

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 that best suit them, their disciplines, and their students.

This interactive document is for your use only. Mark strategies being used by clicking on the checkboxes; then, reflect on opportunities to promote inclusion by typing in the appropriate text boxes.

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. We support this understanding through outreach, increasing opportunities for collaboration, formal education programs and strategies for resolving disagreement.
- **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

How might you introduce and utilize the Principles of Community in your classroom?

--

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 you a starting point, use CELT's Basic Course Design page (<http://bit.ly/coursealignment>).

Syllabus

- Download and consider the use of CELT's Mindful and Learner-Centered Syllabus (PDF) (<http://bit.ly/celtsyllabus>).
- 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 and Resources

- 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.
- Examples that come quickly to us are often those that come from our own experiences. Avoid assuming your students share that experience. Notice if you base yours on regional knowledge that may be favored by one gender.
- Provide access to supporting materials, such as illustrations, glossaries, and necessary background information based on prerequisites required for the course.
- Avoid highly idiomatic language and jargon. While the expressions may add interest, many students may miss an essential 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 relevant to the subject and sensitive to our campus's social and cultural diversity.

Presenting Content

- Avoid 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.
- Ensure images and illustrations represent diverse appearances (e.g., genders, abilities, ages, etc.).
- Use language that promotes a growth mindset. For example, rather than stating, "This course has supplemental instruction (SI) because I know women struggle with math," consider focusing on actions that would help every student, "I invite you all to attend the SI for more practice."
- Incorporate diverse student voices/perspectives/examples without stereotyping, spotlighting, or tokenizing.
- Consider ways to engage students with the course content, with one another, and with you.

Opportunities to promote inclusion in my classroom

In the first column, share your action item related to course design. List your next steps in the second column. Finally, consider sharing your efforts with a colleague, mentor, or department chair/unit leadership.

Action Items for Course Design	Next Steps

Teaching Strategies

Inclusive teaching strategies refer to approaches that support meaningful and accessible learning for all students, promoting a sense of belonging, and encouraging student success.

Building Community

- Create connections with your students and between your students using an ice breaker discussion forum. Choose a few topics and have your students select one to respond to – make sure you reply with your answer, too! Use the steps on the Create an Online Icebreaker Discussion page (<https://bit.ly/celt-icebreak>).
- Course presence in Canvas is a part of all course delivery modes (face-to-face, hybrid, and online, <https://bit.ly/isu-delivery>) for fall 2020. An online presence in Canvas provides students with more flexibility. New ways to collaborate are directly related to how present and engaged both the instructor and the students are in the online classroom. When students are engaged, they tend to perform better. When students are actively involved in the material, they tend to process it more deeply, which leads to successful retention of the material. Learn more from the Engage Students Online page (<https://bit.ly/celt-engage>).

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 10-15 minute lecture, and 5-minutes of student reflection to enhance engagement. When students feel engaged with the instructor, fellow students, and the subject, they are more likely to participate in class, feel valued, included, and respected.
- Encourage full participation while being aware of differences that may influence students' responsiveness. Some students' silence may have learned in response to negative experiences with participation (e.g., being interrupted). In some cultures, asking questions is considered a rude interruption of class time. For example, consider asking students to write their responses rather than verbally report them, consider asking students to share their ideas with a classmate, and increase their 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 to choose oral presentation, research paper, and 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.

Group Work

- Intentionally create groups, asking students to join together on non-visible characteristics, i.e., birth month.
- 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 in secretarial/note-taking positions.
- Provide multiple checkpoints to present opportunities for individual learning, accountability, and reflection.

Opportunities to promote inclusion in my classroom

In the first column, share your action item related to teaching strategies. List your next steps in the second column. Finally, consider sharing your efforts with a colleague, mentor, or department chair/unit leadership.

Action Item for Teaching Strategies	Next Steps

Evaluation Practices

All students need clear standards and evaluation criteria, straightforward comments on their work delivered with tact and empathy, and frequent feedback to 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 demotivate 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

In the first column, share your action item related to evaluation practices. List your next steps in the second column. Finally, consider sharing your efforts with a colleague, mentor, or department chair/unit leadership.

Action Item for Evaluation Practices	Next Steps

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 improve the course to enhance student learning. Helpful tips on CELT's Plus/Delta webpage (<http://bit.ly/isu-plusdelta>).


- 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).



For Inclusive Classroom resources, ways to extend your learning, and references for this handout:

Visit CELT's Creating an Inclusive Classroom webpage (<http://bit.ly/celtinclusion>) or use your camera app on your smart device and focus on the QR code, which will take you to the webpage.

Revised August 24, 2020 1:54 p.m.

 Strategies to Create an Inclusive Course by Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT), Iowa State University (<http://www.celt.iastate.edu>) is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>).