Inclusive Classroom Climate

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Inclusive classroom climates help all students feel supported intellectually and academically by extending a sense of belonging and interest. This vital but complex environment is sustained when instructors and students work together to promote thoughtfulness and respect.

Recommendations

- **Structure classroom conversations to encourage respectful and equitable participation -** Instructors can establish ground rules for appropriate behavior early in the semester (including confidentiality, respectful disagreement, and civil debate); as a strategy to promote student buy-in, instructors can enlist students to help create and maintain these rules. Alternatively, students might be offered a quiet minute to think of responses to key questions or to write down new questions before responding. Instructors can also establish guidelines about how students should signal that they want to speak and contribute to a discussion, and intervene when students violate classroom norms.

- **Use small groups to encourage non-competitive ways of learning and encourage cross-cultural communication -** If patterns of seating segregation in the classroom are tied to patterns of nonparticipation, instructors can assign small groups across racial/ethnic or gender lines. If some students are hesitant to speak up in class, they might contribute in small groups first. Instructors should pay careful attention to group dynamics, and intervene if some students become excluded from full participation and/or more assertive students begin to dominate. Instructors can also set up study groups or assign collaborative projects that require meetings outside of class, such as peer editing, group papers, lab assignments, or presentations where students work with each other.

- **Anticipate sensitive issues and acknowledge racial, class or cultural differences in the classroom when appropriate -** When discussing controversial issues, instructors should expect emotional responses or even conflict. Such emotion is not necessarily negative, unless it makes students unduly upset, inhibits class discussion, or causes students to behave rudely. In such cases the instructor may need to intervene and remind students of the rules for classroom discussion. Establishing shared guidelines can help to mitigate disrespect and hostility, or prevent it from arising in the first place.

- **Model inclusive language -** As an element of developing a respectful, inclusive environment, instructors can be aware of the language practices they model. Common beneficial practices include: avoid using masculine pronouns for both males and females; when using American idioms, explain them for the benefit of non-native English speakers; and avoid using falsely inclusive terms or statements like "women" for European or European American women or "all women/men" for heterosexual

individuals. To assist in this strategy, instructors can vary the concrete examples and case studies used to include a variety of social characteristics, such as race or gender.

- **Use multiple and diverse examples -** Expanding on the idea of varied examples above, instructors can include multicultural examples, visuals, and materials as much as possible in lectures. These should include multiple perspectives on the syllabus, in class discussion, and in assignments, when possible. If including course material or examples that place a group in the position of an oppressed victim, instructors should be sure to provide examples of empowerment for balance. Other ways to involve multiple perspectives include playing devil's advocate, engaging in a debate about the possible interpretations of a text, and assigning the work of relevant minority scholars.

- **Personally connect with students -** Instructors can use a diversity statement or teaching philosophy statement in the syllabus as a way to welcome all students and model openness and honesty. Extending this policy, instructors should feel free to discuss personal learning experiences and challenges whenever appropriate - studies show that students appreciate and learn from metacognitive moments where they can reflect on their or other peoples' thinking. Where appropriate, instructors can even encourage students to meet one-on-one during the semester for conversation.

- **Provide alternative means for participation -** To signal awareness of different emotional and social conditions in the classroom, instructors should allow student participation opportunities via online discussions in addition to the classroom. Instructors can also collect journal entries, reading logs, or other reflection pieces, and should avoid a single homogenous strategy for the entirety of term.

- **Respectfully communicate with students -** Instructors should take care to pronounce students' names correctly and in the proper order. This includes not shortening or simplifying a student's name without his/her clear approval; being aware that some ethnicities may arrange their given and family names in various orders; asking students for their preferred gender pronouns; and avoiding gender binaries by using plurals such as "their" instead of he or she. In contrast, instructors should not ask any student to be a representative spokesperson for his or her perceived group, look pointedly at or away from these same students when discussing issues of race, class, gender, et., ask or expect students to be knowledgeable about their culture unless they volunteer such information.

- **Address offensive, discriminatory, and insensitive comments -** As part of an inclusive classroom environment, instructors should respect all students' honest expressions and thoughts. If a student's response indicates an emotional investment in the subject, instructors should not let other students dismiss their contribution as "irrational" or "unscholarly" reactions; rather, they can address blatantly offensive and discriminatory comments and hold students accountable for their behavior.

- **Perform a Self-Assessment -** Instructors can explore any number of teaching inventories to assess habits and classroom practices, reveal gaps in approaches, and consider strategies for revision.