

# Inclusion by Design: Tool Helps Faculty Examine Their Teaching Practices

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Are there barriers to inclusion lurking in your courses?

After meeting at a diversity and inclusion session of the 2013 Professional and Organization Development Network (POD Network) Conference in Pittsburgh, the three of us set out to develop a tool to help faculty examine their courses through a diversity lens. We were driven by a lack of available resources that provide a practical approach to digging deep into the nuances of one's course.

So how does one examine course diversity, given there are so many points of entry into the conversation yet varying degrees of faculty interest and commitment? We decided the best place to start is the syllabus. After all, it's customary for those who teach in college settings to develop and/or at the very least use a syllabus to guide their courses. That makes the syllabus the perfect focal point for faculty to explore difficult conversations and contradictions about inclusion, exclusion, diversity, privilege, power, and possibilities for transformative change in the barrier-laden structure of college classroom.

We spent a few years of designing and wrestling with what to call our creation (tool, audit, survey?) and eventually decided that it simply was a 'tool' to explore inclusion in one's syllabus and course design. In our ongoing research, deliberations, and presentations of this tool at national conferences, three areas of intentional exploration emerged: inclusion and course context; text; and subtext. The complete tool is rather lengthy and exhaustive, rooted in theory and research on inclusion, multicultural education, universal design, implicit/unconscious bias, and the hidden curriculum (a full version can be found by visiting <http://bit.ly/inclusionbydesign>). For the purposes of this publication we therefore present a brief snapshot of the overarching categories that highlight how the tool can help instructors examine the text, context and subtext of any course.

**Inclusion and Course Context:** A guiding question to explore the context of a course is, how does the context of the course support inclusive learning? We ask educators to reflect on the following:

- What are the situational factors surrounding your course?
- Who are the people that will be in your class? Who will not be there?
- What is the course content? Whose voice is heard? What perspective dominates? What is omitted?
- How is the content relevant in the "real" world and for the learners in your class? How can it be made relevant for those who may not recognize its relevance?
- What is the common pedagogy in your class – the philosophy and practice behind your instructional choices?

**Inclusion and "Text":** As educational developers who have depth and experience in course design, we clearly recognize that the transformation of one syllabus is not enough to address the range of inclusion issues present in any course. In fact, we argue that a transformation of how one thinks about learning and course design is the greater aim. In this respect, we follow the guiding question, How do learning outcomes, assessment, and content support inclusion for all? We ask faculty to examine the tone of their syllabi – is it inviting? Staying true to our training in backwards design and deep learning, we ask faculty to examine the

types of learning outcomes (cognitive, behavioral, affective), the variety of assessment, and the teaching and learning activities they will use to achieve learning outcomes: Do they use culturally responsive teaching approaches, flexible or fixed assessments, shared teaching, or co-learning approaches in their classroom? This section is best used with faculty who have experienced course design principles or who have had more lengthy course re/design experiences.

**Inclusion and Subtext:** In this section of the tool we ask the following questions to encourage instructors to dig deep into the subtext of their course and make the learning process more inclusive and visible for students:

- What are the implicit rules and messages of your course and are they stated in your syllabus?
- What are the hidden/implicit/unconscious biases and stereotypes?
- Have you, the instructor, made your philosophy of teaching and learning explicit, or does it remain hidden?
- Is the tone of your syllabus contractual, inviting, learner centered, authoritarian, or energizing?

**Paths Forward:** Although the tool is comprehensive, it is by no way complete. The nature of its aims and the complexity of the topic will continue to make it a work in progress. Practicing what we preach, we feel such a tool on inclusion should be inclusive and integrate vantage points of a broad network of educators to grow its effectiveness. Therefore, we are in a continuous state of seeking feedback from faculty on the quality and use of our work. Beyond refining the tool, we aim to nourish deeper conversations about inclusion and diversity in hopes of transforming college classrooms by working with professors on their own approaches to course design.

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