discuss, and critique texts, data, and personal narratives.
- 2) **Project development:** the other weekly class meeting (Thursday) is devoted to the design, execution, and evaluation of interventions led by the students with the goal of improving the experience of STEM students at the U. At the end of the semester, students present their group projects to the campus community via a public event.

Students leave the class with the ability to understand others' perspectives and, in their role as future scientists and physicians, advocate for equity in STEM fields.

At the end of the semester, students in the class will present their projects and other course findings at a symposium that will be open to University of Utah faculty, staff and students. In addition, students are encouraged to invite 1-2 entities *within or outside of the UofU community* (e.g., local companies/organizations, schools, affinity groups).

Course Goals

- Investigate the themes of diversity and inclusion in STEM.
- Create a community of students and faculty in STEM who critically analyze and discuss these themes.
- Design, develop, and implement interventions to improve the STEM climate at the U of U.
- Build awareness of issues relating to diversity and inclusion in STEM at the U through an end-of-semester symposium open to the U of U community of faculty, staff, and students.

Learning Outcomes

This course fulfills the [General Education Diversity](#) (DV) requirement and the [Community Engaged Learning designation](#). This course addresses the following Essential Learning Outcomes: Creative Thinking, Teamwork, and Civic Engagement.

At the end of the semester, students will be able to:

- Reflect on how personal and social backgrounds and identities affect students' experiences in STEM.
- Demonstrate topic fluency with regards to significant issues impacting climate and inclusion in STEM fields.
- Communicate personal perspectives, reflections, and questions related to the themes discussed in the course, both verbally and in writing.
- Summarize and provide a critique of scholarly articles and media sources.
- Respectfully engage in and contribute to classroom discussions.
- Choose, design, and implement a project informed and motivated by the topics discussed in class and/or by additional research to improve students' experience in STEM at the U of U and enhance equity and inclusion in the STEM fields.
- Collaborate effectively with groups of classmates on small and large team projects.

Community Engaged Learning involves students, faculty, and community partners working together to apply knowledge in authentic settings to address community and/ or societal needs while meeting academic objectives. CEL enhances and deepens students' understanding of an academic discipline by facilitating the integration of theory and practice.

Community Partners: U of U students in STEM who will be involved in students' projects (e.g. through

surveys, interviews, conversations, etc.), U of U Offices/Centers (e.g. Center for Disability and Access, Office of the Dean of Students, Student Success Coaches), Student Organizations (e.g. Disability and Access in STEM (DASTEM), SACNAS), U of U faculty from other Colleges (e.g. College of Engineering, College of Social Work, College of Education).

Inclusivity

We strive to make this class an inclusive community where we respectfully listen and learn from the many perspectives of people of differing backgrounds and beliefs in the course. As a community, we aim to be respectful to all. We reject all forms of prejudice and discrimination, including but not limited to those based on age, color, disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, body type, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, and veteran status. Faculty and students are expected to commit to creating an environment that facilitates inquiry and self-expression while also demonstrating diligence in understanding how others' viewpoints may be different from their own. We understand that, as a class, we will move forward *imperfectly* and that we will *all* make mistakes. We will use such imperfections and mistakes as learning opportunities to grow as a community while always owning the responsibility for the impact of our actions and words.

Course History

The idea for a Being Human in STEM course came from chemistry professor Sheila Jaswal from Amherst College in response to Fall 2015 racial protests across several American college campuses. The student protests brought to light a need for dialogue between students and faculty about inclusivity; this need was even more acute in STEM where often students perceive that their “identity should remain at the door.” Consequently, the *Being Human in STEM* course asserts that students’ identities matter and that every student deserves the space and freedom to be themselves in a STEM classroom. A course with the same purpose, *Race and Gender in the Scientific Community*, had already been initiated at Brown University in 2014 by students, including black women, and was adopted by the University. Amherst’s and Brown’s allied courses connected in 2016. Since then, the [Being Human in STEM](#) course has been taught with the following mission:

Collaboratively design projects that aim to foster a more inclusive, supportive STEM community and develop a framework for students and faculty to understand and navigate diverse identities in the classroom and beyond.

