Teaching for Inclusion

Diversity in the College Classroom

Center for Teaching and Learning

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
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Chapter 2

Strategies for Inclusive Teaching

General Strategies

Teaching to the Individual

This handbook presents teachers with information on a wide range of diversity issues: from ethnicity, to sexual orientation, to learning and physical disabilities. If you find useful new information in these pages, make sure to give yourself time to change your teaching style. The teacher who tries to be sensitive to all of these diverse student issues may, understandably, feel overwhelmed at having to do something about all of them right away. The fear of unintentionally alienating a student by a slip of the tongue can cause stress to any well-meaning teacher. It is important to keep in mind that developing a coherent teaching strategy to reach diverse students takes time. Try not to refashion your entire classroom style at once. It is often most effective to concentrate on one particular aspect at a time. Add new techniques or strategies incrementally, and get used to how they work before introducing additional ones.

The most important thing to keep in mind is that teaching for diversity means teaching to the individual. By taking an interest in students’ experiences, interests, beliefs, and goals, you take the most important step in making students feel that they can succeed in college. In addition, recognize that differences between individuals are more significant than differences between groups. The greatest challenge you face as a teacher is not tailoring your teaching to be sensitive to a whole group, but rather tailoring your teaching in a way that will meet the diverse learning styles of each student.

Some students, regardless of race or gender, find the university an impersonal environment that does not connect to their own experiences and goals. There are also students who lack confidence or assertiveness, yet are quite capable of learning the content and skills of the courses they take. As discussed in Chapter 1, academics generally perceive verbally aggressive students as being brighter. But some students simply have been raised in environments where they have not been encouraged to speak out. In addition, feelings that the university lacks relevance to their lives or treats them as anonymous faces may add an extra burden to these silent students.
This chapter will explore basic teaching principles and techniques that can be used to create a learning environment that will help enable all students to feel included and to meet their potential. These guidelines apply to classroom interactions, syllabus design, assignments, and interaction outside of class. For clarity, we will illustrate these basic principles with specific examples, but expect that individual teachers will need to adapt these ideas to their specific teaching situations.

**Getting to Know Your Students: The First Day and Beyond**

Chapter 1 discussed the importance of getting to know your students individually, and trying to understand their interests, beliefs and values. This process can begin the first day of class. Try to learn the names of your students as early in the semester as possible and find out by what name they prefer to be called. Also, ask about their interests and experiences early on in the course. On the first day of the course, in addition to asking students some factual questions about their experience with the subject matter, you might ask some questions that require them to give their personal feelings or views on a topic related to the course. For example, you could ask students in a literature class not only what books they have read in high school (which lets you see the students’ reading experience), but also what kind of a book or movie they would make if they had unlimited time and funds. This question allows students a wide latitude in divulging information about themselves, and it will help you see them as individuals rather than as members of particular groups.

Encourage students to learn each others’ names and to get to know each other in group discussions. Use the students’ names when you call on them or respond to their comments. Encourage students to respond to each others’ questions and comments, not just your own. Some teachers have created an e-mail list for their courses so that students can communicate with each other and with the teacher in an informal way outside of class. E-mail accounts are free to all university members. Your departmental computer coordinator can assist you in using electronic communication tools to foster class discussion and sense of community.

**Seen and Unseen Diversity: The Problem of Assumptions**

No matter how objective we may try to be, many of us inevitably share some of the stereotypes which the media propagate about various groups. Such stereotypes are particularly evident for cases where the student’s group affiliation is visually evident, such as racial background or physical disability. Although teachers should consider the potential needs of such students, it is equally important not to assume the student’s needs. The well-meaning teacher often offends a student by offering extra assistance that the student has not requested. The media and debates about Affirmative Action
frequently have created the impression that African American students come to college unprepared and that they need extra help. A teacher, although well-intentioned, should *never* automatically assume that an African American student might need extra assistance. This attitude conveys to the student the impression that the teacher does not think the student has the ability or intelligence to do the required work. Teachers should always base their interaction with students on the student’s performance. If the student exhibits the need for help, then the instructor can offer help. Above all, remember that students have different learning styles and that a student’s apparent difficulty with the material may actually stem from a difficulty with how you are doing something in the classroom.

