

Increasing Inclusivity in the Classroom

by Andrew Greer



The goals of this teaching guide are threefold: 1) to discuss the importance of inclusivity in the classroom, 2) to present examples of teaching more inclusively, and 3) to provide additional resources for further guidance.

Why is inclusivity important?

Drawing from the literature on inclusive teaching in higher education, the current section considers the importance of increasing inclusivity and is framed by two overarching issues. The first issue is that of student belonging in their classrooms and in the broader campus culture. Most students struggle to transition into college, but students of less privileged and more marginal backgrounds face even greater challenges as they enter what they can perceive to be an unwelcoming or even hostile environment (Carter, Locks, Winkle-Wagner, & Pineda, 2006; Kalsner & Pistole, 2003). To help students overcome

challenges integrating into college life, teachers can work to cultivate a sense of belonging among their students. Section Two of this teaching guide provides resources for teachers to increase the sense of belonging in their classrooms.

At the institutional level, increasing a sense of belonging among students is embodied in the following four goals, as derived from a review of inclusion statements across campuses (Hurtado 2003, in Locks, Hurtado, Bowman, & Oseguera, 2008 p. 279):

1. Ensuring that students of underrepresented populations have the support they need to be academically successful.
2. Building relationships and developing multicultural skills with members from diverse backgrounds.
3. Enhancing students' ability to participate in a pluralistic, interdependent global community.
4. Increasing the participation of students of color in campus life.

Studies repeatedly find that positive diverse interactions increase students' sense of belonging on campuses (e.g., Locks, Hurtado, Bowman, & Oseguera, 2008). Conversely, interactions that result in feelings of social anxiety and fear decrease a sense of belonging. Accordingly, student cultures that foster positive diversity experiences help students – all students – feel like they are a valued part of a campus community.

The second theme of inclusivity is stereotype threat, which refers to the fear of confirming a negative stereotype about their respective in-group, a fear that can create high cognitive load and reduce academic focus and performance (Steele & Aronson, 1995). The effects of stereotype threat are profound and can impact students from a variety of backgrounds. Multiple studies have found that stereotype threat significantly reduces performance for undergraduates from less privileged socioeconomic statuses (Croizet & Claire, 1998; Spencer & Castano, 2007), African American students (Steele & Aronson, 1995), women in math and science courses (Good, Aronson, & Harder, 2008), as well as Latino (Schmader & Johns, 2003) and LGBT students at traditionally religious institutions (Love, 1998). Stereotype threat is especially detrimental for individuals who identify strongly with the stigmatized group (Marx, Stapel, & Muller, 2005). Identifying and eliminating stereotype threat should be a central goal for teachers who want to increase inclusivity in the classroom. Sections Two and Three describe specific examples and strategies to increase the sense of belonging in the classroom as well as to reduce stereotype threat.

What does inclusivity look like?

When instructors attempt to create safe, inclusive classrooms, they should consider multiple factors, including the syllabus, course content, class preparation, their own behavior, and their knowledge of students' backgrounds and skills. The resources in this section offer concrete strategies to address these factors and improve the learning climate for all students.

- [Creating Inclusive College Classrooms](#): An article from the Center for Research on Learning and Teaching at the University of Michigan which addresses five aspects of teaching that influence the inclusivity of a classroom: 1) the course content, 2) the teacher's assumptions and awareness of multicultural issues in classroom situations, 3) the planning of course sessions, 4) the teacher's knowledge of students' backgrounds, and 5) the teacher's choices, comments and behaviors while teaching.
- [Teaching for Inclusion: Diversity in the College Classroom](#): Written and designed by the staff of the Center for Teaching and Learning at UNC, Chapel Hill, this book offers a range of strategies, including quotes from students representing a range of minority groups.
- [Managing Hot Moments in the Classroom](#), from the Derek Bok Center at Harvard University, describes how to turn difficult discussions into learning opportunities.

The [Faculty Teaching Excellence Program](#) (FTEP) at the University of Colorado has compiled a series of faculty essays on diversity in *On Diversity in Teaching and Learning: A Compendium*. This publication is available for download (as a PDF file) from the [FTEP website](#) (scroll down towards the bottom of the page for the download links). The essays in this volume include, among others:

- **Fostering Diversity in the Classroom: Teaching by Discussion:** Ron Billingsley (English) offers 14 practical suggestions for teaching discussion courses (with 15-20 students) and creating an atmosphere in the classroom that embraces diversity.
- **Fostering Diversity in a Medium-Sized Classroom:** Brenda Allen (Communications) outlines seven ways to create an interactive environment in larger classes (with 80-100 students) and thus promote diversity in the classroom.
- **Developing and Teaching an Inclusive Curriculum:** Deborah Flick (Women Studies) uses the scholarship of Peggy McIntosh and Patricia Hill Collins to support a useful syllabus checklist and teaching tips that include techniques to provoke discussion about privilege and stereotypes among students.
- **The Influence of Attitudes, Feelings and Behavior Toward Diversity on Teaching and Learning:** Lerita Coleman (Psychology) encourages instructors to examine their own identity development and self-concept to determine how they feel diversity and bias affect their teaching. She also shares 14 specific teaching tips.

Reducing Stereotype Threat

Steve Stroessner (Columbia) and Catherine Good (Baruch College) provide guidelines and concrete strategies to reduce stereotype threat in the classroom. Their work can be found [here](#). These psychologists classify strategies to reduce stereotype threat into the following categories:

Reframe the task

This portion of the website describes ways that teachers can reduce stereotype threat by acknowledging the steps that they have taken to make a task or test fair for stereotyped groups.

