

# Guide for Inclusive Teaching at Columbia

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“Excellence in teaching and learning necessitates the inclusion of every student’s unique identities, experiences, and talents. The Center for Teaching and Learning’s Guide for Inclusive Teaching at Columbia is a great resource for our faculty and graduate instructors to better understand different facets of inclusive teaching and make meaningful changes to their classrooms. As President Bollinger reminds us in his Diversity Mission Statement, ‘building a diverse university community is not the work of a moment. It requires sustained commitment, concerted effort, and the attention of us all.’ I hope that the guide and related CTL programming will provide you with the resources you need to improve learning for all.”

Soulaymane Kachani

Vice Provost for Teaching, Learning, and Innovation, Columbia University

“Creating equal and equitable access to learning opportunities is at the heart of the work the CTL does in service of Columbia’s commitment to learner-centered teaching. Inclusive pedagogies are pedagogies grounded in deep reflective practice and the resulting awareness of the implicit values and assumptions embedded in every decision we make about course design and classroom (both face-to-face and online) practices. It requires intentionality on the part of instructors and a willingness to question long-standing practices. It requires an unflinching examination of power and the dynamics between students and instructors, as well as those among the students themselves. But the results are worth this effort: a transparency of intention, explicit conversations about learning, and a sharing of the power and responsibility to make learning happen.”

Catherine Ross

Executive Director

Center for Teaching and Learning, Columbia University

“Columbia University is made extraordinary when we are able to meaningfully make space for the diverse identities and expertise represented by our exceptional faculty, students, and staff. By working together in community, we can continue to shift campus culture toward a climate of inclusiveness where we support each other in and gain value from our differences. The Guide for Inclusive Teaching at Columbia provides us an opportunity to make headway in this conversation together.”

Dennis A. Mitchell

Vice Provost for Faculty Advancement, Columbia University

“Explicit guidance to promote inclusive teaching is vitally important for institutions such as Columbia University that will produce the next generation of highly influential scholars, leaders and educators.”

Anne L. Taylor

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On behalf of the Center for Teaching and Learning at Columbia University, we want to thank you for your interest in and commitment to inclusive teaching, and for taking time to review the *Guide for Inclusive Teaching at Columbia*. We at the CTL hope you, and your students, find it beneficial as we continue to work as a community to make Columbia University welcoming and inclusive to all.

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# Introduction

## Why this Guide?

Inclusive teaching gets a lot of attention on college campuses. Instructors are increasingly expected to understand how course climate—the intellectual, social, emotional, and physical environment of a class—impacts their students and respond to calls for inclusive classroom environments from both students and administrators (Ambrose *et al.* 170). These are not just matters of attending to students’ educational preferences; decades of research have demonstrated that learning does not occur in a vacuum, and students’ perceptions of class climate (whether they experience the classroom as supportive and inclusive, or “chilly” and marginalizing) can have a dramatic impact on their learning outcomes. Moreover, creating an inclusive teaching environment is beneficial for *all* students’ learning because “many of the strategies that help foster a productive climate also encourage student development” (180). But creating a learning environment that supports all students can be challenging, especially when one considers the myriad ways in which inclusion and disinclusion can manifest themselves: for example, student-student interactions, faculty-student interactions, course content and policies, etc. Although inclusion and diversity are important to most instructors, staff, and students, these topics are rarely discussed in a practical manner. This has left many faculty—even those with strong philosophical and pedagogical motivations—wondering “where do I begin?”

Our goal when creating the *Guide for Inclusive Teaching at Columbia* has been to help instructors answer that question by offering an **overview of five inclusive teaching principles with practical, accessible, usable strategies**. We wanted instructors to learn about inclusive teaching principles and strategies, reflect on and improve their own classroom practices, and receive resources for further study/application all in one place.

This guide is appropriate for faculty and instructors who are familiar with inclusive teaching, as well as those beginning their journey to create an inclusive learning environment. The five principles are derived from evidence-based practices, so instructors can be assured that the tools and strategies they find here are informed by current research.

We also wanted to include strategies that instructors can use immediately. While some changes may require a curricular redesign, instructors can make many changes to create a more inclusive environment immediately. Moreover, the

principles outlined in this guide are flexible; instructors can implement the principles in a holistic manner, or take them individually and apply them in the manner that best suits them, their disciplines, and their students.

