

Teaching Tip Tuesday

Culturally Inclusive Teaching

Connecting with Students is the Instructor's Responsibility

Students are diverse, representing a variety of cultures, positionalities, and value systems that impact education. As an instructor, regardless of your own cultural biases, it is incumbent upon you to meet the students where they are. You can do this by designing courses that demonstrate respect for students' values, cultures, and priorities. Here are some quick tips that will help you to provide students with culturally inclusive learning environments.

Tips for Inclusion and Representation in the Classroom

Continually engage your own positionality

By considering who YOU are, and how your cultural and social identities affect your perspectives and ways of learning, you can better address the biases that have informed your choice of content and the assumptions about student engagement strategies that may have informed your assignment designs.

Adopt a collective focus

Traditional academic structures favor individual achievement and competitive interactions. This can be alienating to students from cultures that place more value on the group and the individual's contribution to it—common values for many ethnic minorities in the U.S. Incorporate group assignments and collaborative activities to help students from minority backgrounds flourish in your course.

Incorporate lived experience

Provide students with an opportunity to reflect on and share how course content is related to their lived experience. This respects the value the students' cultural identities, countering prevailing deficit models of minority students, and facilitates learning by promoting integration of new content with existing knowledge.

Provide both long-term and short-term incentives

Some cultures prioritize working toward long-term goals. For students from these cultures, work that does not seem to have immediate benefits is fine. Others prioritize short-term goals. For students from these cultures, nebulous long-term benefits are not good motivators to engage in work. Be sure to provide short-term incentives (e.g. points, scaffolded projects), while clearly articulating long-term goals (e.g. How the skill may be used in a specific career path).

Promote belonging

Representation matters. Students who see themselves reflected in those who are successful in a particular field have increased sense of belonging in that field. Highlight the contributions of scholars from diverse backgrounds when possible.

Be flexible

Allow multiple pathways to successful completion of your course. Nontraditional students and students from minoritized cultures often have complications related to jobs and families. Providing flexible deadlines and assignment choices can facilitate their success, by reducing hard choices between other commitments and completing work in your course.