Strategies to Create an Inclusive Classroom

Inclusive teaching includes course design, teaching strategies, and evaluation practices that cultivate a learning environment where all are treated equitably, have equal access to learning and feel supported in their learning. Instructors can implement the strategies in the manner that best suits them, their disciplines, and their students.

Setting Guidelines to Establish a Positive Climate for Learning

The Iowa State University Principles of Community (http://www.iastate.edu/principles) can serve as guidelines to facilitate engagement, to promote inclusivity, and to establish a positive climate for learning.

- **Respect:** We seek to foster an open-minded understanding among individuals, organizations and groups.

- **Purpose:** We are encouraged to be engaged in the university community. Thus, we strive to build a genuine community that promotes the advancement of knowledge, cooperation and leadership.

- **Cooperation:** We recognize that the mission of the university is enhanced when we work together to achieve the goals of the university. Therefore, we value each member of the Iowa State University community for their insights and efforts, collective and individual, to enhance the quality of campus life.

- **Richness of diversity:** We recognize and cherish the richness of diversity in our university experience. Furthermore, we strive to increase the diversity of ideas, cultures and experiences throughout the university community.

- **Freedom from discrimination:** We recognize that we must strive to overcome historical and divisive biases in our society. Therefore, we commit ourselves to create and maintain a community in which all can work together in an atmosphere free from discrimination, and to respond appropriately to all acts of discrimination.

- **Honest and respectful expression of ideas:** We affirm the right to and the importance of a free exchange of ideas at Iowa State University within the bounds of courtesy, sensitivity and respect. We work together to promote awareness of various ideas through education and constructive strategies to consider and engage in honest disagreements.

Opportunities to promote inclusion in my classroom

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<th>How might you introduce and utilize the Principles of Community in your classroom?</th>
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Self-Reflect on Your Teaching

While there are several techniques for engaging students positively in the classroom, there are also practices that can help instructors avoid ignoring or perpetuating counterproductive practices. Consider the following suggestions:

- Have you prepared yourself to address diversity issues in class discussions? Don’t assume your discipline is exempt.
- Consider using language that promotes a student’s growth mindset. For example, rather than stating “I’m offering supplemental instruction (SI) because I know women struggle with math,” consider focusing on actions, “I invite you all to attend the SI for more practice.”
- Do you seek feedback from your students to gain an understanding of their successes and difficulties in your class?
- Do you reflect on how you treat students with respect?
- Do you emphasize high standards with verbal assurances that each student can achieve success and discuss what support is in place to help each student meet these high standards?
- Do you model the behavior and skills expected of the students in your classroom?
- When lecturing, do you avoid using phrases such as, “It’s easy to see...” or “I’m sure the answer is obvious to all...”? Phrases like these can implicitly discourage students who do not understand from asking questions.
- It is important to be sensitive and use the current terms for social groups.
- Do you set expectations, encourage, and hold students accountable for treating each other with respect?

Opportunities to promote inclusion in my classroom

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Course Design

It is critical to examine not just the way we teach, but also our prep work before our classes begin. Consider how your learning objectives, activities, and assessments map onto the goals of your course. To give a starting point use CELT’s Basic Course Design page (http://bit.ly/coursealignment).

Syllabus


☐ Review the Interfaith Calendar website (http://www.interfaith-calendar.org/) for world religion sacred dates when scheduling major projects, presentations, exams, and course events. Example: Students fasting for Ramadan may choose not to participate in end-of-spring-semester celebrations involving food.

Textbooks, Resources, and Presenting Content

☐ Choose texts from authors of diverse backgrounds. Select content that engages a diversity of ideas and perspectives.

☐ Discuss contributions made to the field by historically underrepresented groups. Acknowledge the historical and contemporary absences of women and people of color when applicable.

☐ Ensure images and illustrations are representative of diverse appearances (e.g. genders, abilities, ages, etc.).

☐ Examples that come easily to us are often those that come from our own experiences. Avoid assuming your students share that experience. Notice if any of your examples are based on regional knowledge, hobbies favored by one gender, or historical or political information unfamiliar to those from other countries.

☐ Provide access to supporting materials, such as illustrations, glossaries, and necessary background information.

☐ Avoid highly idiomatic English. Idioms are especially confusing for nonnative speakers and students raised in another region of the United States. While the expressions may add interest, many students may miss an important concept if the phrase is unfamiliar (e.g. "once in a blue moon," "between a rock and a hard place").

