

Tips for Creating an Inclusive Classroom

Fall 2016

1. USE WELCOMING LANGUAGE

- Use contemporary language when referring to marginalized groups. If materials use outdated language, note it and explain that the class will use contemporary terms (except when referring to the original). Examples include: “Gay or lesbian” not “homosexual”; “undocumented noncitizen” not “illegal alien”. See Appendix for more examples and resources.
- If a student uses a term or makes a comment that strikes you as offensive, rather than ignore it, gently express why that language may be perceived as problematic and suggest an alternative term.
- Be mindful of diversity in using pronouns and crafting examples. For example:
 - Resist always using “he” to refer to CEOs or investment managers, having only male examples of successful leaders, using terms like “guys” (e.g. “the guys in Finance...”)
 - When giving examples, use a variety of diverse names (female, non-Anglo) and language that does not make assumptions about sexual orientation (e.g. “spouse” or “partner” rather than “wife”).
- Avoid comments or jokes that reinforce either positive or negative stereotypes (e.g., about women being emotional or not good at math, or Asians being extra hard-working or good with numbers.)

2. ELICIT DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES

- When soliciting personal experiences, ask generally whether any student has relevant experience or knowledge they would like to volunteer, rather than singling out students based on a group identity such as race, gender, national origin, sexual orientation, or religious belief.
- Discussing highly charged topics, like race or sexism, is important in a truly diverse community. Don’t avoid those topics because they feel awkward or uncomfortable. Do exercise care in how to open and shepherd difficult conversations, and consider acknowledging your own biases.
 - Note: Studies show that opening such conversations with an acknowledgment of their difficulty as well as by signaling the purpose as a learning opportunity helps to reduce barriers to engagement (e.g. “Talking about race in this context is difficult and uncomfortable, but these conversations are important to have and honest exchanges are a learning opportunity for all of us.”).
- If an unusual degree of tension arises during the discussion, express openness to hearing from students outside of class.

3. RESPECT STUDENTS’ DIVERSE IDENTITIES AND PERSPECTIVES

- Start the course by expressly stating that a wide array of opinions is welcome in your classroom, but that students must treat one another with respect even when they sharply disagree.
- Include a reasonable accommodation statement on your syllabus (language is provided in Appendix and on Sternlife Teaching Policies).
- Ask all students to write their preferred name, gender pronoun, pronunciation/nickname and, if you are using last names, title, on the seating chart at the beginning of the year. If a student requests that you use a different pronoun (e.g. she vs he, they vs he/she), accommodate the request in a respectful manner.
- The names of students will reflect the diversity in a classroom and potentially raise questions of pronunciation. Model how students should behave with clients or co-workers by asking the student for clarification and making note of it.
- Do not assume you know how a person self-identifies, racially or ethnically. Someone who appears or “presents as” white, may self-identify differently, as might someone who presents as a person of color. Be careful of making assumptions, both privately held and publicly expressed.

* This document draws heavily from a document used at NYU Law School, which was the result of a collaboration among NYU Law’s Diversity Working Group, Student Bar Association, and All-ALSA Coalition, and draws upon numerous expert resources including Claude M. Steele, Whistling Vivaldi (2010). Modifications were made based on input from Stern’s Faculty Council, Department Chairs, and the members of Stern’s Diversity and Inclusion Task Force.

