

Helping Faculty Teach Diverse Students and Diverse Topics Effectively Principles and Guidelines

University Committee on Diversity, Equity and Outreach
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Keywords for diversity and equity

Non-discrimination and social justice
Cultural competence
Race, ethnicity and racism
Gender and sexism
Social class and poverty
Sexual orientation, gender identity and expression
Age
Disability
Religious background
National and geographical origin
Language and culture
First-generation college students
Returning college students

Introduction

One of the five components of San Diego State University's vision is to create a community proud of its diversity and committed to furthering social justice on and off campus (see SDSU President's Shared Vision; SDSU Mission and Goals). Our student body includes over 40% students of color and close to 5% international students. A sizable number of our students are first-generation or returning college students. They are also diverse in social class, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, age, ability, religious background, national and geographical origin, and language and culture. SDSU is committed to providing an equitable environment that supports the learning and success of all students. Diversifying the curriculum is central in achieving this goal. Further, research shows that a diverse environment enhances the quality of the learning process for all students (see University of Michigan; Quaye and Harper 2007). Since California is a very diverse state, preparing all students to work effectively with diverse peers is also an important aspect of our mission. The present document aims to assist faculty seeking to teach diverse students and diverse topics by providing them with practical suggestions for increasing their effectiveness in these areas. Implementing these practices should have a positive impact on the quality of all students' educational experience.

Learning to become an effective culturally responsive teacher takes time and self-reflection. The suggestions we provide in this document can help guide you in this process but only constitute a starting point. We encourage you to continue this learning process by reading some of the sources listed below and engaging in discussions with colleagues who have expertise in this area. Finally, there is no substitute for lived

experience. We encourage you to learn more about cultures other than your own by attending community events, cultural festivals, lectures, workshops, and expanding your socialization network.

I-Major principles of equity

In an effort to foster an environment of equity, we suggest that you do the following:

- Begin by assessing what kind of effort you put into expanding your knowledge of groups other than your own.
- Strive to learn as much as possible about groups other than your own, recognizing that there are many things that you may not fully understand.
- Understand that marginalized people have the right to define themselves and their own issues.
- Recognize that learning about other groups may cause you to question some of your basic assumptions. Do show interest and acknowledge that you do not know everything (see Narayan 1988).
- It is better to value differences than to pretend that differences do not exist (e.g., the “color-blind” approach makes it hard to acknowledge the continuing existence of group discrimination).
- Recognize that equality does not mean sameness; fairness does not mean treating all students exactly in the same manner, but recognizing and striving to meet their distinctive needs (for example, providing accommodations for students with disabilities means that although you are not treating all students alike, you are providing what some students need in order to be able to benefit from their education in the same way as students with no disabilities) (see Cummins 1986; Heath 1983; Kochman 1981; Philips 1983).

The websites listed below may facilitate your knowledge in this area:

http://www.irc.uci.edu/TRG/Teaching_at_UCI/Embracing_Diversity/Multicultural_Classroom.htm#tips

<http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/html/icb.topic58474/TFTTrace.html>

<http://www.salisbury.edu/library/diversity/curriculum%20changes.pdf>

II-Syllabus design

Whenever appropriate, strive to include:

- textbooks and materials written by authors from diverse backgrounds and presenting diverse perspectives. Avoid tokenization in designing your syllabus whenever possible works authored by members of the group under discussion
- materials that address underrepresented groups’ experiences in ways that do not trivialize or marginalize them. Avoid using materials that compare underrepresented groups’ experiences with the so-called “norm,” as that approach inevitably finds the former “lacking” (e.g., the nuclear, traditional white middle-class family structure taken as the ideal).

- textbooks and materials that represent the diversity of human experience accurately

http://www.crlt.umich.edu/gsis/P3_1.html

<http://www.education.indiana.edu/cas/tt/v2i2/when.html>

<http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/html/icb.topic58474/TFTrace.html>

As recommended by the SDSU policy guide, include a statement about your willingness to make reasonable accommodations for all students registered with Student Disability Services. Be also willing to make reasonable accommodations for pregnant students and students with documented illnesses.