## Creating the Guide

The work to create this guide began in 2016, after the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) held a one-day event called the [Inclusive Teaching Forum](#). The Forum brought together faculty, staff, postdocs, graduate students, and undergraduate students at Columbia to share their experiences of constructing and participating in inclusive teaching environments. Throughout the day, participants shared with other students and faculty about what inclusive teaching practices meant to them. Nationally-renowned expert Michele DiPietro delivered a plenary address about the relationship between inclusive classrooms and positive learning outcomes for students.

In order to continue our commitment to inclusion at Columbia, the CTL established an internal Inclusive Teaching Working Group. The Working Group determined that an inclusive teaching guide would be a helpful resource for the Columbia community, and appointed Drs. Christine Simonian Bean and Amanda M. Jungels as Co-Chairs of the Working Group and the effort to create the guide. The Working Group reviewed many of the resources, guides, books, and websites that are currently available to assess areas of overlap, similarities and differences, and themes. The group also extensively consulted literature and research on inclusive teaching and learning.

Based on this exploration, the Working Group developed five principles that we believe exemplify inclusive teaching practices. Subsequently, each member chose a principle to research and write. Each principle underwent two rounds of peer review, and the entire guide was reviewed by several CTL staff members who are familiar with inclusive teaching practices, research, and theory. The final product—which we regard as an ever-evolving work because the research on inclusive teaching is ongoing and iterative—is the *Guide for Inclusive Teaching at Columbia*, released in Fall 2017.

## Principle 1: Establish and support a class climate that fosters belonging for all students.

How do instructors create a classroom climate that values students' varied identities, experiences, and backgrounds? How can instructors encourage and build productive space for meaningful conversation, critical thought, and transformative learning? Course climate is the key aspect to creating an inclusive classroom, and considering it as a whole can seem daunting. Susan Ambrose *et al.* define classroom climate as “the intellectual, social, emotional, and physical environments in which our students learn” (170). The concept is all-encompassing for good reason: it includes instructor-student and student-student interactions. It involves the content with which instructors and students interact, the tone of the class and its instructional materials, and the way stereotypes are or are not invoked in the classroom. Due to the concept's comprehensiveness, these aspects will recur throughout this guide's principles.

In a learner-centered classroom, the primary goal is to create a climate that is conducive to learning for every student. In such an environment, students are respected and supported by their instructors and their peers. As Barbara Gross Davis articulates, “the ideal classroom environment is one in which all students feel as if they belong and as if their points of view matter” (65). Instructors provide leadership through the design and delivery of their course, and they encourage students to take ownership for learning. They establish high standards, believe in their students' abilities, and are committed to helping them achieve those standards (Weimer). While a good deal of course climate has to do with the way instructors set up the course, instructors *and* students share the responsibility in co-creating the conditions that lead to learning. Margery Ginsberg and Raymond Wlodkowski insist that this mutual responsibility involves a reorientation of instructors' understanding of their primary role: “Rather than knowing what to *do* to the learner, successful educators seek to understand and strengthen the potential for shared meaning” (29). Instructors should work with their students to proactively set and maintain course climate (see Principle 2).

Centering teaching on the learner demands a robust understanding of and appreciation for each individual student in the room. As Christine Hockings reminds instructors, “inclusive learning and teaching in higher education...embraces a view of the individual and individual difference as the source of diversity that can enrich the lives and learning of others” (1). When students do not feel as though they are valued and respected as individuals, they are less likely to participate in class or engage with the subject matter (Barr). In order



for students to feel included, instructors have to be aware of the varied and intersectional identities inhabited by students in the room, and work to actively invite their experiences and insights into the class. Without this knowledge, instructors “tend to base their teaching upon their beliefs and assumptions about what students do and should know and what they can and should be able to do,” which can leave some students feeling underchallenged, overwhelmed, or disengaged (Hockings 6).

In order to create a productive course climate that embraces each individual, instructors should strive for a classroom that fosters belonging and value for students of all identities, backgrounds, and experiences. An inclusive class climate cannot guarantee safety—classroom spaces are not power-neutral, colorblind, or devoid of conflict, and an inclusive class climate should not claim to be. Instead, an inclusive class climate is one that recognizes and values the differences between individuals, and attempts to allow everyone equal time and space to express themselves and their experiences (Steele and Cohn-Vargas). By minimizing negative behaviors and promoting positive ones, instructors can work to promote a productive course climate.

While there are a number of important techniques for engaging students positively in the classroom, there are also a fair amount of practices to be aware of that will help instructors avoid introducing, perpetuating, or ignoring counterproductive, invalidating, or harmful behaviors. Even a throwaway comment can “send an unintended but powerful message that may saddle students’ identity with negative perceptions related to their group membership” (Ambrose et al. 182). For instructors to work toward an inclusive course climate, they must commit to engaging their students in ways that neither privilege nor exclude groups, identities, or experiences. They should be aware of the impact of exclusion, stereotypes, and microaggressions (defined as “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group”) on learners, and work to reduce these experiences in their classrooms (Sue et al. 183).