On the other hand, some students might have issues not evident at first glance that influence their learning. For example, a gay or lesbian student, or a student with strong religious convictions may feel alienated by classroom discussions or projects that make assumptions about their experiences or beliefs. In addition, a student’s ethnicity is not always visible. These students’ issues are “invisible,” but may affect their learning just as strongly as the student whose diversity issues are visible. Try to anticipate issues of sexuality, religion, or other values for students as you give assignments and lead discussions. Look for warning signs of students who feel distress because some aspect or event in the course threatens their personal identity. Students may respond flippantly or sarcastically to an assignment, or voice criticism of comments made by you or other students. Or, they may become uncharacteristically quiet. In such cases, approach the student individually and ask the student to explain his or her objections and concerns.

Many students may not voice their concerns unless you actively solicit them. Give students this opportunity by using a mid-term course evaluation, about a third of the way through the course. A simple questionnaire will allow you to gauge how the class is working and hear about any concerns. Sample mid-term class evaluations are included in Appendix A.

*What is a Minority?*

*Assessing Each Individual Classroom*

The students most likely to feel alienated in the university classroom are students from groups who hold less power in society and whose values are frequently maligned by “majority” society. However, students can feel alienation from the particular makeup of an individual class. In some cases, “majority” students may feel alienated because of the subject matter and/or student composition of the course. Caucasian and male students may find themselves in the minority for the first time in their lives in Women’s Studies or African American Studies classes and may feel intimidated to participate in discussions. Some teachers have made the argument that it is
positive for these normally privileged students to feel alienated so they can learn how it feels to be in the minority position. However, if students feel they are under attack and that their opinions do not count because of minority or majority group affiliation, they may not be comfortable enough to open up to learning in the course. It is essential to make any students who are in the minority feel comfortable from the first few days of class. Ultimately, these are the students who can most benefit from the course concepts. Showing an interest in their learning and a respect for their contribution to the classroom will make them feel included in your course.

In the Classroom

*Guidelines for Classroom Discussion*

**The Classroom as Community**

The atmosphere you establish in your classroom is as important as your rapport with each individual student. You want to provide an environment where students will feel safe voicing their opinions and where they will understand that discussions are meant to foster learning. Students bring into the classroom a complex range of attitudes about free speech. Some students may make statements such as “I have a right to my opinion” while others may insist on the authority of special experience or knowledge, criticizing other students by saying, “You don’t have the right to say that, because you’re not a woman/black/Christian etc.” The instructor must find a way to mediate between the view that anyone can say anything and the view that only certain people have the right to speak about certain issues. While you do want to let students respond freely to each others’ statements, you have a responsibility to restrict personal attacks. Many students who complain about the lack of attention to diversity in the classroom explain that they believe their teachers respect issues of diversity, but that they let students make injurious statements. Because you are the one who controls the classroom climate, you must be particularly attentive to the dynamics occurring during any given discussion.

Because issues of race, gender, religion, and class are so charged in our culture, many students bring to class considerable anxiety about speaking about these issues. You can reduce such anxiety by making your classroom a community where all members engage in trying to find out the truth about controversial issues. Diversity does not mean privileging “minority” points of view, but rather taking advantage of the diverse range of opinions and experiences so that all can benefit. Lynn Weber Cannon (1990) argues for informing students explicitly about the goal of shared learning in the classroom. As one of her ground rules for class discussion, she asks that all students “acknowledge that one mechanism of institutionalized racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, and the like is that we are all systematically misinformed about
our own group and about members of other groups. This is true for members of privileged and oppressed groups.” She furthermore asks students to: “Agree not to blame ourselves or others for the misinformation we have learned, but to accept responsibility for not repeating misinformation after we have learned otherwise.” (Cannon, 1990, p. 131)

By asking students to acknowledge that misinformation exists, and to accept responsibility for learning about that misinformation and not perpetuating it, you provide guidelines for group discussions. Most students do not simply want to voice their opinions. They want to leave the classroom feeling that they have learned from the discussion. Creating this atmosphere of a community engaged in seeking to uncover misinformation also helps you to move some of the focus away from the personal (potentially injurious or hostile) to the communal value on better information and critical thinking.

**Setting Ground Rules**

In many cases, teachers can prevent students from making hurtful statements by setting ground rules early in the course, especially in courses where controversial topics are likely to occur. In the first days of class distribute a list of ground rules for discussion that everyone should follow throughout the course. You might include general statements such those by Lynn Cannon as well as guidelines specific to your course content. Give students time to review the ground rules so that they can contribute to the agreement by clarifying rules or by adding others they feel are important. When problems arise during the semester, you or other students will be able to refer to the ground rules that all students have agreed on. By having students set ground rules early in the course, you have encouraged them to think about what constitutes a fruitful discussion where all students feel safe to participate.

