

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."