## Teaching Strategies

To positively influence classroom climate from the start, instructors should:

- **Build instructor-student rapport.** (Ambrose et al.; Barr; Weimer)

- Reduce anonymity in the classroom by learning names given by students, and getting to know them through in-class surveys and activities, office hour visits, online chats, etc.
- Share your interests, passions, and personal learning process with students, showing how you apply course materials and skills in your work and life.
- Describe your own fears and struggles in learning new material to break down barriers and demystify the learning process.
- **Build student-student rapport.** (Barr; Davis; Lee *et al.*; Weimer)
  - Provide opportunities for students to get to know and interact with each other. Use icebreaker activities at the start of the semester, and encourage students to work in pairs or small groups.
  - Encourage dialogue about learning experiences. Facilitate a discussion of best and worst class experiences to establish a climate for learning, recording and sharing answers so all students see the diverse responses, experiences, and perspectives. Possible prompts include:
    - “In the best class I ever had, students/the instructor...”
    - “I learn best when...”
    - “I don’t learn well in classes where...”
    - “Peers encourage me to learn when they...”
  - Use narrative reflection to incorporate experiential knowledge. Design activities that allow students to draw on their diverse backgrounds and approaches to a course concept, object, or goal. Ask students to describe their interest in the course to each other, in order to better understand the various perspectives and backgrounds in the class.

To value individuals and minimize discrimination throughout class, instructors should:

- **Treat each student as an individual.** (Ambrose *et al.*; Davis; Lee *et al.*)
  - When inviting student participation, do not make assumptions about students’ membership in various demographic groups. Allow students to self-identify as they wish, when they feel comfortable doing so. Likewise, do not expect individuals to speak for the experience of an entire group; step in if students have this expectation of their peers. Treat each individual student with equal respect, pronouncing their names correctly, asking for and employing the pronouns they use, and supporting their unique abilities and experiences.
- **Avoid making assumptions about students’ abilities based on stereotypes.** (Ambrose *et al.*; ReducingStereotypeThreat.org; Steele)

- When interacting with students, be mindful of existing stereotypes and take care not to perpetuate them (for example, “I’m offering a special tutorial because I know women struggle with math”). Instead, focus on behavioral and controllable actions (for example, “Please come to office hours, so we can practice a few additional problems”).
- **Convey the same level of confidence in the abilities of all your students.** (Davis; Strossner and Good)
  - As you take care not to perpetuate stereotypes, be cautious about being over-protective of or unduly strict toward any group of or individual students. Be even-handed in acknowledging students’ accomplishments and areas for growth. Emphasize high standards with verbal assurances that you will help them succeed, and scaffold support for meeting those standards. (See Principle 2.)
- **Address challenging classroom moments head-on.** (Davis; Sue *et al.*; Tsukada and Perreault)
  - Take responsibility for addressing challenging classroom moments, such as microaggressions, offensive and alienating comments, behaviors, and attitudes. Work to turn difficult moments into teachable moments, asking students to stop and reflect critically on assumptions and positions. When such moments occur, be sure to give adequate time and space to name and discuss the anxiety in the room.
  - When difficult moments occur, prompt students to keep discussions focused on *issues* or *comments*, not individuals. Do not attribute motives or intentions behind the person voicing or committing the offensive or alienating act—rather, focus on the comment, behavior, or attitude itself, and acknowledge the effect it has on others. Ask students to use “I” statements when discussing difficult issues (for example, “I think that comment about blackface minstrelsy minimizes the issue,” or “I feel hurt by that line of thought, and here’s why...”), which can help to build and maintain a healthy student rapport.

To monitor course climate as the course progresses, instructors should:

- **Ask for feedback.** (Davis)
  - Set up informal and formal anonymous processes to receive feedback on climate. Ask teaching assistants, colleagues, or Center for Teaching and Learning staff to conduct classroom observations, or have students complete a classroom climate inventory mid-semester, for example, the [College and University Classroom Environment Inventory](#). Possible prompts include:

- “What questions or concerns do you have about classroom climate?”
- “Have you found any actions or words of the instructor or your peers offensive? How?”
- “How comfortable do you feel participating in this class?”
- “What makes class participation easy or difficult for you?”
- “Do you have suggestions for encouraging open and candid discussion in class?”
- Consider collecting feedback electronically and anonymously through CourseWorks, Google Forms, or Survey Monkey. This technique can promote student honesty, and allay their fears about potential negative consequences for their feedback.
- When asking for feedback, make sure to review comments and report back to students at the next class session to validate their input and perspectives. When sharing feedback, refrain from attributing feedback to specific students even if you know who wrote the comment; they may not want to have their thoughts shared with the class in such a way.

