



Providence Is Not Our Playground

The Swearer Center's Co-Curriculum

Workshop Description: Participants will explore the history of Brown in Providence and how that affects how we do our work in Providence.

Workshop Overview: A workshop that explores the history and relationship between Brown and Providence, and encourages members to contextualize themselves as participants in this history, beneficiaries of this relationship, and provides resources for engagement in Providence.

Workshop Audience: Any Swearer-engaged student, but particularly those new to Providence.

Workshop Goals:

- Learn a brief history of Brown in Providence
- Contextualize ourselves within that history
- Change the way we understand our position in Providence within that historical context and the present reality
- Establish guidelines and norms for working within Providence communities

Learning Outcomes: Cultural Understanding & Humility; Ethical Practice; Effective Action, Collaboration, and Leadership

Materials:

- [Presentation](#)
- [Script](#)

Brief Outline:

[Include a brief outline for the workshop, including the main activities and suggestion timeframes for each]

Monday, August 28; 1:15 - 2:30 pm

1) Introductions & Workshop Goals	3 min
2) Definitions	10 min
3) History of Brown & PVD	20 min
4) Contextualizing Ourselves	15 min
5) Contextualizing Brown Privilege	15 min
6) Rules of Engagement	5 min
7) Concluding Thoughts	7 min

Full Workshop Plan

[Below, include a full workshop plan, including facilitator's notes, discussion questions, materials, etc.]

1. Introductions & Workshop Goals

3 min

We spent this morning hearing broadly about Providence, the city that we'll be living in and working in. Now we're going to transition into a workshop called Providence is Not Your Playground, which will explore the history of Brown in Providence and how that affects how we will do our work in Providence this upcoming year.

We have three goals for this workshop:

- learn a brief history of Brown in Providence
- contextualize ourselves within that history,
- and change the way we understand our position in Providence within that historical context and the present reality, and establish guidelines and norms for working within Providence communities

Before we begin, we'd like to reiterate three of the things we had on our living list from yesterday.

- One diva, one mic
- Name Impact. Own Impact
- No one knows everything, together we know a lot

Is there anything anyone would like to add?

2. Definitions

10 min

Now we'd like to briefly go over three terms that we'll be using throughout this workshop and this is how we define/use them for our workshop. We want to recognize that for some of us, this is the first time you'll be engaging in these kinds of concepts, and for

others these are concepts that you're very familiar with, we want to be able to learn and grow together; we invite all of you to contribute, bring an open mind and be ready to listen, and learn.

The first is **power**, which is a catch-all term for ability, influence, and access, granted and reinforced by institutions, structures, history, and individuals. It is distributed inequitably.

Next is **privilege**, which the anti-oppression network defines as as unearned power enjoyed by a dominant group, giving them economic, political, social and cultural advantages at the expense of members of a marginalized group.

Are there any questions about the definitions?

Now we'd like for you all to reflect for a moment to yourselves: did you interact with college students where you are from? In what context? What was that experience like? We'll give you a couple of minutes then we'll have you turn and talk to a neighbor about what you thought.

Ask participants to share with their neighbor and ask volunteers to share out: Would anyone like to share out?

Thanks for sharing. So, some of you touched on the impact college students had on you while you were in high school and below. I also had strong mentors from the local Universities helping me, giving me a sort of preview into what college is like, and inspiring me. And I think that's part of the reason why I decided to work with high school students when I got here: I found my relationships with the college students to be really powerful and wanted to connect with students in a similar way here. But it's important to recognize the power imbalance in our relationships with folks in Providence before we try to build those relationships.

3. History of Brown & PVD

20 min

So let's look at a few historical moments that demonstrate the ways in which Brown has created and used its power. And just as a note: we're going to go briefly over what is a very long and complicated history, so we encourage you to explore this history further after this workshop!

