

Designing an Equitable and Inclusive Course Environment

Framing the Topic

“**Equity** refers to ensuring that each student receives what they need to be successful through the intentional design of the college experience” ([Achieving the Dream](#), 2021). Equity in higher education has been a longstanding issue and [the COVID-19 pandemic has further widened equity gaps](#), not only in higher education but also in the workforce.

[Inclusive course design](#) is an intentional approach to course design aimed at minimizing inequity in your course. Inclusivity bridges across multiple student identities but would include race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, religion, and any disabilities a student may have, to name a few.

Immediate Steps You Can Take

1. Create a student survey. Invite students to share their pronouns, the name they want to be called in class, and how their identity (race, ethnicity, gender, etc.) shapes their learning.
 - Consider asking a question like "What do I need to know about you to help you be successful this semester?"
2. Share examples that are diverse during your lectures and conversations; for example, use they/them pronouns, working class examples, etc.
 - Allow students to create and share examples that represent who they are and share those examples with others in the class.
3. Share campus resources with students.
 - You can find [an exhaustive list of resources](#) on the WSU Students page, including Learning, Success and Support services, Health and Safety services, Financial services, and other student services.
4. Consider the purposes of the policies you have created/are enforcing in your courses.
 - We understand this may not always be possible depending on the department you work in.

Promote Equity Through Inclusive Course Design – A Long-term Approach

Course Content

To effectively address equity, it is key that we consider inclusivity as part of our course design. Begin first by thinking about your content - who is represented in the materials of the course and how many various perspectives and experiences are you sharing with your students?

Wherever possible, look to include multiple perspectives on each course topic, including materials presented by authors from several different backgrounds and perspectives (i.e., gender, race, ethnicity, religion, political stance, profession, etc.). Challenge students to identify content that fits your course and represents a population that reflects or challenges their own identity. The goal is that all students feel equally represented by the content of the course.

Your Teaching Strategies

Chances are, you have some preferred teaching strategies (your teaching comfort zone). It is worthwhile to identify your preferred teaching strategies and how those may be excluding certain student populations in your course. By identifying such gaps, you can explore other teaching strategies that better engage multiple student perspectives and preferences. Universal Design for Learning (UDL), discussed more below, can help you identify multiple ways to represent information to better engage you diverse learners.

Assessing Learning

Similarly, students value having autonomy in how they express their learning. Allowing for multiple means of expression allows you to engage students in a means that best suits them. Wherever possible, look to allow for multiple means of demonstrating learning, so that students do not feel forced into developing something that does not align with their strengths and their identity. If possible, allow your students to share ideas with you on how they might show their learning. This could be accomplished in [several ways](#), but a simple conversation or group conversation may be the most straightforward option. You might also consider adding in a proposal step to larger projects in which students share their plan for their project, including the methods and tools they plan to use to demonstrate their mastery or knowledge.

Universal Design for Learning

UDL is a framework to improve teaching for *all* people. The UDL guidelines are supported by adult learning theories and [applying them can ensure that you have a more inclusive classroom environment](#).

Principally, there are three main sets of UDL guidelines: (1) provide multiple means of **engagement** so that learners are purposeful and motivated; (2) provide multiple means of **representation** so that learners are resourceful and knowledgeable; and, (3) provide multiple means of **action & expression** so that learners are strategic and goal-directed. [Here is a helpful visualization of the UDL Guidelines](#).

Additional Resources

- [Creating Inclusive College Classrooms](#)
- [Inclusive Course Design](#)
- [Increasing Inclusivity in the Classroom](#)