

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

University Committee on Diversity, Equity and Outreach
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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 (SDSU Mission and Goals; SDSU President's Shared Vision). 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 SDSU's mission of providing quality education and training our graduates for success. 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. While diverse content may seem especially appropriate to the humanities, arts, and social sciences, the pedagogy of teaching diverse student populations engages all subjects and disciplines.

Learning to become an effective culturally responsive teacher takes time, research, and self-reflection. The suggestions we provide in this document aim to help guide faculty in this process but only constitute a starting point. We encourage instructors 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 can all learn more about cultures other than our own by attending community events, cultural festivals, lectures, workshops, expanding our socialization network, and taking advantage of the diversity of programming available on campus and in the region.

Various aspects of diversity:

- 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

I-Major principles of equity

In an effort to foster an environment of equity, we offer the following principles:

- 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 historical legacy and/or continuing existence of group discrimination).
- 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 we are not treating all students alike, we 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).

http://www.salisbury.edu/Library/subject/diversity/curriculum_changes.pdf

II-Syllabus design

As recommended by the SDSU policy guide, it is good practice to include a statement about faculty willingness to make reasonable accommodations for students registered with Student Disability Services. Instructors may also consider making reasonable accommodations for pregnant students and students with documented illnesses.

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

Whenever appropriate, we recommend that faculty strive to include:

- textbooks and materials that represent the diversity of human experience accurately.
- textbooks and materials written by authors from diverse backgrounds and presenting diverse perspectives. Whenever possible, we recommend avoiding tokenization in syllabus design (e.g., “tacking on” only one diverse author or topic on the last week of class tends to have a marginalizing effect).
- works authored by members of the group under discussion.
- materials that address underrepresented groups’ experiences in ways that do not trivialize or marginalize them. We recommend avoiding the use of 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).

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

<http://www.education.indiana.edu/cas/tt/v2i2/when.html> (link no longer active)

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

III-Classroom behavior

The following include suggestions for behavioral guidelines in the classroom:

- Although group stereotyping is a common occurrence, faculty should make every effort to ensure that we make accurate statements about people rather than relying on group stereotyping.
- Whenever appropriate, faculty may consider using examples and metaphors drawing from diverse cultural contexts and topics to make concepts more relevant to various students.
- It is important that we use and ask students to use gender-neutral language (the generic “he” is not generic—we can use “he or she” or rephrase the sentence in the plural instead; we can use the terms firefighter and mail carrier instead of fireman or mailman and the verb to staff instead of to man; faculty may consider using terms such as “partner” instead of “husband” or “wife” to avoid heterosexual assumptions).
- It is preferable to use the term “people with disabilities” rather than “disabled people” (it indicates that the person, rather than the disability, comes first); hearing people should speak directly to deaf people rather than to their interpreter; when having a discussion with a person who uses a wheelchair, it is a good idea to sit or kneel down if possible in order to be at eye level.
- Faculty should use humor with care, ensuring that our use of humor does not rely on stereotypes of certain groups. Although one may not have intended to offend, words can still have hurtful effects.
- It is helpful for faculty to objectively evaluate our interactions with students in the classroom to ensure we do not give more time or serious consideration to certain groups of students over others (e.g., asking oneself: do I call on male or white students more often than other students? do I only make eye contact with students from underrepresented groups when an issue concerning that group is discussed?).
- It is helpful to be willing to learn from students, including the ones from backgrounds different from our own, but without looking for “native informants”: it is important for faculty to take care not to single out the one person in the class who belongs to a group under discussion, such as asking their opinion or for them to represent their group on a given topic (e.g., questions such as, “What do Asian Americans usually think about this?). However, it is important to allow them to volunteer if they want to speak out.
- In class discussion, it is helpful for faculty to objectively assess potentially unfair patterns of communication among students (e.g., men interrupting women, a white student getting credit for the ideas of a student of color) and ensure fair access to class discussion for all students.
- Learning about other groups may cause faculty to question some of our basic assumptions. In the classroom, it is helpful to show interest in issues raised by

diverse students and acknowledge that we do not know everything (see Narayan 1988).

- In courses in which class discussion is important, faculty may 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 wait time to 3-4 seconds after asking a question will yield more diverse volunteers (see Sadker and Sadker 1992). Faculty may also consider allowing students to turn in written comments. In a large lecture class, if one occasionally call on students, one 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.

http://www.irc.uci.edu/TRG/Teaching_at_UCI/Embracing_Diversity/Avoiding_Discrimination.htm#techniques (link no longer active)

http://www.irc.uci.edu/TRG/Teaching_at_UCI/Embracing_Diversity/Multicultural_Classroom.htm#tips (link no longer active)

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

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

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

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

IV-Teaching diverse topics

The first rule is to “do no harm.” It is better to not teach topics one is entirely unprepared to teach rather than present complex issues in simplistic ways. It is helpful for faculty to begin by assessing what kind of effort we put into expanding our knowledge of groups other than our own.

A second step is to endeavor to learn as much as possible about other groups, recognizing that there are many things that we may not fully understand and that everyone will always have some blind spots. Learning about diverse issues takes time and research.

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

Presenting diverse issues in a binary manner (pro and con arguments) does not do justice to the complexity of these issues (e.g., having students debate whether homosexuality is wrong puts gay and lesbian students in the position of having to defend their right to exist; see Barnard 1994). It is helpful to remember 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, not to mention that group members do not have a single view on subjects. Including readings that represent this variety may be a helpful strategy.