There are many ways in which Brown has benefited economically from the Providence community throughout history. First, through acquisition of Narragansett and Wampanoag land by settlers before Brown was founded, land ownership that now forms part of Brown's significant financial resources. While Brown's charter says that it purchased this land from the local indigenous people, it is important to think about the power dynamics that likely occurred during that transaction. Could someone read this quote? Thank you. Notice that Brown does not mention which tribe the Browns purchased the land from, nor does it mention the violent history between European settlers and Native Americans in Rhode Island.

Brown also benefits from the money obtained through the transatlantic slave trade and work of enslaved Native Americans and Africans to build and form the foundation of this university. In the middle of the 18th century around 10% of Rhode Island's population was enslaved, and while Rhode Island was largely not a plantation state, many Rhode Islanders became wealthy off of kidnapping, buying, and selling enslaved people from Africa, including the Brown family for whom the University was named. So, Brown's wealth really came from and is rooted in the slave trade. Also, about thirty members of the Brown Corporation throughout history has been identified as being directly involved in the slave trade through, for example, owning ships. Brown University's first president, James Manning, which Manning Chapel is named after also owned a personal slave.

In addition, when University Hall was built – people “donated” labor from enslaved people to assist in the building process and materials were donated from some of the largest slave trading firms in Rhode Island.

Now, we are going to introduce gentrification as a general term for the arrival of wealthier people in an existing urban district, a related increase in rents and property values, and changes in the district's character and culture. The term is often used negatively, suggesting the displacement of poor communities by rich outsiders.

Fox Point, which is the area highlighted in the map, was gentrified by Brown University. Starting in the 1950's Brown's began to expand and develop College Hill, forcing the Cape Verdean community in Fox Point to relocate as gentrification meant that the poorer segments of the Cape Verdean population could no longer afford to live in Fox Point.

This short video clip is from the documentary “Some Kind of Funny Porto Rican” by Claire Andrade-Watkins which I encourage you to watch if you want to learn more about the Cape Verdean community in Fox Point.

***** Show video from 45:20 to 46:15 *****

Today, part of Brown's economic privilege stems from the fact that Brown is a tax-exempt institution. Instead of taxes Brown makes "voluntary payments" to the City of Providence to compensate for the burden that Brown's presence has on the Providence community. Brown owns property valued at \$1 billion dollars, which would mean about \$38 million every year in tax revenue to the city of Providence if Brown paid property taxes.

Instead the voluntary payments to the city used to be about \$1 million annually, however in 2012 Brown agreed to pay \$3.9 million from 2012 to 2016 and \$2 million from 2016 to 2022. This additional payment was agreed upon after Providence faced a huge deficit and needed additional income. To put this into perspective the deficit was about \$22 million which is actually less than what Brown would pay in property taxes.

Okay, we just threw a lot of information at you. Please take a moment to take a breathe and process this. *time for 30 seconds*

4. Contextualizing Ourselves

15 min

Now we'd like to transition to the second part of our workshop, about contextualizing ourselves within Brown's history and current reality by introducing ourselves a little more. Find student co-facilitator

My name is Juan Carlos Carranza. I identify as a queer, Latino male from a low-income background who is also first-gen. Home is San Diego, California and Providence, Rhode Island.

So we've just introduced ourselves kind of in the abstract. What I've told you about myself gives you some insight into who I am and what my life might be like, or what I am like when I am interacting with people. And the truth is: it depends on where I am and who is around me. This concept is called positionality.

Could someone read this quote aloud?

So basically, our identities mean different things in different places. For example, on Brown's campus my identity and voice is marginalized because I am a Black woman.

Off campus, however, my Brown identity changes my relative power. Our identities and positions change depending on our geographic and social locations.

So what makes being me different in these different locations? How is my identity different at Brown from what it is walking through and working in Providence?

The moment students matriculate to Brown, regardless of where they come from, they gain access to a large amount of resources and privilege, which come from Brown's participation in the slave trade, its roots in settler colonialism, its role in politics, and the many other ways it interacts with and utilizes oppressive institutions and structures.

