

Hollins University -- Inclusive Teaching Guide

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3 Key Principles of Inclusive Teaching¹

Principle 1: Inclusive teaching is a mind-set.

For every teaching decision you make, ask yourself “Who is being left out as a result of this approach?” Think about how you can provide course materials (e.g., lecture outline, notes, discussion questions, case studies, etc...) that will help students identify key ideas, organize information, stay focused, and ask relevant questions. This will also help students learn how to take notes on their own.

Principle 2: The more structure, the better for all students.

Students in our classrooms arrive with a range of different cultural backgrounds, personalities, learning differences, and confidence levels. By sharpening the structure of your syllabus, assignments, tests, and pedagogical techniques you can reach more of them. Students appreciate and thrive from additional structure, and some benefit disproportionately.

Principle 3: Too little structure leaves too many students behind.

Some traditional forms of teaching – e.g., lecturing, cold-calling – are not very inclusive and other forms of low structure methods may leave many students behind. For example, more introverted students may be at a disadvantage in classes that rely heavily on discussion as they may not feel comfortable raising their hands or speaking aloud. How can you add more structure to course interactions that allow for a range of engagements? Similarly, some students who are quite comfortable talking in class may simultaneously score poorly on exams and papers. Some students may be well practiced in sharing personal opinions and memorizing content, yet lack the ability to think analytically and apply course concepts to new material. How can you provide more varied assignments that allow for more frequent feedback and a final grade based on a range of assignments as opposed to just 2-3?

Inclusive teaching means addressing BOTH classroom interactions AND course design.

Considerations for an Inclusive Syllabus²

An inclusive syllabus:

1. Incorporates content that represents a diverse set of perspectives and experiences: choosing content from authors/creators of diverse social identities and disciplinary sub-fields helps students to see that scholars from all identity groups have a stake in the work of your field and that success in the field is not limited to a privileged few.
2. Prioritizes learning over content and/or rules: this may include stating learning goals explicitly, framing major assignments as learning activities (rather than grading

activities), offering guidance on how to study / read / prepare for class successfully, and providing some of the rationale behind important course design decisions.

3. Is framed as an invitation, rather than a contract: this may include an emphasis on the opportunities for learning the course will present, a tone that does not alienate students, and a focus on what students will gain from the course and what kinds of actions lead to those gains rather than a focus on rules and behavior to be avoided.
4. Explicitly articulates the norms and/or hidden “rules” you assume all students know: many students come to us without clear understanding of classroom norms or “rules” for successful academic work in the university setting. This is true of first-generation college students, students who come to study in the U.S.A. from other cultures/countries, and students returning to school after a significant time away. The more explicit you can be about your expectations; the more likely students will be to meet the high standards you set.
5. Explicitly values differences in students’ social identities and considers how these might affect students’ experience in the course: including language that explicitly values diversity, privileges dialogue over debate, and considers the types of supports some students may need are ways to demonstrate your commitment to inclusion. This may take many forms, including: asking students to indicate their preferred gender pronoun (rather than assuming you know from appearance), expressing explicit value for divergent points of view, creating ground rules for inclusive dialogue, and incorporating inclusive statements about course content.
6. Allows for multiple ways to learn and demonstrate learning: This might include varying assignment types to balance individual and collaborative tasks or written and oral tasks. Or, it might include allowing students to choose how they will demonstrate their learning and achievement of assignment objectives.

Inclusive Syllabus Language³

This resource offers sample language written in an inclusive manner that professors may adopt and adapt for your own syllabus.

Religious/Cultural Observance

Persons who have religious or cultural observances that coincide with this class should let the instructor know in writing (by e-mail for example) by [date]. I strongly encourage you to honor your cultural and religious holidays! However, if I do not hear from you by [date], I will assume that you plan to attend all class meetings.

Point of View

The readings, class lecture, and my comments in class will suggest a point of view. This perspective is my own and does not have to be yours! I encourage you to disagree with the ideas in the readings and lectures as well as the perspectives of your colleagues in the course. Please express yourself!! A significant part of a college education is learning about the complexity of various issues. Therefore, it is important that we listen and respect one another

but we do not have to agree. A richer discussion will occur when a variety of perspectives are presented in class for discussion.

Accessibility and Accommodations

If you think you need an accommodation for a disability, please let us know at your earliest convenience. Some aspects of this course, such as the assignments, in-class activities, or the way we teach may be modified to facilitate your participation and progress. To request regular accommodations beyond those I can offer or accommodations that will apply to your courses in general, please see the Dean of Academic Services (dean@hollins.edu). Hollins University will treat any information about your disability with the utmost discretion.

Student Mental Health and Well-being

Hollins University is committed to advancing the mental health and wellbeing of its students. If you or someone you know is feeling overwhelmed, depressed, and/or in need of support, services are available.

