

DIVERSE AND EQUITABLE CLASS ENVIRONMENTS

Classroom climate is just as important as course content in creating a space where students feel empowered and respected.

1 SET AN INCLUSIVE TONE ON THE 1ST DAY

- Introduce yourself, your gender identity, your familiarity with the subject of the class, and what the class will look like (primarily discussion? lecture?).
- Give every student the chance to introduce themselves, their identities, why they're taking the class, etc.

BE EXPLICIT

- Get into the habit of explaining your methods to the class. Slowing down and describing the reasons behind your style and assignments will make the class more accessible.
- Review rubrics for big assignments and exams.
- Have a statement on your syllabus about the environment you want to create together.

ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR POSITIONALITY AND BE MINDFUL OF LANGUAGE

Positionality is the notion that personal values, views, and location in time and space influence how one understands the world. It refers to your position (as a researcher and educator) in relation to the subject matter. This involves race, ethnicity, gender identity, etc. Be aware that the language you use while teaching may be culturally specific and inaccessible to some students because of your position.

- Feel empowered to tell your class that you're learning and might make mistakes, but also be open to feedback.
- If you decide to talk to your class about your learning process, be sure to avoid a confessional. The goal is not to air whatever guilt or uncertainty you may feel about your knowledge gaps, but rather simply to acknowledge those gaps and your aim to ameliorate them.

ACKNOWLEDGE AND RESPOND TO DIFFICULT TOPICS

- Difficult topics can take many forms, some examples include:
 - Issues rooted in the history of course content (e.g., lack of diverse perspectives, unethical research practices).
 - Current events that intersect with course content (e.g. race-based violence, hostile immigration policies, sexual assault).
 - Issues in the discipline (e.g., unbalanced gender and ethnic representation).
- Difficult topics will enter the class regardless so offering, at the very least, brief and structured opportunities to discuss these topics can contribute to a better class environment. Here are some brief DO's to these conversations:

Do's

- Set boundaries and frameworks prior to structured conversations. Prepare some open questions.
 - Example boundaries: Criticize ideas, not groups or people. Don't expect people to speak on behalf of groups based solely on identity. No inflammatory language.
- Actively manage the conversation. Be ready to ask students for evidence, explanations, and follow-ups. Be ready to remind students of set boundaries and guidelines.
- Confront inappropriate language – ignoring this sends signals of complicity to affected students.
- Address the difficulty of talking about these topics. Consider asking why it is difficult to discuss.
- Be ready to defer the conversation. If it gets too heated or off-topic, you can defer to a different time and provide resources as necessary to prep students before said scheduled follow-up.
- Synthesize the discussion at the end of class and provide resources after class. Avoid leaving students hanging without addressing how these discussions intersect with class content. Send an email with resources from Counseling and Psychological Services, Sexual Assault Services, Crisis Hotlines or any other relevant trusted services.

SOURCES

- Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning, Harvard University. "Key moves."
- Indiana University, "Managing difficult classroom discussions."

TEACHING IN TIMES OF CRISIS

LOCAL, NATIONAL, AND INTERNATIONAL EVENTS HAVE SIGNIFICANT IMPACTS ON STUDENT ABILITY

- Students do not need to be directly involved in the event or crisis to experience anxiety or trauma; they may experience it through:
 - the sheer magnitude and scale (event and media coverage)
 - direct and cascading impacts on their family, friends, and communities
 - vicariously through close identification as a "fellow" (i.e. fellow student, fellow LGBTQ community member, fellow woman, fellow person of color)
- Communal crises can lead to anxiety and trauma that reduces the cognitive and psychological capacity of students, preventing them from performing at their best in the classroom.

HOW SHOULD EDUCATORS RESPOND TO THIS, AND IF POSSIBLE, AMELIORATE IT?

- **Surveys suggest that doing ANYTHING is better than NOTHING.**
 - Students have criticized responses when faculty ignore crisis events and have expressed gratefulness for faculty that acknowledge difficult current events.
- The worst responses include a lack of response or a response that acknowledges the crisis event occurred while stating that the class needs to move on with no mention of resources or extra help.
- General recommendations for responding to current events or crises include:
 - **Showing grace to students by attempting to reduce uncertainty wherever possible.** Uncertainty is a common feeling in response to crises and reducing the extent to which students have to feel this in and outside of class is a big step. This means giving explicit instructions, clearly communicating any changes, and giving students a clear window into instructor decision-making processes when assigning work and grades.
 - **Expressing and naming our own vulnerabilities, uncertainties, and struggles in response to crises.** This can serve to normalize collective struggle in situations when a communal crisis cannot be ignored. This humanizes faculty in students' eyes and gives students permission to be human as well.
 - **Actively listen to where students are and meet them there.** If students are in a state where they simply cannot complete an assignment because of current events, consider changing or removing it. If an aspect of the class is not working because of the reduced cognitive capacity in response to communal trauma, consider changing or removing it.
 - **Celebrate moments of resilience in yourself and your students.** Check-in with students and uplift their voices and accomplishments in times of crisis and uncertainty. Share your own accomplishments and small or large victories. This humanizes faculty and embraces the duality of communal struggle and resilience.

