Create an inclusive learning environment (no matter the course modality)

The Equity and Inclusion in the Online Learning Environment guide (https://bit.ly/inclusion-online) provides suggestions and resources to help faculty teach in equitable and inclusive ways in all course modalities (in-person, hybrid/blended, online).

There is a lot of information here, not all of which you should try to implement immediately; however, having this information in the background as you plan your course will help ensure that what you do achieve will follow best practices.

The outline on this page has high-level bullets, while the specific sections provide much more explanation and links to additional resources. Feel free to skim through and digest a little at a time.

Be sure to see the many resources and support for Teaching with Technology at ISU! (https://bit.ly/celt-tech).

Be Accessible (http://bit.ly/celt-access)

There are three aspects of accessibility that are key to students with physical impairments that may create challenges for reading/seeing/hearing digital files and content. Students with psychological and/or learning differences require specific accommodations such as extra time to process materials or additional exam time, and accessibility for students with limited access to computers or stable internet service.

- Ensure all files, images, videos, and other posted content are accessible (e.g., a screen-reader can translate visual content, and that audio content has visible captions).
- Provide approved accommodations for students who present accommodation letters from the Office of Student Accessibility Services (http://sas.dso.iastate.edu/).
- Check whether the content is mobile-friendly.
- Consider variation in students' access to computers and stable internet service.


A key aspect of equitable and inclusive teaching, in general, is recognizing and working with the diversity of our students, along with multiple dimensions. Stay open to trying a few new things; you may find that one silver lining that you discover new ways of teaching that are both better for your students and more enjoyable for you!

- Have flexible policies: Review your syllabus and consider what changes might be necessary to adjust your grading weights, late policies and other course policies to accommodate this transition.
- Think about alternative ways that students can engage with your course (flexible activities) (https://bit.ly/inst-strat)
- Think about alternative ways that students can show you what they have learned (flexible assessments) (https://bit.ly/remote-assessments) and use the Universal Design for Learning (http://bit.ly/celtudl).


A critical feature of equity-minded teaching (American Association of Colleges and Universities, https://bit.ly/2ZoPEP2) is the acknowledgment that our students are NOT all the same and come to us with sometimes vastly different experiences. And those experiences are often tied to their social identities (i.e., race, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, first-gen status, etc.). In the virtual environment, and at this particular moment, there are several ways that you can incorporate that acknowledgment into your course in meaningful ways.

- Address microaggressions in discussion boards, chats and other places where students interact.
- Consider integrating culturally relevant materials, fundamental inclusive teaching practice: ensuring students ‘see themselves’ in course materials, including readings, class examples, assessments, etc.
- Be aware of variation in students’ capacity to manage remote learning.
- Be aware of how the current situation is impacting students.
A well-designed virtual course will build in a great deal of structure and accountability. Also, designing for equity and inclusion means being particularly proactive about supporting students.
- Pay attention to early warning signs that students may be struggling with and reach out proactively.
- Use more formative assessments and make completion mandatory.
- Know what resources are available for students.
- Prepare your students for the varying modes of course delivery (in-person, blended/hybrid, online).

While establishing supportive interpersonal relationships with students is one of the most fundamental tenets of effective teaching, it can be particularly crucial for students from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds.
- Continue to have opportunities for live, synchronous engagement.
- Talk to your students about what is happening.
- Build/maintain community among students.

Being inclusive means being mindful that not all of our students are well-versed in the hidden curriculum (Wikipedia, https://bit.ly/2Vvgx2u) that faculty may take for granted. When we throw in the additional challenges of multi-modal teaching, we must work even harder to ensure that we are not making any unnecessary assumptions about our students.
- Structure, structure, structure.
- Create transparent assignments (http://tilthighered.com).

For Inclusive Classroom resources, and ways to extend your learning:
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 on June 30, 2020 at 9:44 a.m.