# 3 Tips for Creating Inclusive Classrooms

## 1. Inclusive Course Planning Considerations

- In the syllabus and during teaching, be transparent and informative about course expectations, grading criteria, as well as learning strategies and resources relevant to this course.
- Use instructional strategies that promote engagement and interaction, including:
    - teaching to different learning styles; e.g., effective combination of verbal and visual presentation of content
    - promoting student engagement; e.g., intersperse every 20 min of lecture with 2-3 min of silent review of notes during which students can more effectively formulate questions
    - promoting student interaction; e.g., intersperse every 20 min of lecture with 3-5 min of paired or small group discussion where students must synthesize the main points of the preceding lecture
    - promoting effective work in teams; e.g., training teams in the stages of forming, norming, storming, and performing
- Be informed about accommodation policies related to religious holidays and to students with disabilities; consult with relevant offices or peers about how to enact these policies in a relevant and appropriate manner.
- Employ mechanisms to offset how known cognitive biases might impact you; e.g., if attendance matters, take attendance in a formal way. Otherwise you will notice the presence or absence of students who stand out to you visibly and hold them to a different standard of accountability.


## 2. Get to Know your Students

A hallmark of an inclusive classroom is that students have a feeling of being included: welcomed, respected, and supported in their individual experience. The particular strategies you use for your course will depend on its size, the structure of the course, and your teaching style – just keep in mind that it's possible to get to know your students in some meaningful way in any context. Possibilities include:

- Knowing students by name
- Requesting a 1-2 page autobiography at the start of the class focused on their interest in and preparedness for this material (but can also include other interesting facts)
- Talking with students about their progress in the class
- Giving students opportunities to articulate their thoughts and knowledge in class and promoting student discussion
- Collecting mid-term feedback (for the purposes of improving the current class); e.g., at the end of a class distribute index cards, asking students to write down one point of confusion they are currently experiencing with the material
- Using icebreakers to energize and focus a class
- Requiring all students to have one 1-on-1 meeting with you

## 3. Be on the Lookout for Problematic Assumptions (based on simplistic schema)

The following are common assumptions made by individual instructors – often unconsciously. Instructors who are able to recognize, challenge, and test their own assumptions are less likely to create exclusionary dynamics.

Identifying inaccurate assumptions can also inform your curricular or pedagogical design. For example, instead of assuming that all students can keep up with the course on their own, you might encourage study circles or include non-graded in class tests to check comprehension or ask each student to meet one-on-one with you at least once during the course of the term.

### Examples of inaccurate assumptions about students:

- Students understand the norms and expectations of a college environment.
- Students will seek help when they are struggling with a class.
- Poor writing suggests limited intellectual ability.
- Students understand what you are saying.
- All students learn/study/think the way you did as an undergraduate.
- Students who are doodling, reading, or doing something on their phones are disengaged.

### Examples of inaccurate assumptions about people based on social identity:

- Students from certain groups are not intellectual, are irresponsible, are satisfied with below average grades, lack ability, have high ability in particular subject areas, etc.
- Students from certain backgrounds (e.g., students from urban or rural areas, students who speak with an accent, students from specific racial or ethnic groups) are poor writers.
- Older students or students with physical disabilities are slower learners and require more attention from the instructor.
- Students whose cultural affiliation is tied to non-English speaking groups are not native English speakers or are bilingual.
- Students who are affiliated with a particular group (gender, race, ethnic, etc.) are experts on issues related to that group and feel *comfortable* being seen as information sources to the rest of the class and the instructor who are not members of that group. AND/OR European American students do not have opinions about issues of race or ethnicity and members of other groups do have opinions about these issues.
- All students from a particular group share the same view on an issue, and their perspective will necessarily be different from the majority of the class who are not from that group.
- Students from certain groups are more likely to: be argumentative or conflictual during class discussions OR not participate in class discussions OR bring a more radical agenda to class discussions.

Adapted from: Creating Inclusive College Classrooms, by Shari Saunders and Diana Kardia**; Center for Research on Learning and Teaching, University of Michigan.** http://crlt.umich.edu/gsis/p3_1

For more on the specific role of faculty in creating an inclusive learning environment, see:

Dee, J.R. and Daly, C.J. (2012) "Engaging Faculty in the Process of Cultural Change in Support of Diverse Student Populations," in *Creating Campus Cultures: Fostering Success Among Racially Diverse Student Populations*, Edited by S.D. Museus and U.M. Jayakumar, New York: Routledge.