Graduate Teaching & Laboratory Assistants Orientation

Diversity In Teaching

Because issues of diversity in the UGA classroom may not always be visible, instructors should assume that they teach students who come from an array of socio-economic backgrounds and life experiences, both of which inform their individual perspectives. While some teachers bring their own life experiences to a course, we should all learn to consider and value the experiences and perspectives of students whose backgrounds differ from our own. In addition to personal diversity, teachers need to acknowledge that every classroom is filled with students who learn differently and who succeed through individual strategies. Below are some suggestions to help instructors meet the needs of diverse students. A video and a collection of links about diversity in the classroom can be found at:

http://ctl.uga.edu/teachingassistant/diversityresources

Planning for Diversity in Teaching

*Know your student population
   Talk with others and read about student learning needs and successful strategies. Avoid stereotypical assumptions since every class is different.

*Plan for varied academic preparation
   Provide students ways to review basic concepts before understanding new material.

*Plan for multiple ways of learning
   Develop multiple approaches for difficult material so students can choose the method that helps them learn most effectively.

*Build on previous instructor’s work
   Use the expertise in your department as you plan a course to save time, avoid problems and select strategies which have been successful.

*Identify materials showing different perspectives
   Include the contribution minorities have made to your discipline and choose materials that are relevant to student interests and career goals.

*Examine own bias or prejudice with certain groups
   Commit to learning more about and understanding the needs and perspectives of underrepresented groups.

Creating a Syllabus for Diverse Needs

*State relevance of course
   Communicate your commitment to providing a respectful, helpful learning environment for all.

*Incorporate student choice
   Encourage student interest, career goals and life experiences in selecting topics for papers and projects.

*Structure syllabus to be increasingly challenging
   Build student confidence at beginning of course to maintain interest.

*Plan varied assessment of learning:
   Provide students many ways to show you what they have learned.

*Have a grading policy that allows for recovery
   Let students drop an exam or take a comprehensive exam.

*State rules for respectful classroom interchanges
   Avoid value-laden language which discriminates against individuals or groups.

*Structure the course to include study groups
   Provide flexible hours for peer tutoring, help sessions, web-based material and office hours.

*Include contacts for campus academic support
   Provide a statement from Disability Services, contacts for tutoring, writing support and organizations that support diverse student needs.
Selecting Strategies for Diverse Students

*Identify a variety of teaching approaches for stated objectives
Be willing to modify your approach and offer alternatives if students are having learning difficulties.

*Develop alternative learning methods for difficult material
Provide out-of-class opportunities in study groups, on line or with assigned readings and field experiences.

*Create a performance contract for students
Let students know when and what they will have to do or achieve to be successful in the course. Provide samples of various graded material to demonstrate different levels of learning.

*Provide opportunities for students to rehearse ideas or master the material
Don’t surprise students in testing, they should have frequently practiced the format and content.

*Provide opportunities for peer teaching
Organize study groups since most learning occurs outside of class.

*Use eLC for self paced learning
Course management systems that provide sample testing, audio and visual support of important concepts and peer interaction help students learn at their own pace.

Creating an Environment that Respects Diversity

*Provide direction and structure without instructor domination
Encourage new and diverse perspectives by having students discuss their understanding of the material.

*Learn student names and help class get to know each other
Address all students in the same way to avoid perceptions of different status.

*Use inclusive language
Try to use “we” and avoid terms which exclude some students.

*Be aware of body language
Give the same level of attention and eye contact to all students. Body language differs from one culture to another. Be careful of misinterpreting the body language of students from a different culture.

*Do not ignore inappropriate remarks about any person or group
Remind students of the dangers of stereotypes and bias. Treat an inappropriate comment as a learning moment by removing the comment from the student and treating it as an analytical question that must be supported by facts.

*Acknowledge own unfair or offensive mistakes and apologize
Try to learn from your mistakes and work on strategies to minimize those encounters.

*Prepare for controversial subjects
Encourage students to develop rules for respectful discussion and disagreement.

*Include collaborative learning
Help students learn from each other by rotating group tasks and encouraging individual insights as well as group cooperation and goals.

Providing Course Feedback that Meets Diverse Needs

*Schedule daily classroom assessment of student learning
Promote student preparation and self assessment by using frequent short low-stakes assessments.

*Measure different levels of expertise and ways of learning
Allow diverse students to demonstrate their understanding of the material by using a variety of assessment strategies.

*Allow students to draft and rewrite papers
Help students build confidence and writing skills. Encourage use of the writing center.

*Evaluate student work blindly
Avoid bias by having students put their name on the last page or by using a code to identify their work.

*Provide negative feedback on performance, not person
Structure assessment opportunities that help students improve and recover.

*Do a mid-semester assessment of teaching and learning
Adjust your strategies if students are having difficulty.

*Listen to what individual students need, and respond quickly and enthusiastically
Create strategies to meet an individual need and share with all students so they can also benefit from another approach.

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