**2021 Watson Conference Commitments  
April 21-23, 2021**

The 2021 Watson Conference organizers strive to create a different kind of conference environment, a brave space that “emphasizes the need for courage rather than the illusion of safety” ([Arao & Clemens](https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=9eFaAQAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PA135&dq=From+safe+spaces+to+brave+spaces&ots=BUnftk2-8y&sig=n1ScknWwsOAMumu312B6rUGLzc4" \l "v=onepage&q=From%20safe%20spaces%20to%20brave%20spaces&f=false), 2013, p. 141). To accomplish this will take work from all involved. We therefore invite all participants—presenters, moderators, attendees—to support our project by committing to the following:

* We will welcome our whole selves. Virtual meetings can be exhausting, and they pose particular challenges when we are conferencing amid work, caregiving, and other responsibilities. Let us turn our cameras off as needed to stretch, move, lie down, eat, and take breaks. Pets and family members are free to pop in, too.
* We will approach the conference as a space for learning and growth.We all arrive with different lived experiences, interests, and degrees of knowledge about the conference theme. We welcome the opportunity to learn from and share with one another.
* We will connect through play. With full recognition of the serious nature of the conference's goals, let us find opportunities to infuse our collective space with lightness and to reveal something about ourselves beyond our CVs—be it through communal cake-eating, pet parades, or intriguing Zoom backgrounds. Other ideas are welcome!
* We will honor our interlocutors with our communication choices. We will usehumanizing language and respect people’s pronouns. We will not expect anyone to speak for their entire race, gender, or other identity group.
* We will co-create a culture of access while recognizing that this work is never complete (Hubrig & Osorio, “[Enacting a Culture of Access in Our Conference Spaces](https://library.ncte.org/journals/CCC/issues/v72-1/30892)”). We will follow recommendations by the [Composing Access Project](https://u.osu.edu/composingaccess/) and the [Global Society of Online Literacy Educators](https://gsole.org/conference/presenterguide#Tips_for_Presenters) for virtual presentations and interactions. And we recognize that “access is not a one-way transmission of information but involves all members of the communicative situation” (Fink et al., “Honoring Access Needs at Academic Conferences through Computer Assisted Real-Time Captioning (CART) and Sign Language Interpreting,” p. 104 of Hubrig & Osorio). For instance, we will strive to speak slowly—and we will ask one another to slow down as needed.
* We will actively attend to power dynamics in participation—and we will name and interrupt these dynamics as needed.We support presenters using no more than the time allotted and attendees asking questions that are succinct and generative. We encourage as many people to be involved in the Q&A as possible. This work can also involve the following strategies:
  + Being mindful of our own tendencies to participate or withhold**.** If we tend to participate a lot, we might delay asking our question to make room for other perspectives first. If we tend to hold back, we might encourage ourselves to ask a question so that others can learn from us.
  + Reflecting on our own purposes for asking questions. In a well-circulated Tweet thread, Dr. Eve Tuck details an [Indigenous feminist approach to academic Q&As](https://twitter.com/tuckeve/status/1141501422611128320) that involves peer-reviewing questions before asking them. Although this is trickier in our virtual setting, we can still screen our own questions past Dr. Tuck’s four criteria:
* confirm that our question “is really a question”
* ensure that we aren’t “actually trying to say that [WE] should have given the paper”
* decide “if the question needs to be posed and answered in front of everyone”
* determine, given that “the speaker has just done a lot of work,” “if [the] question is asking the speaker to do work that really the question-asker should do.”
  + Dr. Sherita Roundtree gives an example of this kind of question, asked at her CCCC panel in Oregon; see Botex et al., “[Academic #BlackLivesMatter: Black Faculty and Graduate Students Tell Their Stories](http://constell8cr.com/issue-3/academic-blacklivesmatter-black-faculty-and-graduate-students-tell-their-stories/).”
* Rejecting and responding to microaggressions. As Drs. Rasha Diab, Beth Godbee, Cedric Burrows, and Thomas Ferrel declare in “[Rhetorical and Pedagogical Interventions for Countering Microaggressions](https://works.bepress.com/beth_godbee/42/),” “microaggressions run deep, impacting multiple pedagogical spaces and all facets of our teaching/learning lives” (p. 475). For instance, in “[Entertainers or Education Researchers? The Challenges Associated with Presenting While Black](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13613324.2015.1069263),” Drs. Ebony O. McGee and Lasana Kazembe show that white audiences tend to respond to Black education researchers’ presentations with comments about appearance and performance (e.g.. humor, passion, energy), all part of “the historical tendency to situate the black body as a source of entertainment, amusement, and spectacle” (p. 99).

“Microresistance” is defined by Drs. Floyd Cheung, Cynthia Ganote, and Tasha Souza as “small-scale individual or collaborative efforts that empower targeted people and allies to cope with, respond to, and/or challenge microaggressions with a goal of disrupting systems of oppression as they unfold in everyday life, thereby creating more inclusive institutions.” In their article “[Microresistance as a Way to Respond to Microagressions on Zoom and in Real Life](https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/academic-leadership/microresistance-as-a-way-to-respond-to-microaggressions-on-zoom-and-in-real-life/),” they suggest several heuristics that can be used to respond to microaggressions, including OTFD and ACTION.

OTFD involves “stating what you observe, think, feel, and desire.” Cheung, Ganote, and Souza give an example of how it can be used to respond to someone in a position of power who is interrupting or not calling on raised hands: “I am noticing that not everyone who has their hand raised is getting the chance to speak **(Observe)**. I think it is important for us to hear all voices as we consider the implications of this decision **(Think)**. I feel uncomfortable moving forward **(Feel)**. Might we be able to create a system that ensures all voices can be heard **(Desire)**?”

Their article also suggests ways to use the chat features to affirm others’ ideas and to privately check in on individuals.

* We will approach our missteps as opportunities for growth.When we make mistakes, we will urge one another to do better. When we do something that causes harm, we will recognize the difference between intent and impact and will take responsibility for the harm. Dr. Jessica Kirkpatrick’s blog post “[I was wrong and I am sorry](http://womeninastronomy.blogspot.com/2015/04/i-was-wrong-and-i-am-sorry.html)” describes how to apologize after being called in or called out.

**Lastly, we (the organizers) believe that attendance is a privilege, not a right.** Wewill not tolerate hostile or harassing behavior, especially that which functions to oppress marginalized groups. Participants who commit this behavior will be removed from the Zoom meeting.

If you notice something of concern during the conference, please email [watson@louisville.edu](mailto:watson@louisville.edu), or send a message in the chat to someone on the Watson conference planning team.

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We would also like to acknowledge the following sources of inspiration:

* [Anti-Oppression Resource & Training Alliance (AORTA)](http://aorta.coop/resources/) (see resources on Facilitation)
* [BorderLinks Acuerdos](https://www.borderlinks.org/acuerdos)
* [Black Lives of Unitarian Universalism (BLUU) Community Agreements](https://blacklivesuu.org/working-agreements)
* [University Corporation for Atmospheric Research (UCAR) Facilitating Productive Discussions: Ground Rules + Tools](https://www.ucar.edu/who-we-are/diversity-inclusion/community-resources/ground-rules-tools)
* Özlem Sensoy & Robin DiAngelo (2014), “Respect Differences? Challenging the Common Guidelines in Social Justice Education,” *Democracy & Education*, *22*(2), Article 1. Available at <https://democracyeducationjournal.org/home/vol22/iss2/1>

*This is a living document and will be revised for the next Watson Conference.*