<http://www.sa.sdsu.edu/dss/dssguide.html#resfaculty>

III-Classroom behavior

The following include some suggestions for behavioral guidelines in the classroom:

- Although group stereotyping is a common occurrence, strive to ensure that you make accurate statements about people opposed to group stereotyping.
- Whenever appropriate, give varied examples based on different groups' experiences.
- Use and ask your students to use gender-neutral language (the generic "he" is not generic—you can use they or he or she instead; "seminal" has its origin in the word semen and can either be replaced with "groundbreaking," "landmark," or "paradigm-shifting; you can use the terms firefighter and mail carrier instead of fireman or mailman and the verb to staff instead of to man).
- Use the term "people with disabilities" rather than "disabled people" (it indicates that the person, rather than the disability, comes first); speak directly to deaf people rather than to their interpreter; when having a discussion with a person who uses a wheelchair, sit or kneel down in order to be at eye level.
- Use humor with care, ensuring that your use of humor does not rely on stereotypes of certain groups. Although you may not have intended to offend, your words can still have hurtful effects.
- Check in with yourself to make sure you do not give more time or serious consideration to certain groups of students over others (e.g., monitor yourself to see whether you call on male or white students more often than other students; avoid only making eye contact with students from underrepresented groups when an issue concerning that group is discussed).
- Use caution and do not single out the one person in the class who belongs to a group under discussion. Avoid singling out this person by asking their opinion or for them to represent their group on this topic (e.g., questions such as, "What do Asian Americans usually think about this?").

http://www.irc.uci.edu/TRG/Teaching_at_UCI/Embracing_Diversity/Avoiding_Discrimination.htm#techniques

http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/~ode/sexual_harassment.html

<http://www.apa.org/pi/disability/enhancing.html>

IV-Teaching diverse topics

The first rule is to “do no harm.” It is better to not teach topics that you are entirely unprepared to teach rather than present complex issues in simplistic ways. Learning about diverse issues takes time and serious research.

As you are developing familiarity with issues of diversity and preparing to include them in your syllabi, consider requesting the assistance of SDSU colleagues with this expertise. Inviting guest lecturers, while not a long-term substitute for your own knowledge of diverse materials, is one way to begin making your courses more inclusive of diverse issues.

Be aware that individuals may have multiple group and individual identities that may shift depending on number of factors (e.g., race, ethnicity, language, culture, social class, national origin, religious and political belief, age, ability, gender, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, marital status, parent, child, caregiver, immigrant, etc.). Students may identify more strongly with an identity not obvious to an instructor based on appearance, and instructors should remember that group members do not have a single view on subjects. <http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb/inclusive/foster.html#Broad>
<http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/html/icb.topic58474/TFTrace.html>
[http://www.irc.uci.edu/TRG/Teaching_at_UCI/Embracing_Diversity/Feminist Gay and Lesbian.htm](http://www.irc.uci.edu/TRG/Teaching_at_UCI/Embracing_Diversity/Feminist_Gay_and_Lesbian.htm)

Avoid assigning racist or discriminatory readings. If reading or discussing racist or discriminatory beliefs or policies, point them out as such and make it clear that you do not endorse them. If you do not, students may think that you either share or are unaware of the bias and you will create a situation in which students from underrepresented groups are expected to justify their existences and rights (see Barnard 1994). Providing students with tools of critical and content analysis will help them become more adept at uncovering the assumptions and ideologies of various kinds of texts.
<http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/html/icb.topic58474/TFTrace.html>

Anticipate that some topics or readings may lead to heated discussions. Ensure that emotions are acknowledged and dealt with prior to an intellectual discussion of the topic (see Narayan 1988). Also ensure that controversy is handled in a way that does not privilege the viewpoints of majority group students. Ensure that individual students are not scapegoated for their group membership. Many instructors begin with setting ground rules for respectful class discussion. These may include using “I” messages (saying “I disagree with what you said” rather than “you’re wrong”), avoiding put downs, speaking from one’s own experience rather than speaking for others, listening to others without interrupting, and avoiding baiting others.
<http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb/inclusive/foster.html#Broad>
<http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/html/icb.topic58474/TFTrace.html>

If the discussion of a specific topic creates tension in the classroom, openly discuss the tension with students. If a few students are creating a disrespectful or hostile environment, speak with them individually outside the classroom. Please see SDSU's Ombudsman Handbook for other suggestions on dealing with difficult people.

http://www.irc.uci.edu/TRG/Teaching_at_UCI/Embracing_Diversity/Feminist_Gay_and_Lesbian.htm

<http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/html/icb.topic58474/TFTrace.html>

<http://www.sa.sdsu.edu/ombuds/OmbudsmanHandbook.pdf>

Provide opportunities for students to give anonymous feedback on how a specific topic was covered during the semester.

