

Building Inclusion:

Engaging Diversity in the Classroom

1. Guidelines for Creating an Inclusive Classroom Environment:

- Engage the students in developing guidelines for creating a safer and more inclusive classroom. Provide students with a copy of the guidelines that were agreed upon.
- Always interact in respectful and collaborative ways.
- Use inclusive language.
- Learn students' names and use them frequently.
- Avoid making assumptions about the social identities of those who are present in the classroom.
- Consider issues of diversity and inclusion in all class lectures and assignments.
- Provide opportunities for students to work in groups. Mix up the groups!
- Provide clear, direct and timely feedback to students.
- Be available to students. Encourage them to meet with you during office hours.

2. Create a safe and harassment-free classroom:

- Encourage active participation by making it safe for everyone to express their opinions.
- Address discriminatory behaviours or stereotypical comments as soon as possible. Your silence or inaction may be taken as an endorsement.
- If you chose to deal with a public incident in a private manner, loop back to the students during the next class. Let your students know that you've dealt with the situation.
- Document how you've dealt with any incidents of harassment or discrimination.
- Seek support for yourself as needed.

3. Handling “hot” topics:

- Be aware of your own personal biases and “hot” buttons.
- Inform students in advance of sensitive topics that are going to be discussed.
- Do not allow debates to spring up between two students or two sides of an argument. Open up the discussion to others who have not spoken.
- Stop the class in order to give everyone 5 minutes to gather their thoughts on a contentious issue or incident.
- Go around the room and ask each student who has spoken – and others, if they wish – to explain their views without interruption. Acknowledge each students' point of view regardless of your own opinion.
- If students become visibly upset, allow them to take a break to compose themselves, if they wish.
- Pay attention to group dynamics – who has spoken, who has not spoken, who is taking up the most space, use of body language, etc. Interrupt disrespectful behaviour or comments.
- Use different teaching styles; for example, small groups, reflection papers, self-reflective exercises, to manage “hot” topics.