OTHER CONCRETE IDEAS FOR RESPONDING TO CURRENT EVENTS OR CRISES:

- Hold a moment of silence for those affected and the communities that mourn with them.
- Mind the cognitive load the class may be placing on students at this time.
- Pivot class assignments or materials to be relevant to current sociopolitical events or concerns.
- Take the appropriate steps to facilitate an affirming and productive discussion with students regarding the event or crisis. Only do this if you are willing to do the research on what it takes for productive conversations in "hot" moments.
- Provide direct resources to students verbally and via email. If you are unsure of your ability to properly provide the support students may need, provide them with academic and psychological support options they can choose to pursue.

SOURCES

- Harder, W., & McGowan, B. "Recognizing COVID-19 as Trauma: Considerations for Student Affairs Educators and Faculty Developers - ACPA Developments."
- Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching. "Teaching in Times of Crisis."



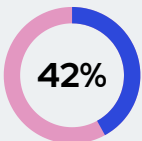
Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion in the Classroom

FORDHAM UNIVERSITY
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RESPECTING PRONOUNS

IN THE CLASSROOM



The Trevor Project's 2021 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health found that 42% of LGBTQ seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year.

Trans and Nonbinary youth who reported having their pronouns respected by all the people they lived with attempted at half the rate of those who did not have their pronouns respected.

Things to Know

- Pronouns are a form of gender expression and presentation and reflect gendered identities.
- Pronouns do not necessarily dictate gender identity, pronouns are a way to represent the self.
- People can have gender non-conforming (GNC) pronouns without being a different gender or trans-identified.
 - Ex: (e.g. gender non-binary and non-conforming identities)

Common Pronouns

Gendered Pronouns
he/him, she/hers

Non-binary/Non-Conforming
they/them, ze/hir, xe/xem

Note: Some trans-identified and nonbinary/non-conforming individuals are comfortable with a combination of pronouns such as he/they, she/they.

What do you do in this case? Usually, this means the pronouns are interchangeable! It never hurts to ask, however, what the student prefers specifically in the classroom setting.

What do you do if you accidentally misgender someone?

Do's

- If you slip up and you notice, correct yourself **BRIEFLY** and move on.
 - If you don't notice and someone corrects you, say **"thank you"** and move on.
 - Practice for yourself: For every time you get a pronoun wrong, form 3 sentences in your head with the correct pronoun.
 - Take an **active role** in your classes via interrupting people with **quick** corrections.
- Example: Another student misgenders someone, just jump in and say "they" (or whatever applies) and move on

Dont's

Don't make anyone feel like a burden for having pronouns you struggle with.

DON'T: Say "it's just hard" or things of that sort
DO: If you need, say "Thank you for sharing your authentic self, I'm learning and I appreciate corrections".

Don't make anyone feel like they need to alleviate your guilt.

DON'T: Apologize profusely if you get a pronoun wrong - this puts students in the odd position of having to make you feel better

Example #1

Professor: "I agree with Alex, he's right."
Alex: "They"
Professor: "Right, thanks! I appreciate it. They're right."



Example #2

Professor: "I agree with Alex, he's right."
Alex: "They"
Professor: "I'm sorry! I'm still learning but all these pronouns are too difficult nowadays."

What's the best way to ask about student pronouns?

One starting point is sending out a survey prior to the start of the semester inquiring about your students. You can ask for preferred names, name pronunciations, and gender identity for each student!

Gender affirmation is one of the simplest ways to improve the experience of trans and nonbinary students.

Sources: • Marissa, K. (2018, October 7). Pronouns 101: Why They Matter and What To Do (and Not Do) if You Misgender Someone. Marissa. @tadras on Instagram
• UWM LGBTQ+ Resource Center. "What if I make a mistake?"

ADDRESSING MICROAGGRESSIONS In the Classroom

Definition:

Microaggressions are commonplace and brief verbal, behavioral, and environmental slights (whether intentional or unintentional) that communicate hostile, derogatory, or otherwise negative messages to a specific group based on identity (such as race, socioeconomic class, gender, sexuality, nationality, citizenship, ability, etc).

Students face:

- Cognitive - questioning whether or not to respond.
- Emotional - exhaustion, anger, sadness, and anxiety.
- Behavioral - diminished attention, careful attention to word choice, tone, and body movement.