Inspired by [Amherst’s](#) and Brown’s work, several other colleges in the Northeast (e.g., Yale University) started their own implementation of the course. Claudia De Grandi co-taught the class twice at Yale University before she joined the University of Utah in 2018. Being Human in STEM had never been offered at a public university before, and Dr. De Grandi was delighted to spearhead the implementation of this course at the University of Utah.

The course was offered for the first time at the University of Utah in Spring 2020, co-taught by five instructors across the College of Science: Claudia De Grandi (Physics & Astronomy), Kelly MacArthur (Mathematics), Jon Rainier (Chemistry), Holly Sebahar (Chemistry), and Anil Seth (Physics & Astronomy).

Course Components

Grade Calculation

A. Class Attendance	18%
B. Class Participation	10%
C. Weekly Assignments	22%
D. Book Reading	10%
E. Writing and Reflection Assignments	10%
F. Team Project *	30%

*(including proposal, design, implementation, and Symposium presentation)

The class is formatted so that all students who put in the time and effort can obtain an A. Grade breakdown are as follows:

Score in %	Letter Grade
100 to 93	A
< 93 to 89	A-
< 89 to 85	B+
< 85 to 80	B
< 80 to 75	B-
< 75 to 70	C+
< 70 to 65	C
< 65 to 60	C-
< 60	D, F

A. and B. Class Attendance and Participation

Attendance and participation in class discussions and activities are crucial to success in this course. Participation includes actively listening, being prepared to discuss the required readings, and thoughtfully contributing to the weekly discussion, activities, and group work. Much of what we do in this class requires us to reflect on the implications of the material we read and discuss. Thus, your presence and participation are important.

- Attendance will be tracked on Canvas using the Roll Call Attendance tool.
- Participation in class (or lack thereof) will be noted at each class meeting. To earn full credit for class participation, you are required to regularly: 1) contribute to the class discussion, 2) submit your answers and comments to online Poll Everywhere questions that we'll use during each class.

C. Weekly Assignments

- An assignment will be due *every Sunday at 11:59 pm* and posted at least 1 week in advance.
- Each assignment has two components:
 1. Reading articles and/or book chapters, watching videos, and/or listening to podcasts.

2. Submission to the pertinent Canvas Discussion Boards. This may take the form of a summary, reflection, or responding to prompts. Discussion Board posts will be an important component of the class to inform and guide our Tuesday's class discussion and to facilitate conversation outside of class.
- We highly recommend that students complete these assignments in 2-3 sessions, and that students take notes on the materials. This is so that students can better respond to prompts without having to re-read/watch/listen to the materials.
 - You will also be required to submit a Post-Class reflection assignment after each Tuesday's class (due on Tuesday at 11:59pm).
 - Note: you'll also have some short assignment due *every Wednesday at 11:59 pm* in preparation for the Thursday class and relevant to the Team Project development (see below).

D. Book Reading

As a class we will read *How to Be an Antiracist* (Ibram X. Kendi). Students will be assigned to read about 40 pages per week for the first 6 weeks of the semester, ending the book by Friday February 20. Every week they will be asked to post a comment on the chapters they read that week. A Book Reflection Essay will be due on Sunday February 22.

E. Writing and Reflection Assignments

There will be 3 writing assignments for a total of 50 points:

1. STEM Autobiography (due Wed 1/14) [10 points]
2. Mid-Semester Synthesis and Feedback (due Fri 3/6) [20 points]
3. Final Reflection Essay (due Sun 4/12) [20 points]

F. Team Project

Students will work in teams to design and implement interventions aimed at improving the experience and climate for STEM students at the U. These interventions can take different forms, some examples from past implementations of the course are:

- Design and implement surveys to assess some aspects of the STEM climate on campus¹
- Organize a student-led workshop for STEM faculty to inform them of campus-relevant statistics and best teaching practices from a student perspective.
- Establish support groups and visibility for specific groups on campus (e.g., first-generation and low-income students, disabled students)
- Design and lead diversity and inclusion discussions with faculty and students in a STEM course
- Create online resources, peer-to-peer mentoring, and informative sessions for incoming students interested in STEM
- Examples of past projects can be found at: <https://csme.utah.edu/beinghumaninstem/>

¹ At Yale University this project eventually led to a publication: STEM Climate survey developed through student–faculty collaboration, *Teaching in Higher Education*, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2019.1636219>. At University of Utah students discussed the results of the survey with former President Watkins as part of her [U Rising podcast](#).