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## Principle 2: Set explicit student expectations.

Creating and ensuring an inclusive course climate means instructors must consider how they communicate their broad course goals (which focus on global outcomes of a course), refined learning objectives (which focus on what students will be able to do when they've completed a course), and overall expectations to students.

Creating “reasonable yet challenging” course goals, clearly articulating those goals, and crafting assignments and learning experiences to help students achieve course goals and learning objectives can help to level the playing field between students, reduce opportunities for bias, encourage student engagement, and set students up for success in the course (Ambrose *et al.*). In addition, having clearly articulated learning objectives and expectations can increase student motivation by reducing frustration and discouragement. Giving students clear goals and objectives for their learning helps students focus their efforts. When creating objectives, it can be helpful to think in terms of verbs—what should students be able to do, identify, solve, etc. when they have completed the assignment—which can help to reduce ambiguity and confusion for students.

Clearly articulating learning goals and objectives gives instructors a roadmap for designing transparent, relevant assessments. It follows, then, that the assignments instructors give students should also clearly articulate assessment criteria.

Instructors should work to be as explicit as possible about assignment expectations and scaffold student success; for example, using a grading rubric and sharing it with students in advance, giving students supporting assignments that help them build necessary skills, supplying well-timed and goal-oriented feedback, and giving students expectations for how long they should spend on an assignment. Each of these measures can help students of all backgrounds focus their attention on the skills they need to succeed in the course. When designing assignment criteria, instructors should be mindful of how assessments are weighted, and whether the grading system they employ might be counteracting their goal of inclusive teaching, or demotivating for students.

Instructors can provide additional levels of transparency outside of explicit goal-setting and assessment criteria. Providing students with examples of exemplary work from previous students—as well as discussing common mistakes that students have made on assignments—can help students understand the difference between on-target work and work that misses the mark. Creating community agreements and/or discussion guidelines with students can help them understand and articulate classroom norms and expectations, as well as make all actors in the classroom responsible for establishing and maintaining an inclusive and supportive classroom environment.

# Teaching Strategies

To help students understand course goals, learning objectives, and expectations, instructors should:

- **Articulate assessment criteria.** (Ambrose *et al.*)
  - Clearly articulate assessment criteria and provide timely feedback to enable students to prioritize their efforts and support their ability to meet objectives.
  - Share tools like grading rubrics, in addition to assignment descriptions and criteria, to help a diverse community of learners understand the requirements of an assignment. Students can learn to apply the rubric by conducting evaluations of anonymized prior work samples or, after establishing student rapport and a supportive course climate, by conducting peer evaluations of each other's work.
  - Consider whether the grading system you employ (for example, grading on a curve) or the weight of your assessments (for example, few high-stakes assignments) might be demotivating for students. Offer students multiple lower-stakes opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge, and use grading strategies that encourage students to develop growth mindsets (defined as the belief that one can improve through personal efforts, development of strategies, and assistance from others).
- **Provide timely feedback.**
  - Provide clear, actionable, and timely feedback to help students gauge their progress in the course relative to the stated goals. Clearly communicate goals, objectives, and expectations at the outset and then provide explicit feedback to students about their performance. These practices may encourage students to take ownership of their learning process and adjust their performance, if necessary, to meet learning goals.
  - Be reflective about the feedback you give as an instructor, and consider how you might modify your teaching to assist students' learning. For example, you might adjust your teaching to emphasize points where students may be struggling.
- **Establish community agreements and discussion guidelines.** (Ambrose *et al.*; Ginsberg and Wlodkowski; Lee *et al.*)
  - Establish collective agreements about what constitutes a supportive and inclusive teaching environment to give students a sense of responsibility for the classroom climate. This can also help you regain control in "heated" classroom moments. Working with students to create agreed-upon guidelines for all actors in the course, discussing what contributes

- to and detracts from inclusive learning environments, and reiterating the importance of abiding by the community agreements reinforces the importance of inclusive environments for everyone.
- Set up processes to get feedback on the course climate, explicitly address tensions when they arise, and when possible, turn tension and debate into learning opportunities for students.
- **Provide examples of exemplary work.**
  - Provide students with examples to both communicate expectations and facilitate their understanding. Sample student work can also model discipline-specific skills, and help articulate assessment expectations and standards—and how those align with learning objectives—to a diverse community of learners.
- **Model expected behavior.**
  - Be aware that you are modeling expected behavior, intentionally or unintentionally. Participate in the course community by exhibiting interpersonal behavior that adheres to the community agreements and discussion guidelines, and by modeling the skills that students are asked to demonstrate in their assessments/assignments.

