

**Salem State University**

---

**From the Selected Works of David Silva**

---

Spring 2018

# You Are Here

David Silva, *Salem State University*



## YOU ARE HERE

We're all acquainted with the question "Are we there yet?"

On a long drive. During that endless transoceanic flight. Sitting through that meeting that drags on. And on. And on. In these contexts, "Are we there yet?" rarely (if ever) proves fruitful. Even if you're the driver, the pilot, or the committee chair, you may not have much control over the journey's length. We arrive when we arrive.

There are, however, situations in which posing the question constitutes a meaningful exercise, including when gauging progress on issues of social justice. When it comes to combating society's *-isms* and *-phobias*, regularly asking if we're there yet is vital to ensuring we continue to move forward.

Acknowledging and appreciating how far we've come requires attention to history. Those further along in our careers must take responsibility for sharing what we experienced and learned with our less-experienced colleagues. Mentoring matters. Without meaningful cross-generational engagement, an

understanding of past struggles dissipates and yesterday's victories can be taken for granted. That's dangerous.

Recognizing there's work yet to be done requires similar intentionality, particularly from those for whom social privilege might distort reality by marginalizing and minimizing the experiences of others. This need for deliberate periodic interrogation of progress rouses itself when demonstrations of sexism, racism, ageism, elitism, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, or homophobia in the academic sphere are met with surprise by some ("I can't believe it!") and exasperation by others ("Here we go again!"). Among the privileged, addressing social injustice is much like becoming dehydrated: by the time symptoms get noticed, it's too late. Damage has been done.

To help avert much of the pain, suffering, and fear provoked by behaviors rooted in *-isms* and *-phobias*, we must commit to staying informed and engaged even when — especially when — things appear to be fine. All of us in the academy, especially those with more experience and power, should make it a habit to check in periodically with one another, especially with those with less experience and power. And when reaching out, we must be open to whatever responses present themselves, be they disconcerting or disruptive. Listen. Then listen some more. Then seek to effect change.

We must also commit to being conscientious bystanders. Call out abuses of power or privilege. Challenge words and actions that instill fear or shame. Refuse to overlook or accommodate the chronic misbehavior of the bullies and bigots among us, especially those who are known in our communities to be "difficult" or "just that way." A private conversation in which one respectfully describes to a colleague the observed (mis)behaviors is sometimes enough to raise not only awareness of the conduct but also awareness that somebody has noticed. And if you're the target of the bullying, abuse, or unwanted attentions, seek out an ally who is positioned to engage in the difficult conversation.

Are we there yet? Nope, not yet. So keep on asking.

---

**DAVID J. SILVA** (Salem State University) is provost and academic vice president at Salem State University. He is a linguist whose work has been funded by the Fulbright Program, the Korea Foundation, and the Academy of Korean Studies. He is a graduate of Harvard University and Cornell University.