

Strategies for Inclusive Teaching

Inclusive teaching and learning refers to modes of teaching and learning that are designed to actively engage, include, and challenge all students. Welcoming diverse perspectives and questions can also help instructors broaden and expand their understanding of their own disciplines and of what they hope to accomplish in teaching and in research. In addition to considering these suggestions, seek opportunities to talk with faculty mentors and graduate-student colleagues to determine strategies for inclusive teaching and learning that are relevant in your discipline.

Include Diverse Content and Materials

- When you are preparing lectures, questions for discussions, assignments or exams, and case studies, include language, examples, socio-cultural contexts, and images that reflect human diversity. Whenever possible, select topics and materials that reflect contributions and perspectives from groups that have been historically underrepresented in the field.
- Model openness to the new ideas and questions your students bring into the course, which can broaden and deepen your own knowledge of your discipline and its relevance. Help students understand that knowledge is often produced through conversation and collaboration among disparate points of view.
- Be aware of how your professional training and background may have shaped the selection of content and materials in your course. If relevant to your course, encourage students to think critically about how historical, literary, and art-historical canons—as well as the criteria for defining these canons—are defined and evolve over time.

Create an Inclusive Environment

- When talking with students during class, communicate clearly—starting on the first day of the semester—about what you expect to happen in the classroom, including your expectations for respectful and inclusive ways to interact, ask questions, and participate.
- In addition, set and enforce ground-rules for respectful interaction in the classroom, such as guidelines for contributing ideas and questions and for responding to the ideas and questions of others. If a student's conduct could be silencing or denigrating others (intentionally or not), remind the entire class of the ground-rules, then talk with the student individually outside of class about the potential effects of the conduct on the ability of all to learn and contribute. Remember that your silence is often read as endorsement. Therefore, it is important to take action to try to improve the learning environment for all.
- To the extent that is possible (depending on the size of your class), get to know your students and the individual perspectives, skills, experiences, and ideas that they bring into your course. Consult the electronic roster for your course to learn about any preferred names that students would like to be called (please see the University's [guidelines and tips](#) on student's preferred names).
- Communicate high standards for student learning and achievement in your course and express confidence that every student can achieve these standards. In addition, include structured support within your course that is designed to help all students achieve those standards. For example, connect all students to course-specific resources such as supplemental help sessions, peer mentors, and study guides, and to centers such as Cornerstone and The Writing Center.
- Show respect for all questions and comments. Use verbal and non-verbal cues to encourage participation and to challenge all students to think deeply and critically.

- Encourage students to “think out loud,” to ask questions, and to actively consider perspectives that are different from their own.
- If you are teaching about topics that are likely to generate disagreement or controversy, identify clear objectives and design a structure informed by those objectives. In addition, communicate the objectives and the structure to the students, so that they know what to expect. If a tense interaction occurs, it is important to address the issue in the moment, whenever possible. In some cases, pausing for a short time to ask students to discuss in small groups or to reflect in writing individually can allow them to discover what they might learn from the interaction. In others, conversations with individual students outside of class (but before the next class session) will be more appropriate. If you realize after the class session is over that a tense exchange has occurred that you did not acknowledge, or if one or more of your students tells you of an exchange that you did not notice at the time, you can devote time at the start of the next class session to discussing the exchange and what you may all learn from it. For assistance, contact The Teaching Center.

Encourage a Growth Mindset

- Foster a “growth mindset” by conveying the idea that intelligence is not a reflection of fixed, “natural” abilities, but can change and grow over time (Dweck, 2006). When talking with students about their performance in class or on exams or assignments, avoid describing such performance as a sign of “natural ability” (or lack of ability). Doing so may activate “stereotype threat,” a phenomenon in which students’ awareness of negative stereotypes that link identity and ability can lead to depressed academic performance (Steele, 2010; reducingstereotypethreat.org/).
- Help students develop a growth mindset by speaking with them about the extent to which experiences of academic faltering can provide opportunities to grow and improve. For example, if a student comes to your office hours to discuss a disappointing grade on an exam or an assignment, work with the student to identify specific areas where the student is struggling, and to identify 2-3 new strategies the student can use to improve in those areas.
- Create an environment in the classroom or laboratory in which it is okay to make mistakes and where faltering can lead to deeper learning. If a student contributes an answer that is incorrect, for example, ask questions to help the student identify how he or she arrived at that answer and to help the entire class to understand at least one method to derive the correct answer. At the same time, be open to the possibility that what seems to be an incorrect answer initially may lead to shared understanding of an alternative way to answer the question.

Strive for Equality of Access to Instruction and Assistance

- Help your students learn about academic and non-academic assistance and resources that are available at the University. Keep in mind that all students will not be equally aware of—or equally comfortable in seeking out—academic help and resources provided by academic advisors, Cornerstone: The Center for Advanced Learning, the Dean’s offices, Student Health Services, etc. (To learn about these resources, please see The Teaching Center’s [handout: Assistance for Students at Washington University](#), provided at the Graduate-Student Teaching Orientation). Set aside time in class to talk about these resources during the first week of class, and—when needed—in individual conversations with students.
- Promote fairness and transparency by articulating and sharing with all students the criteria you will use to evaluate their work. When appropriate, grade with rubrics or answer keys.
- Ensure that assistance provided outside of class is equally available and accessible to all students (e.g., if you share information with one or a few students regarding how best to approach an assignment, repeat this information to the entire class).

- When a student approaches you to let you know that she or he has a disability, refer the student to the faculty member in charge of the course. The faculty member will help the student get in touch with the [Disabilities Resources Office \(at Cornerstone\)](#). The Disabilities Resources staff will then communicate with you regarding any required accommodations.

Gather and Use Feedback to Refine and Improve your Strategies

- Ask a faculty member, colleague, or Teaching Center staff to observe your teaching and help you identify patterns in instructor-student (as well as student-student) interactions. Consider which of these patterns might be encouraging full participation and inclusion of diverse contributions, and which might be perceived as barriers to full participation and inclusion. Identify adjustments you can make to minimize the latter.
- Provide opportunities for students to reflect on the course and to give you feedback on the methods and strategies you are using. For example, ask students to complete brief, anonymous course evaluations at midterm. Afterward, take time in class to explain how you are integrating their feedback as you make adjustments during the remainder of the semester.

As you build your teaching expertise, practice a “growth mindset”—be open to the possibility of learning from mistakes and welcome the opportunity to learn as much as you can from your diverse students and colleagues.

Selected References and Resources

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