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## Principle 3: Select course content that recognizes diversity and acknowledges barriers to inclusion.

Content plays a large role in creating an inclusive learning environment where students see themselves as reflected and valued—or the opposite. As Christine Hockings describes, “What knowledge is included in the curriculum, who selects it and why are important questions when it comes to designing inclusive curricula... ‘what counts as legitimate knowledge is the result of complex power struggles among identifiable class, race, gender and religious groups’” (23). Susan Ambrose *et al.* personalize this issue: “For students who are developing their sense of identity, purpose, and competence, some of [the messages conveyed in course content] can be translated into messages about their own power, identity, and agency and can influence engagement and persistence in the field” (179). Although instructors can employ many inclusive strategies in the way they design and facilitate their class, they cannot create an inclusive classroom without meaningfully considering the role that content plays in student learning.

The issue of content in the inclusive classroom is complex. On the one hand, instructors who teach content representing perspectives that are traditionally marginalized could consider their course safe from scrutiny by virtue of the texts they choose (for example, “I teach East Asian Civilization. My class is inherently inclusive!”). On the other hand, instructors who teach content that is typically considered “neutral” might consider their courses immune (for example, “I teach Statistics. There’s no race/gender in numbers!”). It is important to recognize that there are inclusive ways to consider content in the classroom, regardless of what subject matter one teaches or whether the course content focuses on marginalized groups or not.

It is true that course readings often bear the brunt of the critique around content, and for good reason. Whenever possible, instructors should work to broaden readings from only presenting dominant perspectives, instead choosing content that reflects a range of races, ethnicities, gender identities, sexualities, abilities, ages, religions, etc. That said, they should also avoid including a token marginalized perspective here or there, nominally complying with a diversity requirement instead of meaningfully including and considering different perspectives. Instead, inclusive course readings should place multiple perspectives at the center, and should be contextualized and integrated with nuance. If instructors find themselves teaching a course that focuses exclusively on dominant perspectives (for example, Western, white, heterosexual), they should strive for transparency, encouraging students to consider why that is the case and inviting critique.

Course readings are not the only aspect of content up for consideration: students can absorb messages about who does and who does not belong from a variety of classroom interactions. As Ambrose *et al.* remind instructors, the concept of content is broad, including “examples and metaphors instructors use in class and the case studies and project topics we let our students choose. Just as important as those used are those omitted, because they all send messages about the field and who belongs in it” (179). Instructors should be mindful of the demographic aspects of statistics/data presented (for example, showing only people of color in presentation slides when discussing diabetes could send the signal that only people of color receive the diagnosis). They should also acknowledge historical and contemporary absences of women/people of color when applicable, and discuss institutional barriers to disciplinary inclusion when appropriate (for example, “I want you to be aware that although her labor goes unacknowledged here, Max Weber’s wife Marianne prepared and published these works after his death”). The instructors’ transparency on such issues lends validity to students’ feelings and critiques, and invites critical discussion.

## Teaching Strategies

To work toward inclusive course content, instructors should:

- **Select content that engages a diversity of ideas and perspectives.** (Ambrose *et al.*; Davis; Lee *et al.*; Sellers *et al.*)
  - When selecting course content (readings, textbooks, and any other course materials), consider whether certain perspectives are systematically underrepresented or absent. Aim for an inclusive curriculum so that students can view ideas and concepts from a variety of perspectives, instead of treating one group’s experience as the standard (for example, asking students to study 19th century Native American dance forms alongside white representations of Native Americans in early American melodrama).
  - Critically evaluate the presentation of material. If you assign a text that proves problematic or incorporates stereotypes (for example, a business management textbook that only uses masculine pronouns, or a dermatology chapter that only shows fair-skinned patients), point out these shortcomings and consider supplementing the text with other readings. Encourage students to critique content, which normalizes critical thinking.
- **Select content by authors of diverse backgrounds.** (Davis; Hockings; Sellers *et al.*)

