

Inclusivity Teaching Best Practices

Provide a transparent and detailed course structure

The structure of your course has profound implications for student success: In general, the more structure the better for all students, especially those from underserved, underrepresented and under-networked communities. These students benefit from a highly structured course as it provides clear guidance, while those who would thrive no matter the context will also appreciate your organization.

- a. Be clear in your expectations for the course: provide a detailed course description; give transparent descriptions of assignments; make explicit how the learning activities support the course's learning objectives.
- b. Provide regular opportunities for student growth and development. Provide low-stakes assessments, incorporate typical test questions into assignments, and give prompt feedback, preferably before the next assessment. Consider providing opportunities for students to receive feedback in the middle of larger projects.
- c. Be flexible to provide more options for students who learn in different ways. For example, allow for different ways of completing assignments (oral presentation or essay or one-on-one presentation, etc.) and multiple means of action and expression (discussion questions, group work, internet forums, etc.)

Ensure inclusivity in the classroom environment

Students are only able to engage in higher-order learning when they feel safe and valued in their learning community. The classroom environment must be positive and inclusive.

- a. Actively model inclusivity in classroom discussions by embracing and respecting difference, challenging bias, and creating teachable moments rather than avoiding conflict or relying on students to self-regulate.
- b. Review course activities and materials to ensure sensitivity and inclusive cultural representation. Incorporate readings and perspectives from experts in your field from diverse backgrounds: race, gender, country of origin, etc. For every teaching decision you make, ask yourself "Who is being left out as a result of this approach? Which stories am I elevating or stereotyping?"
- c. Include a diversity and accessibility statement in your syllabus. Encourage students to reach out to SDAC if they need accommodations. Let them know other resources are also available depending on their need: the instructor, CAPS, ODS, Association Dean.
- d. Solicit student feedback throughout the semester.

Cultivate positive instructor-student relationships

- a. Humanize your field and the course material (make eye contact, share about yourself, your professional trajectory, etc.).
- b. Learn students' names (and how to pronounce them); be accessible through office hours; monitor the chat throughout class.
- c. Recognize and work against the tendency to favor those who are similar to you, express equal confidence in all students, don't make assumptions based on identity characteristics such as race, gender, country of origin, etc. Treat each student as an individual, not a representative of a group.
- d. Provide opportunities to engage in ways that work for different learning styles (foster interactivity, create space for silence).
- e. Recognize the very real challenges and traumas students bring to the classroom with them, and acknowledge the hardships you face as well.

Foster inclusivity among students

Cultivate a community of belonging in your classroom. "Belonging," or a feeling of embeddedness or

matter, is when students feel they are an integral part of the campus or classroom community, have a strong connection to the school/class, and feel they are seen and valued.

- a. Collaborate with students to create shared expectations or class norms as they relate to discussions and engagement for the learning community.
- b. Provide consistent opportunities for students to build relationships with each other. (Start the semester with icebreaker activities, encourage students to learn each other's names, assign work in small groups.) When students work in groups, consider assigning roles to each member (reporter, skeptic, facilitator, etc.) and rotating these roles throughout the semester.
- c. Address problems and disagreements when they occur. Center the conversation on the issue rather than the person. When the incident involves microaggression or discrimination, engage all your students in a discussion of what happened and why it was inappropriate. Remind everyone of established class norms and if necessary, amend as a result of the conversation.

Use inclusive language

Language is a powerful part of any classroom, and it is essential to ensure that the language in your classroom is inclusive. Careless or insensitive language can alienate students or create barriers to their learning, thus hampering their ability to thrive in the course. Inclusive language creates a space of belonging for all students.

- a. Ask for and use students' preferred pronouns.
- b. Use language that is inclusive and avoids stereotyping. (For example, say significant other instead of husband/wife/boyfriend/girlfriend/etc.; winter break instead of Christmas break, etc.)
- c. Use universal language. Avoid jargon or language and stories that could make someone feel like an outsider.

Make sure all course resources are accessible

Using principles of Universal Design (creating something that can be used by people with the widest range of abilities, and not just the average person), do not make assumptions about learners' abilities, but seek to create a course that any student can thrive in.

- a. Provide transcription or captioning of all video content, including recordings of class sessions. Caption or provide alt-text for all visual images, including charts and graphs.
- b. Make sure that all texts you use can be read by a screen reader. (For example, not all PDFs are compatible with screen readers, so either choose a format such as docx or create an accessible PDF.) Additionally, do not rely on visual clues from the text to convey information: instead of using color, bold, or italic fonts use the built-in styles in your word processor. Use dyslexia-friendly fonts.
- c. Use descriptive hyperlinks (instead of long URLs or "click here").
- d. Research the accessibility of the digital tools you are using. (For example, if your lecture capture system does not provide transcription or if a tool requires students to drag and drop items, these tools are not accessible.)
- e. Make sure that all required texts for your course have accessible, online versions. Communicate book lists ahead of time so that students can get a head start on reading if they want.

Additional Resources

- [Accessibility Resources from UVA](#)
- [Article from the Chronicle of Higher Education on Inclusive Teaching](#)
- [Detailed Guide from Columbia University](#)
- [More Information on Universal Design](#)
- [Succinct Tips from UVA Nursing](#)