<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 (link no longer active)

It is crucial for faculty to carefully consider our choice of assignments in terms of racist or discriminatory readings. If reading or discussing racist or discriminatory beliefs or policies, or if discriminatory comments are made in class discussion, it is important for faculty to point them out as such and make it clear that we do not endorse them.

Otherwise, students may think that we either share or are unaware of the bias and we may 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>

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

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

Instructors should anticipate that some topics or readings may lead to heated discussions and insist on a professional discussion environment. In particular, it is important to ensure that emotions are acknowledged and dealt with prior to an intellectual discussion of the topic (see Narayan 1988). Also, controversy is best handled in a way that does not privilege the viewpoints of majority group students and ensures that individual students are not scapegoated for their group membership (e.g., one may criticize a power structure that gives a group dominance in society without blaming or singling out students in the class who appear to be members of that group). 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, it is helpful for faculty to openly discuss the tension with students. If a few students are creating a disrespectful or hostile environment, faculty will be well served by speaking 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 (link no longer active)

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

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

Faculty may consider including internships into the curriculum and/or Community-Based Service Learning (CBSL) into courses as an option when appropriate. CBSL involves making connections with local agencies working with diverse people 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>

Faculty may consider providing opportunities for students to give anonymous feedback on how a specific topic was covered during the semester in order to gauge effectiveness.

If a faculty member encounters difficult situations, a helpful tactic is to seek advice from colleagues with expertise teaching diverse topics.

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

V-Teaching diverse students

The principles of Universal Design for Learning may be helpful when considering effective teaching across a variety of differences. Universal Design begins from an equity perspective that takes inclusion of people with a variety of disabilities as a starting point (e.g., if a building is easily accessible to someone in a wheelchair, it is also easily accessible to a heavy-set person, a pregnant woman, an elderly person, or someone carrying a heavy load). In teaching, these principles include instructional delivery in a variety of modalities (e.g., lecturing orally while using visuals, whether in the form of a handout, writing major points on the board, or using technology). A Universal Design for Learning approach may reduce the need to provide accommodations for specific individuals because some of their issues were taken into account from the beginning. Whenever appropriate, it is helpful to 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.cast.org/research/index.html>

<http://www.washington.edu/doit/Faculty/Strategies/Universal/>

<http://www.education.indiana.edu/cas/tt/v2i2/when.html> (link no longer active)

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

Faculty may consider grading midterms and exams blind to ensure fairness in grading. Students will also be more likely to perceive the grading system as being more fair if they know the grading is blind.

It is helpful to recognize that students have different levels of preparation and not to assume that they already “know the ropes.” This is particularly important for first-generation college students, students coming from less affluent K-12 environments, and students coming from high schools that do not offer college preparatory classes. Making expectations explicit is helpful in that it allows all students to have access to the information they need in order to be successful. Examples include: providing majors with information on professional standards, incorporating class sessions on conducting library research and on how to cite sources properly, and outlining expectations for writing major papers when assigning a research paper.

It is important for faculty to be encouraging and supportive of 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. Communicating to students that one expects them to succeed and providing them with clear assignment guidelines and grading criteria will help them know what they need to do to be successful. It is helpful to let students know that we have high expectations of them, that our assignments may be challenging, but that we trust that students have the potential to do well. Faculty may wish to remind students that ability expands as one learns more (see Steele, Spencer and Aronson 2002).

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

It is essential to recognize the expertise of students from a particular group, especially an underrepresented group, on issues relating to that group. Marginalized people have the right to define themselves and their own issues. 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)

It is helpful for faculty to try not to make assumptions about students’ backgrounds (such as mentioning their parents’ college experience, assuming students come from or live in a nuclear family, assuming 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:

- Faculty may consider explaining the ways in which STEM disciplines are relevant to the lives of diverse people. Providing concrete examples of uses and applications of scientific concepts and methods to help solve socially relevant

issues is helpful, as is emphasizing the potential for positive social impact of the material.

- Faculty may consider designing 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, it is important for faculty to point out the blind spots and exclusions of research methods.

(See Mukhopadhyay and Greer 2004; Branch 2004)

VII-Beyond the classroom

It is helpful for faculty to examine our office environment. Is the office and departmental space free of stereotypical or offensive representations of disadvantaged groups (e.g., scantily-clad women, 1920s colonial posters, etc.)? Faculty may consider including representations of diverse groups in these spaces and in 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 may 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). Faculty may want to make students aware of this fact. Unless one is teaching very large classes, one may consider encouraging students to stop by during office hours and responding 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 strategies 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 those available through the Center for the Advancement of Students in Academia (CASA, especially in the College of Sciences).

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 SDSU's effort to help all students gain the tools they need to be successful.

Finally, if faculty, students, or staff are being sexually or otherwise 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 SDSU 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, concerns, or feedback. 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). In conjunction with the DEO, the Center for Teaching and Learning will also develop practical, hands-on information on implementation. The DEO thanks the many members of the SDSU community who have contributed to this document. Feel free to use and share this document with interested parties, making sure that SDSU's Committee on Diversity, Equity and Outreach is cited appropriately.

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SDSU Mission and Goals. http://www.sdsu.edu/campusinfo/mission_and_goals.html

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

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

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IX-Related links:

Academy of Management. Gender and Diversity in Organizations Division.

<http://division.aonline.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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