- When selecting course content—especially in courses where content is understood to be more traditionally neutral—work to include materials written, created, or researched by authors of diverse backgrounds. For example, if all studies you present in a Chemistry course were conducted by male European or American scientists, you may send a message (even if inadvertent) to students that there is no scholarship produced by women and people of color, or perhaps worse, that you do not value it.
- If applicable, discuss contributions made to the field by historically underrepresented groups and explain why these efforts are significant. This action can prove validating to students looking to see themselves represented in the researchers, mentors, and models of the course.
- **Use multiple and diverse examples that do not marginalize students.** (Ambrose *et al.*; Davis; Hockings)
  - When presenting content in class discussions or lecture, plan to use examples that speak across gender, work across cultures, and are relatable to people from various socioeconomic statuses, ages, and religions. If you cannot, ground examples in specificity and discuss limitations (for example, “This study conducted research on white male Ivy League students in the 1970s, which changes the way we apply the findings to higher education classrooms today.”)
  - Do not assume that all students will recognize the cultural, literary, or historical references you use. Make sure not to reward students for their similarity to you at the expense of others (for example, chatting warmly with students who are from your hometown, but never asking other students about their backgrounds). Instead, try to draw on resources, materials, humor, and anecdotes that are relevant to the subject, and sensitive to the social and cultural diversity of your students.

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## Principle 4: Design all course elements for accessibility.

An inclusive environment recognizes the diversity of learners' abilities and experiences, and provides multiple ways for them to engage with course materials and express their learning. Instructors can help ensure their learning experiences are physically and cognitively accessible to everyone by using Universal Design for Learning (UDL), a pedagogical approach grounded in learning sciences. In practice, UDL means making no assumptions about learners' abilities or experiences (indeed, it is never appropriate for an instructor to speculate about what disability a student may or may not have), and eliminating biases in methods of expression, such as only accepting written work. It means acknowledging that the technology and communication of course materials and assignments are not necessarily neutral and can in fact create additional and unnecessary challenges for learners beyond the course focus.

While the term “universal” in UDL is sometimes criticized for seeming to suggest that there is one perfect approach to teaching, the intent, in fact, is the opposite. The keywords for UDL are “multiple means:” its precepts guide instructors in providing multiple means for engagement, representation, and action and expression of learning.

With its focus on creating learning experiences that facilitate learner engagement and capacity for expression, UDL can benefit all learners, not just those requiring accommodations. UDL invites instructors to think objectively—making no assumptions about learners' abilities or experiences, and eliminating biases in methods of expression—about what engagement with and mastery of their course material looks like. Having this articulation will then make it easier to adjust the course not just to meet accessibility concerns but also for other purposes, such as moving from a face-to-face format to a fully online format. Making adjustments to address particular accessibility concerns can also enhance the experience of all learners in unanticipated ways. For example, providing transcripts for lecture videos creates an alternate, text-searchable means of consuming lectures. Similarly, addressing cognitive accessibility concerns by breaking down course concepts to highlight patterns and big ideas, and supplying background knowledge brings a clarity to course design that benefits everyone in the class.

United States law requires instructors to provide accommodations for learners with physical or learning disabilities (for more information, see the [Department of Education website](#)). There is an Office of Disability Services at Columbia that can assist with compliance (see the [Columbia Disability Services website](#)). That said, it is important to remember that the legally mandated accommodations—for example,

having double the time to take a written exam—almost always set a *minimum* standard for instructors to meet. While giving a learner with cognitive processing differences more time on a written exam technically fulfills the requirement, an instructor might be able to create a better way for that student to show mastery of a subject through an oral presentation, structured model, or other product that more closely aligns with the learner’s communication strengths. Prioritizing the accessibility of all aspects of a course, from instructional materials to assignments to classroom activities, allows instructors to envision a course from multiple perspectives and create a learning experience with fuller engagement from a diverse field of learners.

## Teaching Strategies

*The following strategies follow the structure of UDL’s framing principles. For more information, visit the [Center for Applied Technology](#) or the [National Center on Universal Design for Learning](#).*

To recognize the diversity of students’ abilities and to create accessible learning experiences, instructors should:

- **Provide multiple means of representation.**
  - Ask the question “How might this information present barriers to learners?” to help improve accessibility in the broadest possible context. This approach equips you to address the needs of learners new to a discipline, non-native speakers who find the vocabulary of learning materials inaccessible, and students with physical or cognitive disabilities.
  - Ease barriers for learners by providing supporting materials (e.g., glossaries, illustrations), background information, and multiple types of examples to facilitate knowledge transfer. Provide information in multiple modalities (e.g., including transcripts for multimedia materials) and in a format that learners can adjust (e.g., by increasing text size or altering brightness).
  - Adopt guidelines for accessible presentations and discussions created by the [Digital Library Federation](#), which include making it a practice to choose dyslexia-friendly fonts and avoid using color difference to convey concepts.
- **Provide multiple means of action and expression.**
  - Consider all of the possibilities for participation and assessment in a course. Clearly articulating what it means for a student to master the course content might allow you to provide a range of ways for students

to demonstrate their knowledge. Remember, engaging in activities outside of the classroom may not be possible for some learners; clearly articulated goals can help you devise alternative assignments that capture the same concepts and skills developed by the field experience.