☐ Carefully consider how you use humor in your classes to ensure it degrades no one. Draw on humor and anecdotes that are relevant to the subject and sensitive to the social and cultural diversity of your students.

Opportunities to promote inclusion in my classroom

In the first column, share your action item related to course design. List the resources needed in the second column. Finally, determine your timeline in the last column.

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Teaching Strategies

Inclusive teaching strategies refer to approaches that support meaningful and accessible learning for all students, promoting a sense of belonging, and thus encouraging student success. When students feel valued, included, and respected as individuals, they are more likely to participate in class and engage with the instructor, fellow students, and the subject.

Building Community

☐ Consider finding out more about your students using prompts, index cards, or an online survey. Potential questions:
  - Ask their names according to the office of the registrar and if they wish to share preferred alternate names or gender pronouns. Update your attendance and other records with these preferences.
  - Ask how to pronounce students’ names phonetically. Work hard to pronounce each correctly. Read the Cult of Pedagogy’s “How We Pronounce Student Names, and Why it Matters” web post (http://bit.ly/2NM1r5n).
  - Ask the reasons why they signed up for the course and what they are most looking forward to learning.
  - Ask what their goals are after graduation and how will this course help them achieve their goals.
  - Ask fun questions to help you get to know students. Example: “If a song played when you entered the room, what would that song be?” Be ready when they ask you for your answers to the same questions.

  *Effective Practice:* Instructors who teach large classes have used the data to call on students. This helps instructors build the classroom community by ensuring a broad base of participation and can encourage engagement.

Encourage Active Learning

☐ Chunk classtime into segments, such as 10-minute lecture, 10-15 minutes of students engaged with active learning (discussion, problem-solving, low-stakes assessments), another 10-minute lecture, and 5 minutes of student reflection to enhance engagement.

☐ Encourage full participation while being aware of differences that may influence students' responsiveness. Some students’ silence may have been learned in response to negative experiences with participation (e.g. being interrupted) or in some cultures, asking questions is considered a rude interruption of class time. Example: Consider asking students to write their responses rather than verbally report them, consider asking students to share their ideas with a classmate, increase your wait time.

☐ Invite students to complete projects on self-selected topics to draw on personal interests and relevance. Increase options for assignment format to allow students choice such as oral presentation, research paper, design project.

☐ Invite students to co-design elements of classroom activities, for example, contribute to exam study guides.

☐ Treat students as individuals whose identities are complex and unique. Example: Ask open-ended questions to solicit students' reports of their experiences without calling on a single student to speak for their race, gender, culture, etc.

☐ When assigning group projects, ask students to rotate roles. The roles should be non-gender specific and of equal contribution. Example: Ensure those female group members are not always given secretarial/note-taking roles.

Opportunities to promote inclusion in my classroom

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Evaluation Practices
All students need clear standards and evaluation criteria, straightforward comments on their work delivered with tact and empathy, and frequent feedback so that they can change their learning strategies or seek additional help.

- Provide frequent opportunities for informal assessment and feedback on progress.
- Share tools such as grading rubrics, in addition to assignment descriptions and criteria to help a diverse community of learners clarify the requirements of an assignment.
- Consider whether the grading system you employ (for example, giving only a couple of high-stakes assignments) might be demotivating for students. Offer multiple lower-stakes opportunities to demonstrate knowledge and encourage students to develop growth mindsets (the belief that they can improve).
- Provide specific, actionable, and timely feedback to help students gauge their progress in the class.

Opportunities to promote inclusion in my classroom
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Student Feedback
Establish processes to receive anonymous feedback on the course climate and student learning. Make sure to review comments and report back to students at the next class session to validate their perspectives and make improvements to the course to enhance student learning.

- The Plus/Delta is usually conducted in the first quarter of the class and includes four open-ended questions:
  - What is helping me to learn in this class?
  - What changes are needed in this course to improve learning?
  - What am I doing to improve my learning in the course?
  - What do I need to do to improve my learning in this course?
- The Critical Incident Questionnaire (Brookfield, 2017) is done periodically and has five questions:
  - At what moment in class did you feel most engaged with what was happening?
  - At what moment in the class were you most distanced from what was happening?
  - What action that anyone (teacher or student) took this week did you find most affirming or helpful?
  - What action that anyone took this week did you find most puzzling or confusing?
  - What about the class this week surprised you the most? (This could be about your reactions to what went on, something that someone did, or anything else that occurs).

Sources

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