These ground rules for discussion do not just prevent students from making injurious statements about others, but they also ensure fruitful discussion that focus on critical thinking. Even when discussing topics that are not controversial, following these guidelines, or those that you have established for your class, will help give students a sense that when they are talking, they are learning, and not just expressing their opinions. If you establish an electronic mail list for your course, you might wish to have students agree that your classroom discussion guidelines should also apply to any discussions that occur on the list.

**Establishing a “Zone”**

Establishing a safe classroom atmosphere is the key to increasing everyone’s comfort level. As discussed previously you can begin by laying out ground rules for discussion of controversial, emotional and potentially offensive topics either in the syllabus or in a handout on the first day of class. Starting the class with a discussion of these
explicit ground rules avoids some of the problems that may arise in the classroom. Some teachers and students may find, however, that structuring discussion in this way inhibits the free flow of ideas. A handout on ground rules will help only if the course objectives and the individual teacher’s personality and teaching style are compatible with such an explicit, “up-front” statement of rules.

Some teachers address issues of diversity and the free exchange of ideas by introducing them as topics for discussion on the first day of classes, and by involving the students in the formulation of the ground rules. This approach requires careful lesson planning, but many teachers and students feel that it is worthwhile because it establishes a general atmosphere of open-mindedness and awareness. As part of the opening discussion, the teacher might have students define and illustrate concepts such as “presupposition,” “assumption,” “prejudgment,” “prejudice,” “perspective,” and “bias.” Having introduced these words as part of the permanent classroom vocabulary, the teacher can now lead a discussion about the nature of opinions, how they are formed, and why they differ. At the end of the discussion, when the students realize what is at stake when they utter their opinions, the teacher can introduce the idea of the classroom as a place for the free exchange of ideas, where students should leave their prejudices and presuppositions at the door.
Giving the classroom a name such as “The Zone” highlights the important symbolic function of the room itself. Students may even build on the idea, making their own observations and jokes about the importance of protecting the atmosphere of this special place. The name, if incorporated into the classroom vocabulary, becomes a point of reference in all future discussions, and can be reinforced from time to time throughout the semester. With encouragement, students quickly learn to make observations about all assignments, readings and statements (including the teacher’s) using the rhetorical terms they learned on the first day. Once sensitized in this manner, the students are ready to hold mature discussions about issues that might otherwise provoke hot emotions and name-calling.

**Ignoring or Singling Out**

A guiding principle for including students in the classroom should be to avoid the opposing habits of ignoring or singling out students. For example, in a discussion about African American women’s experiences with poverty, a teacher might feel that she does not want to put the one African American woman in the class on the spot and thus avoids eye contact with her and does not call on her. On the other hand, the teacher might see this moment in class as a golden opportunity to make the student (who perhaps has been somewhat quiet until this point in the semester) feel that her opinion counts. By calling on the student in this context, however, the teacher has conveyed the assumption that this student will be able to represent the viewpoint of all African American women. In reality, this student may be aware that she disagrees with other African American friends on the issue discussed in class, and is reluctant speak for the whole group. She might also perceive the teacher’s solicitation of her opinion as an assumption that she herself comes from a poor family. So how can a teacher avoid the extremes of ignoring versus singling out? If the student feels early on that she is treated as an individual in the class, that her opinion counts on all issues, she will be more likely to feel comfortable sharing her views when the class discussion of African American women arises. Particularly in small classes, where discussion takes place more often than in a lecture hall, teachers must develop strategies for encouraging all students to participate from the beginning of the semester. Above all, never ask a student to act as a spokesperson for his or her group.

**Calling on Students vs. Taking Volunteers**

There are certainly advantages and disadvantages to the various techniques for involving students in classroom discussion. Allowing students to volunteer lets those who most want to talk have the opportunity to do so. It penalizes, however, those students who have a contribution to make, but refrain from volunteering because they are shy, do not have confidence in their opinions, or do not feel it is appropriate for them to speak. In a 1992 survey on students’ attitudes towards their education (UNC Center for Teacher and Learning, “Classroom Communication Analysis Project”), almost 30% of students responding to the questionnaire reported having wanted to
speak in class but not doing so because they “felt insecure, inadequate, or uncertain.” The percentage of female students and African American students responding in this manner was somewhat higher than among other segments of the student population. Clearly, many students want to talk, but need encouragement from their teachers. On the other hand, calling on students ensures that all students make a contribution to the class, but can embarrass shy students and penalize students who really want to speak on a given topic.

