



Graduate Teaching & Laboratory Assistants Orientation

Diversity In Teaching

Because issues of diversity in the classroom may not 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 choose materials for class, create a syllabus, select teaching and learning strategies, promote a class environment of mutual respect, and provide learning assessment and feedback that meet the needs of diverse students.

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 personal biases or prejudices 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, and contact information 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 computers 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 biases. 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.