- Allow students to interact with course materials in a way that allows them to advance their learning (for example, consider illustrating text-dense syllabi and assignments with graphic organizational aids such as a calendar with milestones).
- Meaningfully consider the use of technology in your courses. For learners with some types of physical disabilities, technology can be both a help and a hindrance; while assistive technologies such as screen readers can open up inaccessible resources, digital tools used to promote active learning may require actions such as dragging, dropping, and clicking that are not compliant with accessibility standards. Learning management systems such as CourseWorks meet accessibility standards, but you should check the [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines](#) ratings for other technology tools used in your courses.
- Provide scaffolding. Help students build executive functioning skills (for example, setting long-term goals, planning strategies to meet those goals, monitoring progress toward goals, and modifying strategies in response to feedback) by articulating the necessary steps between the granular mechanics and the big picture outcomes in a learning experience.
- Provide frequent opportunities for informal assessment and feedback on progress, and build into this process places where learners should stop and reflect before acting. (See Principle 2).
- **Provide multiple means of engagement.**
  - Create a supportive class climate (see Principle 1). Remember that cultural messages (for example, “Girls can’t do computer science”) and internal anxieties (for example, “I’m just not a good writer”) can limit learners’ ability to engage. Combat messages and behaviors that can demotivate students by encouraging collaboration rather than competition among peers, and emphasizing process as much as final answers in assessment.
  - Provide multiple options for engagement that encourage learner autonomy. Invite students to do investigations or research on self-selected topics to draw on personal interests/relevance. Increase options for assignment form to allow students increased choice such as oral presentation, research paper, design project, etc.



- Invite students to co-design elements of classroom activities or assignments (for example, contribute questions for exam study guides or lead class discussions). This practice builds purposeful engagement by asking learners to reflect on their learning and its relevance.

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## Principle 5: Reflect on one's beliefs about teaching to maximize self-awareness and commitment to inclusion.

As instructors commit to understanding their students (including their identities, experiences, motivations, interests, background knowledge, and needs), it becomes equally important for instructors to reflect on their *own* identities and beliefs. In the rush of day-to-day teaching, instructors often fall back on teaching strategies, instincts, and/or habits that are commonplace in their disciplines, or that mirror their own learning preferences. Margery Ginsberg and Raymond Wlodkowski discuss the difficulty of making shifts from monocultural education toward one more responsive to diversity: “From the tendency to (1) reward those who think like ourselves, (2) rely on our own background and education for determining subject matter, and (3) secure the comfort of the controlled, the familiar and the predictable in our classes, we have little reason to change these habits” (25). No matter how well-intentioned instructors are, these (sometimes unconscious) actions can keep instructors from considering their actual students’ experiences. These behaviors may even run counter to making the learning experience inclusive.

Development of some amount of bias, however subtle or unexpressed, is inevitable over the course of a personal and professional life. Biases can pertain to students with whom instructors share identities as much as students they perceive as “different” (Tarr). Additionally, instructors may have biases about students they identify as privileged as well as about those they believe belong to underrepresented, marginalized, or culturally distinct groups (Goodman). Ginsberg and Wlodkowski argue that “mindfulness of who we are and what we believe culturally can help us examine the ways in which we may be unknowingly placing our good intentions within a dominant and unyielding framework—in spite of the appearance of openness and receptivity to enhancing motivation to learn among all students” (13). Taking time to reflect on the attitudes they hold, the assumptions they make, and the affect and habits they demonstrate in class can help instructors keep their students engaged with the subject matter, each other, and themselves.

