

“As a black woman being able to see myself in these dissertations and connections is wonderful.”

– Dr. Rihana S. Mason, Research Scientist,
Georgia State University

Dr. Inez Beverly Prosser, First African-American female
to receive a doctorate in Psychology, University of Cincinnati, 1933



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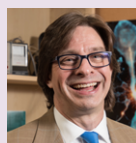
Faculty leaders and researchers use dissertations to fill the diversity gaps in current undergraduate psychology textbook curriculum

Professors, Dr. Jon Grahe, Department Chair and Professor of Psychology at Pacific Lutheran University, Dr. Rihana S. Mason, an experimental psychologist and research scientist at Georgia State University and co-chair of the Inez Beverly Prosser Scholarship, and Dr. Michelle Ceynar, Dean of Social Sciences and Professor of Psychology at Pacific University, all noticed a gap in women of color in their psychology courses. Inspired by the APA's I Am Psyched! Exhibit at PLU in 2018, they decided to build a course around this. The students were so excited about learning about women of color in the early history of psychology that Dr. Jon Grahe tried to start incorporating it into other aspects of his classes but quickly found there weren't resources out there to support these women.



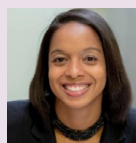
Michelle Ceynar

Dean of Social Sciences, Professor, Psychology
Pacific Lutheran University



Jon Grahe

Department Chair, Professor of Psychology
Pacific Lutheran University



Rihana S. Mason

Experimental Psychologist, Research Scientist
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Dr. Grahe started using dissertations that he found including Dr. Inez Beverly Prosser's, the first African-American woman to earn a doctorate in psychology. In doing so, Dr. Grahe realized that dissertations are valuable teaching tools for his undergraduate students. Michelle, Rihana, and Jon started a collaborative project to help improve the teaching materials for their coursework by writing a supplemental volume. Each chapter in the edited volume is taking a dissertation by a woman of color who earned their degree before 1980. These women are cultural pioneers in their fields since they were the first or only woman representing her demographic at that time. Dr. Michelle Ceynar noted that they have encountered many challenges with finding dissertations. "The undergraduate students in my program have been helping by finding cultural pioneers," she added. Currently, they have identified 52 of these on their list. Out of the 52, they have 34 dissertations in their possession, and 16 of these 34 they have found through ProQuest. Ceynar added that originally trying to find some of the dissertations proved to be a bit difficult because the author published their dissertation under their married name, but then got divorced and reverted to their maiden name. It was a reoccurring issue they found, and Libraries became extremely helpful to navigate that.

Dr. Rihana S. Mason said that it's exciting to see these dissertations. Mason stated that "we're in a time now where everyone is excited about 23&Me and finding their own ancestry. I feel like this project is our own ancestry in scholarship." Adding that, "they are able to find out what these women did in their scholarship and see how they're connected in our discipline. It is like finding history. As a black woman being able to see myself in these dissertations and connections is wonderful." This project is allowing students to see these women's biographies as well, which might have been something they wouldn't have necessarily seen previously. "The research that Dr. Inez Prosser investigated we see today with different personality measures and in early remnants of identity measures," Mason added. "We're providing a supplemental resource and additional materials about these pioneers. This publication promotes inclusivity within our textbooks and gives us a way to share these pioneers' lives in undergraduate and graduate courses," she added. Often, these women have been ignored in the past, but being able to elevate these voices through dissertations is helpful and needed.

Dr. Ceynar added that they're really excited to model collaborative scholarship in the process of writing with chapter authors as well. She added that their project is collaborative, which is unique when writing an edited volume. "We're also adding in opportunities for peer reviews so that the authors can have conversations with each other," Dr. Ceynar added. "One of the goals is to promote open science," added Dr. Jon Grahe. "The open science framework allows us to connect individuals with supplemental materials in addition to the text itself."

"These women represent the real-life experiences of what we are embarking on today."

– Dr. Rihana S. Mason

According to Dr. Grahe and Dr. Mason, their volume can be utilized across sub-disciplines. Mason noted that while the time period these women were writing about is historically different, some of the challenges they were facing are actually still the same. Dr. Grahe added that the reason they're focusing on dissertations is that "dissertations represent ideal research." Our student body is more diverse and psychology is often 70 to 80% women and at PLU over half of the students are women of color. "This project is a way to recruit and retain these students by seeing their ideals," Dr. Mason added. "These women represent the real-life experiences of what we are embarking on today," she finished.

Dr. Michelle Ceynar added that the libraries can value the dissertations as equally as they do white and male dissertations. She found that historical dissertations by women and women of color can cost more to access because they haven't been digitized, but studies and research projects like this one can hopefully close that gap. By connecting students with the content and supplemental materials, students can embrace the voices and history of cultural pioneers from the past. This will also exponentially benefit current student research as well. These students, professors, and other researchers can make their research more widely available to other researchers through resources like ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global and allow for a bigger discussion on uncovering and illuminating voices from women of color.

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