



## Considerations for Inclusive Teaching in Remote Environments

Inclusive pedagogy refers to the ways in which courses, classroom activities, curricula, and assessment are designed and delivered to engage all students in learning that is meaningful, relevant and accessible. It embraces a view of the individual and individual differences as sources of diversity that enrich the lives and learning of [all students]. (Hockings, 2010)

Central to including all learners are the following practices:

- Working to be aware of our biases while recognizing students' individuality.
- Providing structure.
- Making our courses as accessible as possible.
- Seeking and giving targeted feedback.

Inclusive pedagogy is not distinct from general principles of excellent teaching; rather, centering inclusion is a way of viewing our teaching through a particular lens, of keeping in mind the distinct and diverse needs of all of our students. First and foremost, **inclusion is a mindset**. It is a way of reminding us to be intentional as we think about the needs of our students asking, **"Who is being left out of the learning process due to the decisions I am making?"**

Given this mindset, some of the concerns about inclusive student learning may differ in this remote environment. Instructors may be concerned about students:

- not having equal access to technology or internet bandwidth.
- not having access to quiet spaces to attend class or to study.
- having to support family members who have recently lost employment.
- needing to cope with illness and death.
- whose learning, psychological, and emotional needs are new and not met.
- not surfacing their diverse perspectives and learning from each other.
- continuing to cope with issues of racism, xenophobia, classism, homophobia, sexism, and other social concerns.

To promote inclusion in this remote environment, consider the following adjustments.

**Work to be aware of biases while recognizing students' individuality.**

Our implicit biases offer shortcuts for how we behave in the world. When we fail to recognize our harmful biases, they can cause us to make decisions that exclude specific groups of students from full engagement.

This particular pandemic has caused different kinds of biases to surface, and we should be aware of how this impacts us and our classrooms. For example, some political actors have labeled the disease in a way that blames the Chinese community and stirs up racist tropes. And subsequent mortality rates, which disproportionately impact African Americans, have turned discussions about the universality of how one contracts COVID-19 to one that erroneously blames a lack of personal responsibility among Black people.

We thus should keep in mind our own understanding of the local, national, and global contexts, as well as the language we use. And we should remember that our students may be in environments where they are overtly targeted or subtly blamed for this illness, or may feel the threat of targeting.

Understand this moment and consider your thoughts about it.

- Explore how the pandemic has differentially affected different communities and consider the experiences from the points of view from people from different communities.
- Take time to explore and identify your own prejudices by taking an [implicit association test](#) or through other means of self-analysis.

Check in with your students.

- At the start of a course, survey students to get to know them and their circumstances. Some may be struggling with this particular moment or have ongoing concerns. It is useful to ask them how they are and what they may need to learn so that you can adjust. You may decide, for example, to provide content warnings of potentially fraught topics or give students choices for assignments.
- To learn students' names and pronouns, ask students to adjust their names and, if they choose, share their pronouns on the Zoom application.
- Use a poll to ask students about their level of energy before a Zoom session. Let them know that you understand if they cannot interact very much on a particularly low day.
- Frequently communicate with students. Open synchronous class sessions early to allow casual conversations; send encouraging email messages; encourage students to attend office hours at least once a quarter.
- Ask students about inappropriate comments that may be happening in breakout rooms or among students in your class. If made aware of micro or macroaggressions, address them (For a strategy see: McIntroy, L. *et al.*, 2019).

### Provide structure.

First generation, low-income, and historically underrepresented students may have minimal understanding of the unwritten rules of university classrooms (e.g. how to effectively challenge an authority figure (Bergenhengouwen, 1987)). In addition, this group of students may feel uncertain about whether they belong in an academic setting, doubt their academic skills, and may not seek help (Karabenick, 2006; Collins & Simms, 2006; Winograd & Rust, 2014).

The online environment adds layers of difficult-to-navigate expectations to this tenuous situation and further distance between students and instructors. It is thus useful to provide a clear, transparent structure to help all students know what kind of learning is expected and how to connect with other students and the curriculum.

Provide clear guidelines.