Reflecting on personal beliefs about teaching can help to maximize instructors’ self-awareness and commitment to inclusion. Formally and/or informally reflecting on teaching practices and analyzing actions can help instructors examine and challenge beliefs, as well as hunt out assumptions they hold about themselves and others (Brookfield). As Stephen Brookfield suggests, “Becoming aware of the implicit assumptions that frame how we think and act is one of the most challenging intellectual puzzles we face in our lives. It is also something we instinctively resist,

for fear of what we might discover” (Brookfield 2-3). By performing this work of reflection and uncovering, instructors can actively seek opportunities for greater self-awareness, and pursue new and different strategies that will better include students in their classrooms. Instructors can then commit to teaching as an iterative process, and one that models deep, critical thought for students.

## Teaching Strategies

In order to reflect on one’s teaching, instructors should ask themselves the following questions:

- **What are my identities, and how do others/my students perceive me?** (Bennet and Bennet; Goodman; Hearn; Johnson-Bailey and Lee; Lee *et al.*)
  - Consider your positionality, or the way your social location or position is assigned and negotiated as the result of combining various social factors or identities (e.g., race, sex, class, gender, ability, sexual orientation). The body you inhabit, your self-presentation, and the information you choose to share about yourself can all have an effect on student perception and comfort in a class. Take inventory of the way your affiliations and identities—the readily evident ones as well as ones that are less visible—may shape your perceptions and connections with others, or their perceptions and connections with *you*. For example, do you believe that all students can succeed in your class? Do you find yourself siding with students who are more similar to you? Do students equally afford you authority in the classroom? Do some make assumptions about you based on your positionality that may be inaccurate or stereotypical? If you find you want to change any of the dynamics occurring in class based on positionality, work to address it through discussion and concrete actions in class.
  - Often our courses necessitate intercultural competence, in which students encounter perspectives and people from different cultures in class or on campus. If establishing and encouraging intercultural competence is a course goal, articulate which behaviors and attitudes contribute to this goal and which do not. Work with students to set objectives and scaffolds to meet this goal using models of intercultural literacy.
- **What are my implicit (or explicit) biases? Do I propagate, neutralize, or challenge stereotypes in my class?** (Ambrose *et al.*; Banaji and Greenwald; [Project Implicit](#); Steele; Sue *et al.*)
  - Take honest inventory of the ways you might unconsciously or consciously be affected by or perpetuate bias. Proactively adjust your

behavior, and encourage others to modify theirs to avoid creating a marginalizing class environment or work to neutralize a hostile one. Harvard University's [Project Implicit](#) is a particularly helpful tool for self-inventory, providing a wide range of implicit bias tests for people to become aware of their own automatic preferences for certain identities (race, gender, sexuality, etc.).

- Familiarize yourself with the concept of stereotype threat (defined by Stroessner and Good as “being at risk of confirming, as a self-characteristic, a negative stereotype about one’s social group”), and work to neutralize or intentionally discuss instances where stereotypes arise. Challenge stereotypes when they arise in content, or in the spoken or written comments of students. If you catch yourself (or your students catch you) perpetuating stereotypes, address the situation openly in class and work to reduce your unconsciously held stereotypes in the future.
- **How do I handle challenges in the classroom?** (Ambrose *et al.*; Kipp in Landis *et al.*; Lee *et al.*; Weinstein and Obear)
  - Cultivate reflective distance by asking yourself, in the moment or preemptively: what student behaviors trigger strong emotions in me, cause me to lose equilibrium, or otherwise distract my attention? How do I react to recurring frustrations such as tardiness, lack of preparation, inappropriate use of technology, or indifference or hostility during discussion? Students are quick to pick up on signals in such circumstances, which can introduce into class emotions or affiliations that could prove alienating. Greater self-awareness of the ways you handle difficult moments in class can help to model constructive behavior for students. (See Principle 2.)
- **How might the ways I set up classroom spaces and activities foster inclusion or disinclusion?** (Lee *et al.*)
  - Be attentive to the way you are defining and using space in the classroom. Considering how you position yourself and your students in a room can help identify signals sent to students about authority and equitable engagement via fundamental components of classroom life such as seating, movement, presentation, and group formation. Similarly, consider the way you use and move through space in teaching; these actions can have implications for your students about hierarchy and inclusion. Consider: do you stand in front of the class looking down at your students? Do you sit at a seminar table with them to have a discussion? Where is your attention directed when interacting with students? While there is no perfect or neutral use of space, being

mindful of the way you define and use space can help make sure that your actions do not contravene your intentions.

- Reflect on the activities you choose for class. Do you tend to repeat the same format every week, or do you vary your class activities? Do you provide multiple class participation opportunities, such as large group, paired, group, and individual work? If you find that you repeat the same activities with no defined intentions, or that you continually rely on the same modes of expression for student participation, try expanding your repertoire to broaden student engagement. (See Principle 4.)

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