Students may develop something like the above or something completely new. It will be up to them to identify the major needs via research and data collection and maximize the impact of their intervention.

Successful completion of a Team Project includes:

- Initial individual project proposal
- Regular weekly collaboration with project team members in accordance with established team norms
- Submission of weekly project updates (due Wednesday at midnight)
- Design and execution of team project
- Write up/delivery of project outcomes and/or findings
- Public presentation of the project at the end-semester symposium during Final Exam period on **Monday April 27 1-3pm**

Absences, Late submissions, and Extension Requests

An **Absence and Extension Request Form** is available and linked on our CANVAS homepage. **Please use this form to notify us** of any absence and/or circumstances you believe should allow you to have an extension *before* the deadline/class period in question.

- *Class attendance:* You will be excused for two class absences automatically. Three or more absences will result in a 0.67% deduction from your overall course percentage for each additional class missed.
 - If you happen to miss more than 4 classes, a check-in meeting with the instructors will be required.
 - Please stay home if you are sick and/or have symptoms of flu, Covid- 19, or other illnesses. If you are recovering from an illness, consider wearing a mask to protect yourself and others.
- *Late submissions:* All assignments will be subjected to a 3% late penalty per each hour the submission is late.
 - *Extensions:* Please use the form above to request an extension at least 24 hours before. Please communicate and let us know if you anticipate any conflicts – it is our goal to facilitate your learning and be flexible, but we request you to be active participants in this process and engage in clear and honest communication with us.

Course Policies and Resources

The Americans with Disabilities Act

The University of Utah seeks to provide equal access to its programs, services, and activities for people with disabilities. If you will need accommodations in this class, reasonable prior notice needs to be given to the [Center for Disability and Access](#), (801) 581-5020. CDA will work with you and the instructor to make arrangements for accommodations. CDA location: [Student Services Building](#), Third Floor, Room 350. You are encouraged to come and talk to us about your necessary accommodations within the first two weeks of the semester.

Campus Safety

The University of Utah values the safety of all campus community members. To report suspicious

activity or to request a courtesy escort, call campus police at 801-585-COPS (801-585-2677). You will receive important emergency alerts and safety messages regarding campus safety via text message. For more information regarding safety and to view available training resources, including helpful videos, visit safeu.utah.edu

Addressing Sexual Misconduct

Title IX makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender (which includes sexual orientation and gender identity/expression) is a civil rights offense subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories such as race, national origin, color, religion, age, status as a person with a disability, veteran's status or genetic information. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you are encouraged to report it to the Title IX Coordinator in the [Office of Equal Opportunity and Title IX](#), 135 Park Building, 801- 581-8365, or the Office of the Dean of Students, 270 Union Building, 801-581-7066. For support and confidential consultation, contact the [Center for Campus Wellness](#), 426 SSB, 801-581-7776. To report to the police, contact the [Department of Public Safety](#), 801-585-2677 (COPS).

Lauren's Promise (<https://laurenmccuskey.org/laurens-promise/>): we will listen and believe you if someone is threatening you, and help you connect with the appropriate help and resources. If you are in immediate danger, call 911. Utah Domestic Violence Coalition www.udvc.org is another good resource 800-897-5465.

As University Employees, the instructors of the class are mandatory reporters. If you report to us or anyone else who works for the university, know that we are mandatory reporters. All this means is that after checking that you are okay and helping you reach appropriate resources, we will notify the OEO and they will reach out to you. You are in complete control, and can choose to do nothing (ignore their emails), file a report, or request an investigation. They can help you navigate your options and remember, YOU are in control.

Violence Prevention

We are committed to make sure all students in the class have the support they need if they are experiencing violence, including but not limited to domestic violence, interpersonal violence, and stalking. If you are experiencing violence we encourage you to tell someone and seek help from the resources listed below.