Combining both methods leads to more participation in class discussion. You can combine volunteering and calling on students by beginning a discussion topic by asking for volunteers. When a student responds to your question, call on other students to support, add to, or modify that student’s comments. Try to encourage all students to participate early in your course. The more time that goes by, the less likely shy or unconfident students will ever be to volunteer. Make clear in your attitude that you know all students have important contributions to make and that you have confidence in each student. Also make sure that you allow enough time for students to think after you ask a question. Many teachers only wait about one second for an answer. By waiting as much as five seconds, you allow more reserved students the chance to formulate their responses and to get up the courage to answer. For additional information about encouraging student participation, see the sections on group work and participation within each chapter in Part II of this handbook.

**Monitoring Student Comments**

It is vital that you, as the teacher, takes responsibility to ensure a comfortable environment for all students in the class. When students voice comments that attack or malign a particular group (such as race, religion, or sexual orientation) those comments potentially threaten some students in the classroom. In this situation, do not ignore such remarks, or change the subject. While it is unnecessary to reprimand the student directly, take issue with the statement made and remind the whole class that such statements are hurtful and do not further the pursuit of knowledge. Where relevant, challenge the statement’s validity by pointing to statistics or studies that challenge stereotypes. For example, if a student makes a comment about African American women who take advantage of welfare, it would be instructive to point out that the majority of mothers on public assistance are, in fact, Caucasian. To ensure friendly and constructive discussion, try to prevent students from attacking each other personally. Most often, the kinds of attacks students make on each other come from their perceptions of each others’ background and experience. Students accuse each other of not having “the right” to speak on an issue because they do not have the experience needed to speak about the issue. Remind students that while personal experience can be a valuable resource for drawing conclusions, it remains only one resource which other personal experiences may contradict.
Anticipating Problems Before the Lesson
In addition to setting ground rules, try to anticipate specific issues that may arise during a particular lesson. Imagine comments that students might make that could be insensitive. Naturally, the more you have taught the course, the easier it will be to anticipate student comments.

Depersonalizing Controversial Topics
When you introduce a controversial topic, you may make students feel less personally threatened by the discussion by introducing the debate in impersonal terms. Rather than asking a student, for example, “Do you think schools should make contraception available to students?” present the arguments usually made for and against contraception in the schools and ask students to critique or support the arguments. Students will thus be engaged in thinking about where they stand on the issue, but the more impersonal way of presenting the argument leaves the door open to students to decide how much of their personal views they want to divulge.

Teaching Resources:
Anecdotes, Humor, Visual Aids, Role Plays

Anecdotes
In CTL’s 1992 study on how the university met students’ needs, researchers asked UNC students whether their instructors used examples or analogies that they could not understand. Almost 10% of students indicated that their instructors frequently used analogies they could not relate to, while almost 22% indicated their instructors occasionally used such analogies. What is the problem? Good teachers want to use examples with which students can identify. Good examples can make abstract and unfamiliar concepts more accessible to students. However, teachers who frequently use examples that reflect the experience of only some students risk alienating others. For example, the business school teacher who frequently employs sports metaphors risks not only failing to clarify the concept for students who are not familiar with sports, but also risks making those students feel that they are outside the “club” of students who speak this sports language. Another problem arises when teachers forget that they are already experts and use analogies that make sense to others in their field, but are foreign to the new student. For example, explaining the causes of poverty in a Latin American country by using a classic textbook case study of poverty in an Asian country will not make sense to new students. Even if the study is the standard reference point for scholars in the field, new students will be unaware of such important discoveries and publications in the field.

Teachers should also remember that though they naturally draw on their own experiences when they teach, these experiences may differ significantly from those of the
students. For example, comparisons with another country to which the teacher has traveled are often meaningless to the majority of students who have never left the country, or even North Carolina. Furthermore, analogies drawing on activities such as sailing or skiing, often associated with higher socio-economic classes, might make students from a lower-income background feel excluded. Try to use analogies based on information you are fairly sure that students have. Use information already covered earlier in the course, for example. Also consider using examples from popular culture or from issues discussed currently on campus (from the Daily Tar Heel, for example). If you do have an anecdote from your life that seems particularly suited to your material, make sure that you present it in a way that the students feel involved. For example, research on International TAs (Nelson, 1991, p. 433) suggests that student interest and learning increases when the TA makes reference to the way things happen in their country. However, only when the TA “personalizes” the discussion by comparing his or her life directly to the students’ lives, does the comparison gain immediate meaning for the students.