5. Contextualizing Brown Privilege

15 min

We are going to conceptualize these privileges in three categories: the political power we have gained as a result of Brown's longstanding participation in and control over Providence politics, the economic privilege Brown students have because of Brown's many financial resources, and social capital Brown students have because of the people, communities, and institutions Brown is associated with. This does not mean that these are the only lenses through which to look at this issue.

Simply scrolling through Brown's wikipedia page one can see that Brown has a long list of notable alumni who have served as jurists, governors, legislators, mayors -- the first mayor of Providence was a Brown alum. It's also common for Brown students to intern within state government in RI as well as political offices across the country and on capitol hill.

Because we live in a society where everything is politicized, political influence does not stop within the "political realm." It extends to us as students being able to have any sort of influence whether it's someone investing in your start up simply because you are a brown student, or a business opening their doors to you because they "love Brown students." Also pictured on the left is Christina Paxson, Brown's president, mayor Jorge Elorza, and former mayor Angel Taveras, symbolically digging the site of Brown's expansion into the Jewelry District downtown, which was announced in 2013. Thinking about its history, consider why Brown might be favored by local politicians?

Economic privilege basically means resources and advantages that have monetary value. So at Brown we get freeRIPTA rides which is something that brown pays for every time we swipe, which is something that no other college in RI gives its students.

While we do acknowledge that financial aid at Brown is flawed, more than half of Brown students have access to some type of financial aid where other private colleges in RI do not have a billion dollar endowment to do this.

Brown funds a lot of things whether that be research fellowships/grants/awards available to work in Providence that other schools in RI do not have. So, Brown students, who statistically do not come from Providence, end up being hired to work with the local government and nonprofits over students who are from Providence because Brown can pay for their students to fill those positions.

Social capital refers to the connections between individuals and entities that can be economically valuable, directly or indirectly. These relationships between individuals and companies can lead to a state in which each thinks of the other when something needs to be done. An example might be having access to jobs, specific clubs, and networking opportunities after graduation as a result of being an Ivy League alum.

Now that we have complicated our frameworks for thinking about our identities, we'd like to ask you to turn + talk with your neighbors and answer the following questions: How has Brown's political power, economic privilege, and social capital will impact you in your time at Brown? How might it affect your work in Providence? Note - Time for 4 minutes.

We hope that, with this knowledge, we can all think about the unearned power Brown has, think about how your identity as a Brown student maps onto other identities we might hold, and what that means on and off campus.

6. Rules of Engagement

5 min

Finally, to help us think about the implications of all of this, we created a working document called "Rules of Engagement," a list of guidelines for Brown students hoping to collaborate with Providence and Rhode Island communities, which everyone should have a copy of. If you don't, please raise your hands and we'll pass some more around. It is by no means a complete document.

While we read the list out, please be thinking about how you personally might implement these rules if you consider yourself a part of Brown's community and how these rules might be strengthened if you do not.

Rules of Engagement

Things all Brown students should know before doing work in Providence, a working draft.

- Learn. But do not expect to be taught.
- Listen. Listen with the intent of learning, not responding.
- Ask why? Why were you given the opportunity that you have? Why are you speaking? Be critical of your actions. For example, should we be leading this workshop?
- Ally is a verb. Not a noun. Not a badge of honor. It works in the present.
- Understand your power and know when to use it. Support local endeavors, but do not take the spotlight.
- Take an asset-based approach. Value local expertise, knowledge, and experience.
- Know that Brown is a center of knowledge, not the center of knowledge in RI.
- Own impact. Expect to be held accountable for your actions. Welcome criticism. Acknowledge and apologize for harmful actions.
- Change actions. It's not enough to apologize and acknowledge your wrong doings, you have to change your future behavior.
- Consider Brown's role in constructing and supporting systems that create and perpetuate inequality

7. Concluding Thoughts

7 min

Okay, for our last turn and talk, please chat with a neighbor about how you will personally use these rules and/or how these rules could be strengthened. What's missing? What could be added? Do one or two people have comments from their discussion they would like to share out with the group?

Works Cited

[List any citations of articles or other sources used in this workshop here]