

CARE FOR INCLUSION AND EQUITY IN LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Contents

Below are five dimensions along which to foster an inclusive and equitable learning environment for your students, in both in-person and online/remote instruction. Which practices will you explore further and commit to implementing the next time you teach?

[C: COMMUNITY](#)

[A: AGENCY](#)

[R: REPRESENTATION](#)

[E: EQUAL ACCESS](#)

[Pedagogies of Care](#)

[References](#)

C: COMMUNITY

Research into the social and emotional dimensions of learning indicates that a sense of social disconnection from instructors and peers impedes learning, and disproportionately impacts underrepresented students. How can you foster social connections and belonging in your courses to benefit all of your students?

Some ideas:

- Communicate early, often, and if possible 1:1, with students (e.g., pre-course survey, welcome video, course announcements, assigned time for each student to visit office hours)
- Provide synchronous and asynchronous opportunities for students to get to know one another, and learn from each other's diverse perspectives (e.g., [icebreakers](#), group work [online](#) or [in person](#), [peer feedback](#) on work, informal time before or after class to socialize).
- Convey recognition and value for each student's identity and circumstances (e.g., confirm name pronunciations, and use name tents to capture names and pronouns)
- Create an informal "buddy system" for students to have peers in the course they can go to for quick questions and check-ins.

A: AGENCY

Research in self-determination theory and universal design for learning indicates that students benefit from being given some choice and control in how they encounter, engage, and express their learning. How can you give students more agency in your courses?

Some ideas:

- Solicit student questions and feedback on your syllabus before finalizing it.
- Empower students to choose how they engage and express their learning when multiple options serve the same learning goals (e.g., a written, oral, or visual pitch).
- Co-create [class norms](#) with students (e.g., how to contribute, how to voice disagreement, how to raise concerns, how to participate equitably in discussions and group work).
- Support students in [controlling the feedback they receive](#) and assessing or grading themselves (e.g., through [rubrics](#), reflections, or [exam wrappers](#)).
- Solicit frequent feedback from students on their course experience (thumbs up/down, exit tickets, midterm feedback) and make changes based on their feedback.

R: REPRESENTATION

Research on stereotype threat and learning environments indicates that student learning is impacted by visual and other cues that send implicit signals about who belongs and who can succeed. How can you create courses that represent and affirm all of your students?

Some ideas:

- Represent individuals of varied race, gender, religion, ability, etc. in your course slides, course site, and other course materials.
- Avoid using symbols or imagery that might trigger stereotypes or be perceived as exclusive (e.g., a national flag, women performing housework, people of color in service positions)
- Include explicit statements in your syllabus, course site, and assignments acknowledging that the work is challenging and expressing your confidence that every student can succeed with consistent effort and the teaching team's support.
- Diversify your curriculum so that students can see themselves reflected in the scholars, practitioners, and other figures upheld in the discipline.
- Guide students in reflecting on and affirming their core values.
- Design activities and assignments that elicit students' backgrounds and experiences and promote learning through encounters with diverse perspectives.

E: EQUAL ACCESS

Research on the accessibility of college learning indicates that barriers to equitable learning exist in person, are stronger during online/remote learning, and disproportionately impact underrepresented students. How can you enable all of your students to equally access and benefit from your course learning experiences?

Some ideas:

- Organize your course online to guide students along the learning path and explicitly offer multiple means for seeking help (e.g., email, office hours, questions through the LMS).
- Make materials financially accessible (e.g. by reserving library materials, or using free, [open-source](#), copyright-unrestricted online materials, such as [OpenStax](#)).
- Make materials technologically accessible (e.g., by ensuring they are [mobile-friendly](#), keeping file sizes small, turning off the default HD video in your Zoom settings to [help those who might not have reliable bandwidth](#)).

- Make materials sensorily accessible through multiple modalities (e.g., provide [image description and alt-text](#) for all images and videos, narrate visual information when you share your screen, live caption your Powerpoint or [Google](#) slides, use [PDFs with OCR \(Optical Character Recognition\)](#), confirm screen reader accessibility with a tool such as [Webaim](#)).
- Make materials linguistically and culturally accessible by allowing students to engage with materials in alternative languages as suitable, and encouraging paraphrase and adaptation to their own lives.

Pedagogies of Care

Research on trauma-informed instruction and pedagogies of care indicates that demonstrations of caring from instructors enhance student motivation and learning. How can you place student well-being at the heart of your course design, activities, and assessments and show that you care about your students as whole people?

Some ideas:

- Build flexibility into your course design and course policies (e.g., provide due date ranges, offer multiple avenues for getting points/credit, allow for a certain number of absences or late submissions without requiring explanations or imposing penalties).
- Include explicit statements in your syllabus and course site, acknowledging that students might find coursework challenging, expressing a commitment to support students without requiring personal details, and including campus resources on mental health and well-being.
- Familiarize yourself with signs of student distress and steps you can take as an instructor on your campus to help.
- Design activities and assignments that elicit students' backgrounds and experiences and enable them to be known as whole people.

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