...consequences of microaggressions from other students in class.

Common Classroom Microaggression Types

1. **Ascription of intelligence** - assuming one is unintelligent or smarter than average based on appearance or accent.
2. **Denial of racial reality** - e.g. dismissing claims that race was relevant to understanding a student's experience.
3. **Denial or devaluing of experience or culture** - e.g. ignoring the existence, histories, and systemic injustices against cultures or groups of people.
4. **Making judgments about belonging** - e.g. assuming people are foreign or don't speak English well because of their appearance; questioning someone's membership status such as "you don't look disabled".
5. **Assumption of immorality** - (e.g. assuming that poor people, undereducated people, LGBTQ people, or people of color are more likely to be devious, untrustworthy, or unethical).

What To Do When Microaggressions Occur

1. **Be calm.** A part of unpacking our biases is making mistakes. Approach the conversation from an intent versus impact standpoint. Good intentions can have a harmful impact, and this can be a valuable teaching moment for students.
2. **Acknowledge** the moment and take the lead in guiding the conversation (slow down or stop the previous conversation).
3. **Inquire:** Give students the benefit of doubt. Ask for clarification, then hold students accountable as necessary.
 - Example: "Could you please say more about that?" or "It sounds like you have a strong opinion about this. Could you please tell me why?"
4. **Reframe:** Create a different way or perspective from which to view the situation.
 - Example: "Let's reframe this to explore other perspectives/interpretations. Consider for a moment that... What if...?"
5. **Identify:** Explain why a certain statement is problematic. Support critical thinking. Avoid villainizing and speak from "I" statements where possible. Reference previously established discussion guidelines if needed.
 - Example: "Saying ___ often comes up in popular culture. Some might find it problematic because of ___".
6. **Acknowledge** visible and invisible emotions in the room. Ask students if they'd like to stay or take a break/end class for the day and return to the conversation later.
7. **Validate** the students who have been impacted.
8. **Follow up** as needed. See individuals after class, briefly check in at the start of the next class. Identify if more resources are needed.

What NOT To Do When Microaggressions Occur

1. Ignore the situation.
2. Respond with hostility.
3. Be passive and let students guide.
4. Focusing on right or wrong.
5. Looking to marginalized students/instructors to be experts on issues related to their identity group.

Sources: • Carnegie Mellon University, "If you notice a microaggression, mention it."
• University of Washington, "Addressing microaggressions in the classroom"

LGBTQIA+ INCLUSIVITY IN THE CLASSROOM

FAMILIARIZE YOURSELF WITH CURRENT TERMINOLOGY

Terms are ever-changing and context-dependent. Find updated online definitions. If you do use a word inappropriately, humbly correct yourself on the spot. Then help correct others, if need be, in a positive manner.

ASSESS YOUR COURSE CONTENT

Highlight LGBTQ+ contributors to the field when choosing required and recommended readings. Do not be shy in highlighting these identities in class. Make sure to provide context and explain how these contributors fit into the big ideas of the lesson plan so as to avoid feelings of fragmentation and isolation. These feelings occur, for example, when instructors only highlight LGBTQIA+ contributions during LGBTQIA+ Pride Month (June).

ASSESS YOUR CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

Become aware of how you address your class. Instead of "ladies and gentlemen," consider using "students." Become aware of implicit biases or microaggressions that occur in class and be sure to address them. Do not rely on LGBTQIA+ students to address these issues or explain LGBTQIA+ experiences or course content.

RESPECT STUDENT AUTONOMY IN THEIR IDENTITY EXPRESSION

Respect clothing choices students make, allowing them to navigate their gender identity as they please. Be careful not to "out" students that may share their gender or sexual identity with you in private. Sometimes being out can be more dangerous than being "closeted". If students' pronouns or names do not match what is on the roster, be sure to only ask them what they prefer in private.

RECOGNIZE THAT YOU WILL ALWAYS BE LEARNING, AND WILL LIKELY MAKE MISTAKES

We all have a lot on our minds and are human. It is normal to slip up with even the best intentions. If you make a mistake (i.e. misgender someone, commit a microaggression), take the proper steps to adequately address the situation in order for the class to move on in the most safe, affirming, and productive manner.

BE A RESOURCE

Familiarize yourself with LGBTQIA+ campus resources and clubs. Become aware of psychological resources on campus. Be able to provide LGBTQ+ students who may confide in you with these resources when necessary.

SOURCES

- Cliff Rouder. "Seven Ways You Can Foster a More Inclusive LGBTQIA+ Learning Environment."
- UW-Oshkosh LGBTQ Resource Center. "Creating an LGBTQIA+ Inclusive Classroom."