

Diversity in student needs handout

I. Multiple styles of teaching.

To maximize inclusiveness in a classroom, it may be ideal to teach in such a way so that all of these styles can be addressed in some ways.

* Encourage students to assess how they learn best. You can get at this by means of an in class survey about how they like to have material presented, or by directing students to self-assessment tests about learning styles.

* Switching between different modes may offer multiple ways of expressing difficult concepts to students. i.e. a student who is primarily visual may have trouble following a concept by simply hearing a lecture. Encouraging them to try to “sketch out” the idea on paper may help them visualize the concept and make sense of it.

* Orienting lectures/presentations to infuse different styles can be of use, and keep the attention of a class.

Try incorporating visual, aural and kinesthetic elements to presentations.

Examples:

*Have a lecture where concepts are explained verbally and by use of a chart/graph demonstrating the logic of a concept

* Use sound and video clips as case studies/examples of a phenomenon.

II. Setting up a classroom to be welcoming for all.

A. From a teacher's point of view:

1.) Define your relationship with your students and the professor early. This is especially important for international TAs and minority TAs.

Be certain to have a discussion with your professor at the beginning of the term about those areas where one's authority may be questioned, namely, what will happen in a grade dispute? Late policies, extension policies, etc.

2.) Reframe your relationship with students as a mentor, as opposed to as an evaluator. Especially with undergraduate students, if they feel that you are there to assist them in understanding the material by any means possible, then issues of authority challenges, etc. are less likely. This includes being open about having office hours, answering e-mails and promoting transparency regarding expectations (especially in terms of how grades are assigned).

B. From the student's point of view:

Diversity in the Classroom Module.

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Students come to universities with a large variety of backgrounds, obstacles and environments, so it is important to be sure that we are as sensitive to such diversity as possible. Small adjustments can help ensure that the classroom is as inclusive as possible.

As an overall comment, try as much as possible, not to assume a particular background of students, even if the school is a very prestigious school, or may be located in a homogeneous area.

More specific details:

1.) When using cultural, historical or social references, explain the context first, and then go into the example. Not all students who are in a classroom may come from the same school background (or quality), or may even be US citizens. Explaining the context of a reference/example will help promote diversity by keeping everyone on the same page, thus avoiding excluding students from the start.

2.) Minimize economic constraints as much as possible. Students may come to a classroom under restrained resources, but may be too embarrassed to say that they cannot afford the books. Having course packs and required books on reserve for such students will ensure that they can participate without having to worry.

Make it clear that if students do have special concerns or problems that they can feel comfortable discussing those with you so you can provide assistance.

3.) List resources for student assistance on syllabi, course websites, etc. Many students who may have special needs go without simply because they do not know of such options. Alerting them to writing centers, free tutoring on campus, disability resource

centers, etc. will allow those who need such options the freedom to do so.

4.) Announce all students by name and attribute contributions to the respective students.

Doing this helps ensure that all students feel welcome and relevant members of the classroom and the university overall by communicating that they are being taken seriously. This is especially helpful in situations where students may feel uncomfortable as minority members of a class (based on race, gender, class background, etc.) or who may have an unpopular or dissenting point of view.