

TOPkit DIGEST

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Video Tip

Inclusive Teaching Practices

Creating a Sense of Belonging



During the COVID-19 global pandemic, what became apparent was that developing online learning that is diverse, inclusive, and equitable (DEI) is not only vital for a positive learning experience, but also lacking in many existing online learning environments. For instructional designers, instructors, and students, there is a growing body of information about how DEI can be incorporated into the teaching and learning.

This video illustrates the first step in DEI development is examining one's own perspective.

Top Tips

Permeating a Teaching Culture of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

How to Get Started

Much has been said about diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in higher education and online learning, and it can get confusing with all the information. What is important to consider in designing for DEI is understanding the differences between the terms and how they work with one another. As with the creation of any kind of culture, some standards hold true. Creating a teaching, cognitive, and social presence is crucial, and there are some specific ways these kinds of presences can be implemented with diversity, equity, and inclusion as the focus. Below are a few ideas and tips to help you get started.

#1 - Examine Yourself. To design for DEI, one first has to know definitions of these terms and how they work with each other, and even how they get mistaken for one another. First on the list is diversity. Diversity is the presence of difference. It's often referred to as the representation of a group with regard to race, gender, and age, but as the "[Waterline of Visibility](#)" suggests, diversity is more about what can't be seen by looking at someone, rather than what can. Second is equity. [Equity is often mistaken for equality](#), which is about treating everyone the same without consideration of who people are. But equity is about acknowledging the diverse needs of people and providing support. Last is inclusion. There is an assumption that if you have created an environment that is diverse and equitable, that inclusion just organically falls into place. Inclusion involves how people feel and the sense of belonging they have in the classroom or any environment. So, just because the other two pieces are in place, the work of inclusion is done by purposeful practice. So, let's find out how.

#2 - Know Thy Audience. Nurturing an atmosphere of DEI in course design starts with good, basic design: finding out about the learners. Inclusive course design can reduce students' feelings of isolation and anxiety in online courses. Providing a space where students can introduce themselves and using a variety of tools (video, images, voice) so they can show who they are sets an inclusive community environment from the start. Including an assignment where students detail their academic journey, why they

are taking the course, and even what fears or anxieties they might have about the course or online learning also helps create a community of inclusion. Instructors who share who they are in an [introductory video](#), provide timely feedback, and [provide opportunities for student feedback](#) (open discussion forum, [Padlet](#) resource page, one-minute paper), create an online atmosphere that values all voices.

#3 - Watch Your Language. This tip includes not only adding your own personal pronouns to your e-mail and syllabi and saying them out loud, but also inviting students to self-identify or not. Instructors should also know [how to pronounce students' names](#) (even in an online course), and [why it's so important](#). In online content and discussion postings, the aim should be to use language that is “[people-first](#)” rather than [leading with adjectives acting like nouns](#) to label people.

#4 - Read the Room. When using examples, references, and scenarios in online teaching, strong DEI design implements a “[variety of cultural references and elaborates on cultural references when possible](#).” Certainly [online class discussions](#) are more impactful with a variety of perspectives, but faculty shouldn't signal out students in order to spotlight any one perspective. To promote success for all students, clear expectations of course policies and resources should be explicit. High standards in online learning need to be set, but also be transparent about how to achieve those standards. [Universal design strategies](#), such as [varying teaching strategies, providing content in multiple ways](#), and letting students demonstrate their learning in different formats provides support for all the learners.

#5 - Think, Reflect, and Rethink. Designing for DEI also involves acknowledging when things are hard or uncomfortable. “Equity requires educators to shift their thinking and be comfortable with acknowledging the differences—identifying differences—and addressing students differently,” says Dr. Ruanda Garth-McCullough, Associate Director of Teaching and Learning for Achieving the Dream. This means DEI design builds in opportunities for communication in the course, such as soliciting mid-semester feedback and giving students purposeful [time and opportunities to think and reflect](#), with reflection that is “[continuous, connected, challenging, and contextualized](#).”

#6 - Learn to Grow. Just like any course design, the goal is to build on small yet substantiable improvements that lead to positive teaching and learning practices. So, faculty should talk to instructors and instructional designers who may already be implementing DEI in their courses. Encourage faculty to reach out to their [Office of Diversity and Inclusion](#) for support along with their [Faculty Teaching and Learning Centers](#), instructional designers, and other faculty who include DEI in their course design. Just as with implementing any course design, there are bound to be mistakes. Mistakes should be recognized as opportunities for growth and improvement, so that faculty can create a positive learning environment where all students can thrive.

Encourage faculty to embrace resources, because if we know anything about designing with DEI, it's that it's not about doing things alone.

From The Community

Learning about Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity in Online Course Design

Resources to Grow

Many higher education institutions went online during the Spring 2020 term and have continued with online teaching. Institutions went from reactive efforts to sustainable efforts. Take time to review some of the resources that came from these two methods of professional development.

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TOP COMMUNITY TOPICS



- Evaluating - Checklists & Rubrics
- Connect with Us
- Hyflex, Blendflex, Asynchronous, Synchronous: Decoding Modalities
- TOPkit Digest Archives
- Developing - Sample Course

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Teaching Online Preparation Toolkit

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