Developing an Inclusive Syllabus

A syllabus is often the first exposure students have to a course and instructor. The syllabus is more than the road map of a course, but is also a reflection of the instructor. *What is included and excluded in a syllabus sends explicit messages to students about what an instructor values*. Developing an inclusive syllabus is a key first step towards creating an inclusive classroom environment. This document provides some principles and strategies for developing an inclusive syllabus for faculty and instructors who are interested in this process. See the rubric provided by the Center for Teaching & Learning as a guide to assess one of your course syllabi for inclusivity.

Diverse content and perspectives.
As research has shown, diversity is a critical component to educational excellence. When students are able to see themselves represented in course content and discussion, it signals to them that their identities (such as race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, immigration status, and disability) are valued and respected in the classroom. Instructors can access students' lived experiences and cultural backgrounds as part of their curriculum to enhance student learning.

Multiple means of instruction and demonstration of learning.
Students have a range of learning styles and varying the way we teach (e.g. lecture, videos, presentations, discussion, small group collaborative work) and ask students to demonstrate their learning (e.g. power point, term papers, oral and written exams, performances, individual vs. group assignments) is an important component of inclusive teaching. This may also include allowing students to choose their preferred method to demonstrate their learning for a particular assignment.

Explicit and transparent expectations, learning outcomes, and assessment.
Transparency in teaching helps not only underserved students but all students better understand the expectations of instructors. By explaining the why and how behind each assignment, students gain a clear understanding of how they are being assessed. Elements of transparency in teaching and learning include providing:
- Examples of excellent student work.
- Clear rubrics and grading criteria.
- Scaffolding or step-by-step guidelines for each assignment.

Discussion guidelines.
These should be either provided by the instructor on the syllabus or added after the students develop the guidelines as a group on the first day of class. This is extremely important for both physical and online classrooms. In physical classrooms, these guidelines provide group structure and agreements so that instructors can effectively facilitate challenging discussions that may

arise. Online discussion boards should have clear guidelines on what are appropriate and respectful comments, and what consequences may ensue should students choose to post something inappropriate.

Campus resources for students.
Include information for resources on campus that provide student support that aren't stated in other areas of your syllabus such as the Counseling Center, LGBT Resource Center, International Center, and the Veteran's Resource Center. Information for many of these resources is provided on the CTLE Syllabus Checklist.

Inclusive language.
Make it clear to students that you value and respect their diverse backgrounds and identities, and that they are encouraged to share their perspectives in class. This can be demonstrated in a diversity statement or in different ways throughout the syllabus.

- **Inviting and engaging tone**.
  The syllabus should prioritize learning over rules, reveal the instructor's genuine enthusiasm for the course, express high expectations for all students, and emphasize what to do to succeed in the class rather than how to avoid failing. **Show your humanness**! Click here to view a research study regarding the effect of syllabus tone on student learning.

- **Statements regarding diversity and inclusion**.
  Several statements are required by the University of Utah such as ADA and academic integrity. Other statements are strongly recommended such as a diversity statement that demonstrates the instructor respects and welcomes the contributions of students' diverse backgrounds, as well as a statement regarding name/pronoun. You can find a list of syllabus statements here.

- **Hidden or assumed norms.**
  Be conscious of norms that may reflect dominant culture or privilege – e.g. using only masculine pronouns, terms such as Christmas break rather than winter break, or slang. Simply being aware that many students in our classrooms come from cultural backgrounds different from our own goes a long way towards creating an inclusive classroom.

Syllabus accessibility.
There are several tools and strategies that instructors can use to ensure students of all abilities have equal access to learning. Universal Design Principles and tools on Canvas can be used to assess syllabus accessibility. Be clear with students that they should notify you of any resources or accommodations they might need to maximize their learning in class, both in the physical classroom and online.

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