- Create common structures across assignments to orient students to the environment. Consider consistently listing the purpose of the assignment, specific tasks to complete it, and criteria used to assess it.
- Because not all students know how to use discussion boards or interrupt during a synchronous interaction, give clear instructions on how students should participate in class (e.g. using the raise hand function on Zoom), when they should use the chat function or other tools to endorse or refute an idea (e.g. thumbs up or down). Check these different modes of communication often – perhaps ask a TA or student to monitor them for you.
- Create discussion roles for students and rotate them. You may find it useful to try roles such as: devil’s advocate, summarizer, or elaborator. When discussion begins, call on these students first and build on their comments.

Help students connect with each other in structured ways.

- Use Canvas discussion tools and provide clear instructions for initial posts and for replies. Guidance that asks students to extend or synthesize peers’ posts can promote rich discussions.
- Set norms for discussion. You may remind students to continue treating classmates with respect, to post with care, and to ask clarifying questions when necessary.
- Help students create study groups, understanding that learning from each other helps with inclusion and connection. Facilitating the creation of study groups will help students in different time zones as well as those who find it difficult to connect with peers in a virtual space.

Offer structured choices.

Principles of universal design include providing different means of demonstrating one’s learning. This is a practice that gives more access to students with different learning, psychological, and emotional needs; it also addresses students who now may feel a sense of helplessness in this traumatic time. It also can help students connect new material to their diverse backgrounds.

- Consider flexible deadlines and asking students how they may best share what they have learned.
- Consider allowing students to complete different, final assignments that respond to the same prompt– e.g. an essay, a recorded presentation, or a digital representation.
- Assign a final project that requires students to connect a newly learned concept to an example of choice.

**Make your presentations as accessible as possible.**

- Distribute materials using Word or tagged PDFs. Generally, accessible documents are first produced in Word, converted to PDF and then [checked for accessibility](#).
- Ensure consistent use of colors for graphics, icons within a slide deck, fonts for tables, and other visual cues.
- Ensure all graphics, figures, and other illustrations include a text equivalent.
- Ensure appropriate use of colors and contrasts in screen design.
- Provide alternative sources of information for video or audio.
- Caption any videos that you include in your course. Auto-generated captions should be edited to ensure correct captioning.
- Please see [Student Disability Services](#) for more specific guidelines and standards.

## Seek and provide feedback to students.

We may assume students' lack of engagement in Zoom sessions based on their muted voices and videos. This may or may not be true. They may be listening, taking notes, and independently considering what is being discussed. They also may choose not to invite their peers into their homes or have quiet places to work. In either case, we will not fully understand the limits of their participation unless we ask. Checking in with students about what is working or could be adjusted can improve their participation. Consider sharing a version of this survey twice during the quarter:

- What is helping you fully engage in this course?
- What are we doing now that we might change to help you better engage in this course?
- What could we start doing to help you fully engage in this course?

In addition, students need to understand if they are on the right track. Historically marginalized students may also struggle with stereotype threat and benefit from WISE feedback – targeted feedback and an assurance that they are capable of achieving the high standards you set (Yeager *et al.*, 2014).

When giving feedback, make it targeted and timely. In this mediated environment, it may not be as easy to guide student work in a productive direction; so, take time to provide individual feedback about students' work and participation. Explain to them that you will provide feedback on certain elements of their work and assess that work for a grade at a later time. This will help keep students on track and improve their confidence.

## References

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- Hockings, C. (April 2010) *Inclusive Learning and Teaching in Higher Education: A Synthesis of Research*. Report for Higher Education Academy.
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- Winograd, G. & Rust, J. (2014) Stigma, awareness of support services and academic help-seeking among historically underrepresented first-year college students. *The Learning Assistance Review* 19(1), pp. 19-44.
- Yeager, D. S., Purdie-Vaughns, V., Garcia, J., Apfel, N., Brzustoski, P., Master, A., Hessert, W., Williams, M. & Cohen, G.L. (2014) Breaking the Cycle of Mistrust: Wise Interventions to Provide Critical Feedback Across the Racial Divide. *Journal of Experimental Psychology* 143(2): 804-824.

## Other resources

8 Ways to Be More Inclusive in Your Zoom Teaching

<https://www.chronicle.com/article/8-Ways-to-Be-More-Inclusive-in/248460>

Brown University - Inclusive Teaching

<https://www.brown.edu/sheridan/inclusive-teaching-open-curriculum>

Chronicle of Higher Education Guide:

[https://www.chronicle.com/interactives/20190719\\_inclusive\\_teaching](https://www.chronicle.com/interactives/20190719_inclusive_teaching)