Campus Resources

- Safe U safeu.utah.edu
- Advocacy/Mental Health wellness.utah.edu
- Contact a Victim Advocate advocate@sa.utah.edu
- University Police 801-585-2677

Area Resources

- Utah's Domestic Violence Coalition www.udvc.org
- YWCA of Utah www.ywcautah.org
- Utah Coalition Against Sexual Assault www.ucasa.org
- Rape Recovery Center Crisis Line 901-467-7273
- Love is Respect www.loveisrespect.org

Student Names and Pronouns

Class rosters are provided to the instructors with the student's legal name and "Preferred first name" (if previously entered by you in the Student Profile section of your CIS account). While CIS refers to this as merely a preference, we will honor you by referring to you with the name and pronoun that feels best for you in class, team assignments, etc. Please advise your instructors and CELA of any name or pronoun changes (and [update CIS](#)) so we can help create a learning environment in which you, your name, and your pronoun will be respected.

Office of the Dean of Students

The [Office of the Dean of Students](#) is dedicated to being a resource to students through support, advocacy, involvement, and accountability. It serves as a support for students facing challenges to their success as students, and assists with the interpretation of University policy and regulations. Please consider reaching out to the Office of Dean of Students for any questions, issues and concerns. 200 South Central Campus Dr., Suite 270. Monday-Friday 8 am-5 pm.

University Counseling Center

The [University Counseling Center](#) (UCC) provides developmental, preventive, and therapeutic services and programs that promote the intellectual, emotional, cultural, and social development of University of Utah students. They advocate a philosophy of acceptance, compassion, and support for those they serve, as well as for each other. They aspire to respect cultural, individual and role differences as they continually work toward creating a safe and affirming climate for individuals of all ages, cultures, ethnicities, genders, gender identities, languages, mental and physical abilities, national origins, races, religions, sexual orientations, sizes and socioeconomic statuses.

Wellness Statement

Personal concerns such as stress, anxiety, relationship difficulties, depression, cross-cultural differences, etc., can interfere with a student's ability to succeed and thrive at the University of Utah. For helpful resources, contact the [Center for Campus Wellness](#); 801-581-7776.

Basic Needs Collective

The [Basic Needs Collective](#) connects students to campus and community resources to help them meet their basic needs (e.g. [Food Pantry](#) (free for everyone), information on housing, healthcare, financial support etc.)

Center for Student Access & Resources (CSAR)

[CSAR](#) supports student success and well-being through scholarships, personalized one-on-one support, community engagement and skill-building, and support navigating higher education systems.

Student Success Coaches

The mission of [Student Success Coaches](#) is to support students in making the most of their University of Utah experience. They will work closely with you to learn about your particular needs, aspirations, and goals.

Learners of English as an Additional/Second Language

If you are an English language learner, please be aware of several resources on campus that will support you with your language and writing development. These resources include: the [Writing Center](#);

the [Writing Program](#); and the [English Language Institute](#). Please let me know if there is any additional support you would like to discuss for this class.

Support for Veterans

If you are a student veteran, the University of Utah has a [Veterans Support Center](#) located in the Olpin Union Building. There is also a national [Veterans Crisis Line](#): Veterans call 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1, chat online <https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/get-help-now/chat/>, or send a text message to 838255 to receive confidential support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Please also let me know if you need any additional support in this class for any reason.

Undocumented Student Support

Immigration is a complex phenomenon with broad impact— those who are directly affected by it, as well as those who are indirectly affected by their relationships with family members, friends, and loved ones. If your immigration status presents obstacles to engaging in specific activities or fulfilling specific course criteria, confidential arrangements may be requested from the Dream Center. Arrangements with the Dream Center will not jeopardize your student status, your financial aid, or any other part of your residence. The Dream Center offers a wide range of resources to support undocumented students (with and without DACA) as well as students from mixed-status families. To learn more, please contact the Dream Center at 801.213.3697 or visit <https://dream.utah.edu/>.

Too Many Resources! Where to start?

Reach out to the [Student Success Coaches](#) or the [Center for Student Access & Resources](#) for assistance navigating resources. (Find also a list of additional resources on our Canvas site, under Modules: Resources for you.)

Religious Accommodations

The University of Utah respects the right of all students and employees to observe their [religious holidays and cultural observances](#). Students should work with their instructors in advance (at least 6 weeks notice) when the need arises to be absent from a class for religious or cultural obligations or observance reasons. Students can also work with the [Office of the Dean of Students](#) when needed.

Your suggestions are always welcome

Your suggestions are always encouraged and appreciated. Please let us know ways to improve the effectiveness of the course for you personally or for other students or student groups. You can also submit an anonymous comment through the *Anytime Feedback* tool linked on our Canvas homepage.