



## Knowing “Who’s in Class” Supports Inclusive Teaching

Inclusive teaching practices encourage us to intentionally create and nurture a learning environment that supports all students. From the moment we begin communicating with our class, we are shaping our relationship with our students and the classroom community. As inclusive educators, we establish a welcoming tone, use an equity-minded syllabus, give explicit learning outcomes and expectations, and we carefully craft our curriculum to support all learners. However, even with the best course planning, we can’t predict each class’s individual makeup and the barriers they may encounter in our class. Thus, we may not recognize these barriers and challenges until later in the semester, if at all. What if, instead of reacting to success barriers, we proactively meet the specific needs of the class at the very start?

In the book *What Inclusive Instructors Do: Principles and Practices for Excellence in College Teaching*, Tracie Addy presents a tool that instructors can use to better understand their students at the beginning of the semester. This anonymous and optional form was designed to provide students with the opportunity to share information about their social or cultural identity, and other information that may influence their success in the class. [A study using this tool](#) in a variety of courses indicates that both faculty and students found a benefit in its usage, including a way for students to provide the instructor with information that they normally would not have given.

### The Who’s in Class Tool

The [Who’s in Class tool](#) includes simple “check all that apply” questions and short response questions. Questions can inform faculty about whether their students are commuting to campus, access to technology, social identities, financial barriers, and other information that may shape how students learn effectively. As an OU-specific variation of this tool, OU faculty can use the [Getting to Know You form in OU’s Google Form templates](#), edit and add questions, then distribute it to their students.

### Additional Ideas

- Offer free response prompts like “Tell me a little bit about yourself (major, interests, etc.), what you hope to get out of the class, and any concerns you might have for the semester ahead.” These can be done on a piece of paper on campus, or students can submit their pieces in a format other than text-based writing, such as audio or video.
- [Past OU guest speaker Bryan Dewsbury](#) asks students to write [This I Believe essays](#) in his large biology courses.
- Activities such as the [Personal Identity Wheel](#) can be effective and creative ways to learn about your students and build community.

Gathering information about your students starts the semester on a note of caring and support, and can provide faculty with information for establishing equitable teaching practices.

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