Deemphasize threatened social identities

This activity encourages test givers to modify questions that might make stereotyped groups recall their stigmatized identity while they are performing a graded task. The modifications can include moving identity questions to the end of the test or asking questions that highlight students' valued identities to empower students to perform well.

Encourage self-affirmation

Repeatedly, studies suggest that self-affirmation – where students think about their valued characteristics, skills etc. – leads to increased performance. This section of the website presents evidence and examples of self-affirmation activities.

Provide role models

Positive role models, who perform well in fields that typically invoke stereotype threat, can increase otherwise poor performance for stigmatized groups.

Provide external attributions for difficulty

Help students attribute their anxieties to causes other than stereotype to lessen anxiety for students who would normally suffer from stereotype threat. For example, some studies posited that instructors reduced poor performance by suggesting that anxiety might actually help with test taking, without connecting the anxiety to any stereotype.

Emphasize an incremental view of intelligence

This portion of the website suggests that instructors should assist students to overcome fixed notions of intelligence. When notions of genius or inherent talent were downplayed, stereotype threat was greatly reduced.

Additional Resources at Vanderbilt

University Programs and Centers

- [Antoinette Brown Lectures – Vanderbilt University Divinity School](#)
Established in 1974, this lectureship brings distinguished women theologians and church leaders to the Divinity School to speak on a variety of concerns for women in ministry.
- [Bishop Joseph Johnson Black Cultural Center](#)
This center, dedicated in 1984, provides educational and cultural programming on the Black experience for the University and Nashville communities, and serves as a support resource for African-descended students. The center's programs are open to the Vanderbilt and Nashville communities.
- [Carpenter Program in Religion, Gender and Sexuality](#)
Established in 1995, this program fosters conversation about religion, gender, and sexuality by providing education and encouraging communication within and across religious affiliations, ideological bases, and cultural contexts. The program facilitates courses of study, workshops, lectures, and provides consultation

and information services. Their website includes news items on gender, religion, and sexuality, as well as a list of syllabi, papers and student projects.

- [Office for Diversity in Medical Education](#)
This office administers an active recruitment program that involves visits by students and staff to other campuses; encourages contacts between applicants and matriculating students; and arranges visits to the Vanderbilt campus for newly accepted under- represented minority applicants. This site also links to related programs fostering diversity at the School of Medicine, such as the [Vanderbilt Bridges Program](#) and the [Meharry – Vanderbilt Alliance](#) .
- [The LGBTQI Resource Office](#)
provides information about a variety of organizations that serve the needs of gay, straight, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender undergraduates, graduates, faculty, and staff.
- [Margaret Cuninggim Women’s Center](#)
Providing activities on women, gender equity, and feminism through lectures, This center sponsors campus workshops and special events. These programs are open to students, faculty and staff, as well as interested members of the local community. The center’s 2000-volume library houses the only collection on campus devoted to gender and feminism, and is available for reference, research and general reading.
- Vanderbilt launched new [Title IX and Student Discrimination](#), [Student Access Services](#) and [Equal Employment Opportunity](#) offices to serve students, faculty and staff Jan 15, 2018. The mission of these coordinated offices is to take a proactive stance in assisting the University with the interpretation, understanding, and application of federal and state laws and regulations which impose special obligations in the areas of equal opportunity and affirmative action.
- [Project Dialogue](#)
Project Dialogue is a year-long, University-wide program to involve the entire Vanderbilt community in public debate and discussion, and to connect classroom learning with larger societal issues. Project Dialogue has been run every other year since 1989, each year centering on a particular theme. Recent speakers have included Naomi Wolf, Cornel West, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., Oliver Sacks, and Barbara Ehrenreich.
- [Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities](#)
The Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities promotes interdisciplinary research and study in the humanities and social sciences, and, when appropriate, the natural sciences. The center’s programs are designed to intensify and increase interdisciplinary discussion of academic, social, and cultural issues. Recent and upcoming fellows program themes include: “Memory, Identity, and Political Action,” “Constructions, Deconstructions, and Destructions in Nature,” and “Gender, Sexuality, and Cultural Politics.” Lectures, conferences, and special programs include: Race and Wealth Disparity in 21st Century America, a Gender and Sexuality Lecture Series, Rethinking the Americas: Crossing Borders and Disciplines, Diversity in Learning/ Learning and Diversity, Feminist Dialogues, and the Social Construction of the Body.
- [The Office of the University Chaplain](#)
This office offers programs to students to help them understand their own faith and the faith of others, clarify their values, and develop a sense of social responsibility. The office also provides leadership for Project Dialogue, as well as the Martin Luther King Jr. Commemorative Series and the Holocaust Lecture Series.

International Services and Programs

- [English Language Center](#)
This center is a teaching institute offering noncredit English language courses for speakers of other

languages. The center provides English instruction to learners at all levels of proficiency to enable them to achieve their academic, professional, and social goals.

- [International Student and Scholar Services](#)
This office offers programs and services to assist international students and scholars across the university.

Student Offices and Programs

- [Office of Leadership Development and Intercultural Affairs – Dean of Students](#)
This office initiates, develops, and implements multicultural education in the areas of policies, services, and programs for the entire student body.
- [International Student Organizations](#)
Lists information on organizations sponsoring programs and offering support systems for international students at Vanderbilt.
- [Religious Student Organizations](#)
Lists information on a range of fellowship and worship services provided by Vanderbilt's diverse religious community.
- [Representative Student Organizations](#)
Lists information on a range of additional student groups, such as the Asian-American Student Association, Black Student Alliance, etc.

Outreach Programs

- [Girls and Science Camp](#)
This camp was established at Vanderbilt University in the summer of 1999 in response to the gender differences in science achievement found in high school. Its goals are to engage girls in science activities, to foster confidence in science achievement, and to encourage girls' enrollment in high school science courses.

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