Attendance, Participation, and Universal Learning

Attendance and participation are highly important in this [small, collaborative, seminar-style] class. If you must be absent because of an emergency or illness, please make every effort to speak with me about it beforehand, if possible, or after the next class. I will excuse such absences with a doctor's note or other form of official documentation. Please notify me of absences due to religious observance or University sporting events as soon as you can, or by the third week of the semester. Keep in mind that more than two unexcused absences will begin to affect your final grade.

I am committed to the principle of universal learning. This means that our classroom, our virtual spaces, our practices, and our interactions be as inclusive as possible. Mutual respect, civility, and the ability to listen and observe others carefully are crucial to universal learning. Active, thoughtful, and respectful participation in all aspects of the course will make our time together as productive and engaging as possible. I will give you midterm feedback on your participation.

If you have a need, please arrange a meeting with me so I can best help you learn in this course. I will treat as private and confidential any information that you share

Discussion Guidelines (multiple examples)

1. **Class Conduct:** A positive learning environment relies upon creating an atmosphere where diverse perspectives can be expressed, especially in a course that focuses on pressing and controversial social and political issues. Each student is encouraged to take an active part in class discussions and activities. Honest and respectful dialogue is expected. Disagreement and challenging of ideas in a supportive and sensitive manner is encouraged. Hostility and disrespectful behavior is not acceptable. Just as we expect others to listen attentively to our own views, we must reciprocate and listen to others when they speak, especially when we disagree with them. However, in this class, our emphasis will be on engaging in the mutual exploration of issues as presented in the course readings as scholars rather than in defending points of view we have formed outside the classroom.

2. In our structured and unstructured discussions and dialogues, we also will have many opportunities to explore some challenging, high-stakes issues and increase our understandings of different perspectives. Our conversations may not always be easy; we sometimes will make mistakes in our speaking and our listening; sometimes we will need patience or courage or imagination or any number of qualities in combination to engage our texts, our classmates, and our own ideas and experiences. Always we will need respect for others. Thus, an important second aim of our course necessarily will be for us to increase our facility with the sometimes-difficult conversations that arise inside issues of social justice as we deepen our understandings of multiple perspectives – whatever our backgrounds, experiences, or positions.
3. To learn, we must be open to the views of people different from ourselves. In this time, we share together over the semester, please honor the uniqueness of your fellow classmates and appreciate the opportunity we have to learn from one another. Please respect each other’s opinions and refrain from personal attacks or demeaning comments of any kind. Finally, remember to keep confidential all issues of a personal or professional nature that are discussed in class.

Inclusive Interactions with Students¹

1. **Get comfortable with periods of silence in your classroom.** Use activities like think/pair/share that give students quiet time to think before they speak. This approach both supports students who need time to gather their thoughts and helps eliminate the monopolizing of class discussions by a few students who are always ready to speak. Don’t rush the “thinking” part – be ok with silence. And invite students to jot down notes to prepare for sharing their comments.
2. **Add structure to small-group discussions.** Small group discussions give students a low pressure way to vet their ideas with peers. Faculty members can use this opportunity to walk around and eavesdrop with the goal of affirming those students who may need encouragement or a confidence boost. And, rather than assume the groups will function well on their own, provide more structure by: 1) assigning and rotating roles in the group (e.g., notetaker, reporter, facilitator, skeptic), 2) teaching students how to participate in small groups (offer guidelines like sharing names, putting away phones, listening without interrupting, etc...), 3) providing clear instructions on a screen and/or handout rather than just orally, 4) allowing anonymous participation which supports introverted students, students who fear they don’t belong in college, or students who hold a minority opinion, etc... Students can provide feedback on notecards, or via a clicker system.
3. **Counteract self-perceptions that stunt student learning.** These include for example a fixed mind-set (vs. a growth mind-set) and imposter syndrome.
4. **Connect with students personally.** Research shows that a personal connection with a professor can make a significant difference in a student’s experience and achievement. Some ways to build connections include using their names, sharing pronouns, sending notes, sharing something about yourself as a person, and acknowledging that we all have hard times, including the professor (see original essay for details).

5. **Survey your students throughout the semester** to see what is working and what isn't. Invite feedback and revise your course content, structure, and/or class interactions as necessary.
6. **Invite a peer faculty member to observe your class** and provide feedback on what they observe.

¹ Sathy, Viji and Kelly A. Hogan. 2019 Want to Reach All of Your Students? Here's How to Make Your Teaching More Inclusive: Advice Guide. *Chronicle of Higher Education*. July 22.

https://www.chronicle.com/interactives/20190719_inclusive_teaching?fbclid=IwAR0AjXmj_RGIp2CvYKXQgCNTYRMaiF5GBbuCSjB8rwV302A2kgzCFGSJsYE

² Reinert Center for Transformative Teaching & Learning: <http://www.slu.edu/blogs/ctl/2017/01/18/features-of-an-inclusive-syllabus/>

The Syllabus as a Tool for Setting a Climate

<https://sites.tufts.edu/inclusiveteaching/the-syllabus-as-tool-for-setting-a-climate>

³ University of Michigan, College of Literature, Science and Arts

<https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/inclusive-teaching/2017/08/24/inclusive-syllabus-language/>