Inclusive Teaching

By creating inclusive classrooms from the very start-- in your syllabus design, policies, [reading list choices](#), deadlines, class activities, and tone-- you can move the needle forward on helping to create a stronger, more equitable community at Mount Holyoke. Classrooms are never neutral spaces and are marked by the same inequalities, exclusion, and power struggles that exist elsewhere in the world. The point is not to claim a privileged space for the classroom that is somehow exempt from those dynamics, but to work to eliminate them where we can, confront them honestly when we cannot, and find ways to listen and include *all* our students in equitable, just ways. A first step might be taking an [inventory](#) of your own practices to see how inclusive your classroom is.

In traditional college classrooms, faculty have often been assumed to be in a position of manager and enforcer, making sure students attend class, do their assignments, and then judging that performance. That is, the [syllabus serves as a contract and is filled with punishing language](#) about what will happen when a student violates this or that policy. Recent thinking about universal design in higher education suggests a very different approach. By inviting students to learn in approachable, empathetic ways, faculty can create more accessible, learning-centered courses in which *all* students are given the opportunity to learn well.

Further tips for getting started from [Cornell University's Center for Teaching Excellence](#) (reprinted with permission):

- Be reflective by asking yourself the following:
  - How might your own cultural-bound assumptions influence your interactions with students?
  - How might the backgrounds and experiences of your students influence their motivation, engagement, and learning in your classroom?
  - How can you modify course materials, activities, assignments, and/or exams to be more accessible to all students in your class?
- [Incorporate diversity](#) into your overall curriculum.
- Be intentional about creating a safe learning environment by utilizing [ground rules](#).
- Be proactive in [connecting with and learning about your students](#).
- Utilize a variety of teaching strategies, activities, and assignments that will accommodate the needs of students with diverse learning styles, abilities, backgrounds, and experiences.
- Use [universal design principles](#) to create accessible classes. For example, present information both orally and visually to accommodate both students with visual or auditory impairments in addition to students with various learning preferences.

- When possible, provide flexibility in how students demonstrate their knowledge and how you assess student knowledge and development. Vary your assessments (for example, incorporate a blend of collaborative and individual assignments) or allow choice in assignments (for example, give students multiple project topics to choose from, or have students determine the weight of each assignment on their final grade at the beginning of the semester.)
- Be clear about how students will be evaluated and graded. Provide justifications.
- Take time to assess the [classroom climate](#) by obtaining [mid-semester feedback](#) from students.
    - Pass out index cards during class for anonymous feedback.
    - Ask students to rate from 1-5 how comfortable they are in class. Also ask for 2 suggestions for how they could feel more comfortable.
    - Conduct a [Qualtrics](#) survey.
    - Discuss your findings in the next class and share any changes you will make regarding the feedback.

More Resources:
[Inclusive Mentoring/Prof. Becky Packard](#)
[Inclusive Syllabus Design/Tulane University](#)
[Identifying Your Own Attitudes/University of Michigan](#)
[Guide to Creating Inclusive College Classrooms/University of Michigan](#)
[Classroom Dynamics and Diversity/Bok Center at Harvard University](#)
[Building Inclusive Classrooms/Cornell University](#)