If you encounter difficult situations, seek advice from colleagues with expertise teaching diverse topics.

<http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb/inclusive/foster.html#Respond>

V-Teaching diverse students

Whenever appropriate, use a variety of teaching and testing techniques (including active learning techniques and collaborative student work) to ensure that all students' learning styles (visual, oral, hands-on) are included (see Venable 2004). Even in a large lecture class, it is possible to interrupt the lecture and include a short pair discussion activity or engage in an in-class group activity (see MacGregor et. al 2000).

<http://www.education.indiana.edu/cas/tt/v2i2/when.html>

http://www.vanderbilt.edu/cft/resources/teaching_resources/technology/crs.htm

You may consider including Community-Based Service Learning (CBSL) into your courses as an option when appropriate. CBSL involves making connections with local community agencies working toward social justice goals. In class students are presented with readings, lectures, and discussion that relate the service work to the intellectual component of the course. They are then placed with an agency from among a list provided by the instructor to work with the agency for an agreed-upon amount of time in a specific capacity as part of the course work. Reflective essays on the experience are written by the students for credit, and the agency usually also provides the instructor with an evaluation of the students. Research on CBSL indicates that it promotes active learning and enhances students' grades, critical thinking skills, and understanding of diversity (see Washington 2004). For more information on CBSL, see:

<http://servicelearning.sdsu.edu/service-learning.html>

Consider grading midterms and exams blind to ensure fairness in grading.

Recognize that students have different levels of preparation. Do not assume that they already "know the ropes." Making expectations explicit is helpful in that it allows all students to have access to the information they need in order to be successful. For example, provide your majors with information on professional standards; consider incorporating a session on conducting library research and outline expectations for

writing major papers when assigning a research paper. This is particularly important for first-generation college students and students coming from less affluent K-12 environments.

Be encouraging and supportive of your students, especially when critiquing their work. Students from low-income backgrounds, underrepresented groups and female students often experience “impostor” feelings—feeling that they are here by mistake—and may become easily discouraged. Communicate to your students that you expect them to succeed and provide them with clear assignment guidelines and grading criteria so they will know what they need to do to be successful in your class. Let students know that you have high expectations of them, that your assignments may be challenging, but that you trust that students have the potential to do well. Remind them that ability expands as one learns more (see Steele, Spencer and Aronson 2002).

<http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb/inclusive/convey.html>

In courses in which class discussion is important, consider calling upon students rather than only relying on volunteers. Some students may be willing to participate but may not volunteer, for cultural or personal reasons. In addition, increasing your wait time to 3-4 seconds after you ask a question will yield more diverse volunteers (see Sadker and Sadker 1992). You may also consider allowing students to turn in written comments. In a large lecture class, if you occasionally call on students, you may want to consider using a random selection system (e.g., calling on students wearing a particular color) to minimize the possibility of unconsciously favoring some students over others.

In class discussion, be wary of unfair patterns of communication (e.g., men interrupting women, a white student getting credit for a student of color’s idea) and ensure fair access to class discussion for all students.

If discriminatory remarks are made in your class, it is your responsibility to interrupt them and point them out as such. If you do not, students may think that you either approve of or are unaware of the impact of the comment or behavior.

<http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb/inclusive/foster.html#Broad>

<http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/html/icb.topic58474/TFTrace.html>

<http://honolulu.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FacDevCom/guidebk/teachtip/diverse.htm>

Recognize the expertise of students from a particular group, especially an underrepresented group, on issues relating to that group. This does not mean that they will always be right, only that they have experiential knowledge that should not be discounted, especially by an instructor who is not a member of that group. (See Narayan 1988)

Be willing to learn from your students, including the ones from backgrounds different from your own, but looking for “native informants”: do not put individual students in the awkward position of serving as representatives of one of the groups to which they belong. In other words, do not single them out for comment, but allow them to volunteer if they

want to speak out.

<http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb/inclusive/foster.html#Broad>

Use examples and metaphors drawing from a variety of cultural contexts and topics.

Assumptions about your students' backgrounds (mentioning their parents' college experience, assuming students come from or live in a nuclear family, assuming your students are heterosexual, etc.).