4. ENSURE EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

- Post all TF openings on the TF/GF system to ensure that any student who is interested can apply. Recognize the value of diversity when making TF/GF selections.
- Aim for diversity in classroom participation. Cold call or select volunteers with an eye toward equity, and be conscious about possible bias in feedback or in who is asked to follow up. Recognize the natural tendency to gravitate toward, and to be more comfortable with, people like oneself.
 - Engage the help of a TF/GF, colleague, or STEP consultant to track participation, noting gender, race, etc. Note both whom you do or do not call upon, as well as which students raise their hands.
 - After the first third of the semester, take stock of whether participation is skewed in your classroom. If it is, explicitly encourage more voices. Students who participate with high frequency can be gently reminded to leave room for others by limiting their participation to especially important points; students who do not speak can be encouraged to participate more so that all perspectives are heard.
 - Explicitly ask for “new voices” in the discussion. Request that only students who have not spoken today/this week/this month raise their hands.
 - Wait a bit before calling on students, rather than calling on the first hand you see go up. While the silence can feel awkward, it almost always results in a greater number and more diverse set of hands raised.
- Be conscious of which students contribute what comments so as to avoid praising a student who replicates a remark that was previously stated but without notice, particularly since research suggests that those more likely to be overlooked may be students from marginalized groups.
- Studies show that educators may inadvertently use different language with students who are or are perceived to be struggling, based on race, gender, or background, and that this language matters. For *all* struggling students, use language that suggests that success is within their control, as opposed to a product of fixed ability (e.g. Rather than say “Statistics are really hard for some people”, consider “Statistics feels hard now, because you’re learning” or “The point isn’t to immediately know all; the point is to learn it step by step.”)

5. EXHIBIT A WILLINGNESS TO LEARN

- Acknowledge openly the potential biases in your own perspective, and ensure a rich dialogue within class by seeking to elicit opinions that differ from your own.
- Empower TAs to raise concerns with you anonymously on students’ behalf. Consider providing a method for students to give anonymous feedback during the semester about diversity-related concerns. One option is to create or ask IT to create a Google Form that can be adapted for this purpose and included as a link on your syllabus.
- Encourage students to reach out to you during office hours or otherwise to talk about any issues related to identity that may be inhibiting their ability to fully engage in your class.
- Consider videotaping your classes to get another perspective on classroom dynamics. Look at whether there are any disparities in race, gender, or other discernible factors in student participation, and whether it relates to who raises hands, who is called upon, who is asked follow up questions, and who receives positive feedback or affirmation about their contributions/responses. If you see inequitable patterns, adjust accordingly.

APPENDIX

CONTEMPORARY LANGUAGE

It may be helpful to know that many marginalized groups' preferred terms have changed over the years. There are several resources for learning about these preferences:

- LGBTQ <http://www.glaad.org/reference/> ; <http://goo.gl/lXc1y0>
 - e.g. "gay or lesbian" not "homosexual"
 - e.g. "sexual orientation" not "sexual preference"
- Immigration https://www.raceforward.org/sites/default/files/DTIW_Stylebook.pdf
 - e.g. "undocumented" or "unauthorized" not "illegal" when describing an individual in a country without or beyond authorization and/or documentation
 - e.g. "noncitizen" not "alien" when describing individuals based on their lack of citizenship status (or, when addressing a specific group among noncitizens, more tailored terms like "immigrant" "refugee" or "migrant")
- Race/ethnicity
 - e.g. Native populations may prefer "Indigenous" to "Indian"
- Differentiate race from ethnicity, and note that students may identify with multiple categories
- Mental Health/Disability <http://ncdj.org/style-guide/>
 - Use person-first language:
 - "people with disabilities" not "handicapped"
 - "a person with an intellectual disability" not "retarded"
 - "a person with schizophrenia" not "a schizophrenic"
 - Avoid expressions that imply that a person with a disability must be a victim or have a poor quality of life. (e.g. "afflicted with/stricken by/suffers from").
 - Avoid terms like "crazy," "loony," "mad," and "psycho"

STATEMENTS FOR SYLLABUS

Include these paragraphs in your syllabus for both graduate and undergraduate classes:

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities. Please contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (212-998-4980 or mosescsd@nyu.edu) for further information. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance.

HEALTH AND WELLNESS

To access the University's extensive health and mental health resources, contact the NYU Wellness Exchange. You can call its private hotline ([212-443-9999](tel:212-443-9999)), available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to reach out to a professional who can help to address day-to-day challenges as well as other health-related concerns.