<http://honolulu.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FacDevCom/guidebk/teachtip/diverse.htm>

VI-Suggestions for disciplines in which diversity issues may appear less relevant

Even in disciplines such as science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM disciplines) in which the content does not appear to be directly related to issues of diversity, there are opportunities to teach in culturally sensitive ways. The following include some suggestions for including diverse concerns and diverse students:

- Make an effort to explain the ways in which STEM disciplines are relevant to the lives of diverse people. Provide concrete examples of uses and applications of scientific concepts and methods to help solve socially relevant issues. Emphasize the potential for positive social impact of the material.
- Design lectures and assignments that highlight how students can use scientific tools to help them analyze and solve issues important to their lives and society.
- When applicable, point out the blind spots and exclusions of research methods.

(See Mukhopadhyay and Greer 2004; Branch 2004)

VII-Beyond the classroom

Examine your office environment. Is your office and departmental space free of stereotypical or offensive representations of disadvantaged groups (e.g., scantily-clad women, 1920s colonial posters, etc.)? Do consider including representations of diverse groups in these spaces and in your publicity materials (departmental website, brochures, etc.) to let current and prospective students know that SDSU is a welcoming and inclusive environment.

Whenever appropriate, discussions of diversity should be encouraged in department meetings, especially with respect to topics such as curriculum, classroom climate, course content, course requirements and enrollment and graduation rates of diverse students.

<http://honolulu.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FacDevCom/guidebk/teachtip/diverse.htm>

Whenever appropriate, departments and colleges should consider including multicultural and diversity competence as part of their mission, expected student learning outcomes, and evaluation and assessment procedures (see Quaye and Harper 2007).

Departments and the university should support faculty members who seek to include diverse topics in their syllabi and class discussions and recognize that attention to diversity in the classroom is an essential part of excellence in teaching. In particular, departments and the university should recognize that a faculty member's student evaluations may be influenced by the extent to which a faculty member sought to make students question dominant group beliefs with respect to the experiences of marginalized groups. This may be especially important if the instructor is a member of that marginalized group (see Nast 1999; Ghorpade and Lackritz 1991).

The retention of students in general and of students from underrepresented groups in particular increases with more faculty-student contact (see Kuh 2005). You may want to make students aware of this fact. Unless you are teaching very large classes, consider encouraging students to visit you during office hours and respond to student e-mail and phone messages in a timely manner. The university should create structures so that further out of the classroom faculty-student contact is recognized and does not result in a work speed-up for faculty. Possible structures include providing faculty members with assigned time or extra funding for mentoring or for developing research experiences for undergraduate students, as well as building upon structures already in existence such as the Faculty-Student Mentoring Program.

The university could support the faculty's efforts by working to establish a university-wide writing center, an important feature of most large universities. Because not all students have had equitable access to K-12 education, a writing center would be an important part of our effort to help all students gain the tools they need to be successful.

Finally, if faculty, students, or staff are being harassed, they should contact the Office of Employee Relations and Compliance (formerly the Office of Diversity and Equity) at 619/594- 6464 and/or the Office of Ombudsman at 619/594- 6578.

A Final Word

On behalf of your students, we thank you for being interested enough in these issues to have taken the time to read this document. Feel free to contact the DEO if you have questions or concerns. The Senate website lists current DEO membership and contact information at <http://senate.sdsu.edu/> (click on Committees and scroll down to Committee on Diversity, Equity, and Outreach). The DEO thanks the many members of the SDSU community who have contributed to this document.

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<http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/html/icb.topic58474/TFTTrace.html>

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<http://www.sa.sdsu.edu/dss/dssguide.html#resfaculty>

SDSU Mission and Goals—Diversity.
http://www.sdsu.edu/campusinfo/mission_and_goals.html#diversity

SDSU Ombudsman Handbook.
<http://www.sa.sdsu.edu/ombuds/OmbudsmanHandbook.pdf>

SDSU President's Shared Vision.
<http://www.sdsu.edu/vision/SVupdate.html>

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IX-Related links:

Academy of Management. Gender and Diversity in Organizations Division.
<http://division.aomonline.org/gdo/teaching/index.htm>

American Library Association. "Internet Resources: Diversity Web Sources in Higher Education: Looking at Our Rich Heritage."
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