Humor

Undoubtedly, the use of humor can open doors for students to take an interest in a course. However, humor is equally likely to alienate students who find the humor offensive. Humor can serve as a possible means of uniting people from diverse backgrounds, or a chance to lighten the mood of an otherwise heavy and serious class. But humor, far from being universal, is actually very rooted in individual identity. As Regina Barreca (1994) who has studied humor in literature has said, “[Humor] is rigidly mapped and marked by subjectivity. Almost every detail of our lives affects the way we create and respond to humor: age, race, ethnic background, and class are all significant factors in the production and reception of humor.” Barreca discusses the example of an male archaeology professor’s reaction to her paper on how men and women react differently to humor. The professor was upset because he felt that people like Barreca were ruining everyone’s fun: “I used to be able to tell wonderful, hilarious jokes in my introductory course in archaeology. But by the time I retired, I couldn’t say anything anymore for fear of offending a female student. We used to be able to laugh at ourselves and to laugh together, and now we have lost that.” The professor offered an example of his jokes: “How do you know if a skeleton is a male or a female?—If the mouth is open, it’s a woman. They never stop talking! Get it?” Barreca reports that no one of the one hundred or so audience members laughed (Barecca, 1994, p. 13). Clearly, this blatant example of a sexist joke is insulting to women, (and probably much more blatant than the majority of jokes that offend students). Not realizing the offensive nature of the joke, the professor assumed that it was “just a joke,” that values did not count in humor, and that if some of his students laughed, there was no problem with the joke.
Are UNC professors using offensive humor? According to the 1992 CTL survey, over 15% of students reported that their instructors occasionally or frequently used offensive humor. A greater percentage of African American students than Caucasian students reported that their instructor frequently used humor offensive to groups or individuals (13% versus 6%). Surprisingly, fewer women than men reported offensive humor (5% vs. 10%). The questionnaires were administered on a voluntary basis. Data is available only for those professors who requested the questionnaire for their students. The number of students at UNC who have encountered offensive humor is therefore possibly much higher than the survey data indicates.

Visual Aids

The use of materials other than written texts can make a course more interesting to students. Visual aids can be particularly helpful in the foreign language classroom. Be attentive, however, to the images you present to your class. Do the visual aids you use reinforce stereotypes of gender and race? For example, a Spanish teacher introducing the textbook unit on occupations may have students practice the new vocabulary by having them identify the occupations of people in magazine images. If all the images represent Caucasians, non-Caucasians may feel that they are excluded from this working world. Likewise, pictures that reinforce gender stereotypes (women as nurses and secretaries, men as businessmen and scientists) may offend men and women who believe such stereotyped roles are harmful. Of course, many American magazines themselves perpetuate gender and race stereotypes, making it difficult for teachers to find non-stereotyped images to use in the classroom. Therefore, publications that serve women or ethnic groups may provide resources not to be found in mainstream publications. When drawing your own visual aids, try to present neutral figures of no identifiable gender or ethnic identity. Although it might require more time to adapt your visual aids to reflect diversity issues, it will make all students in the class feel included.

Role Plays

Role plays are often a good way to help students feel more personally engaged with course concepts. They can, however, contain hidden assumptions about gender, race, or other issues. Whenever possible, design your role playing activity so that students play roles regardless of their gender, race, etc. Avoid assigning students roles based on their real-life identities. By arbitrarily distributing roles, you emphasize that the activity aims to teach concepts and critical thinking, not to reinforce differences between groups.

Group Work

The same principles of setting ground rules for full classroom discussion (see earlier section in this chapter) should also apply to group work. Students should engage in group activities confident that they will not be attacked personally or as a member of
a group, and aware of the limits they must place on their own comments to other

Assigning Groups

It is typical in classrooms for students to tend to sit next to students who resemble

them. Thus, the seating patterns in a classroom will frequently be divided by gender

or racial lines. These patterns of self-segregation are not necessarily harmful to learn-
ing, but they make it more difficult for students to gain new perspectives from their

classmates. One way to encourage more diverse interaction is to assign your students
to work in groups. If you let students choose their own groups, you run two risks.
First, the students will choose to work with their friends or those who are likely to
share their views. Second, students who are perceived as minorities may be

marginalized when they are not invited to join groups. When assigning groups, mix
different classroom areas, having students from the back work with students in the

front, students from the left side working with students on the right side, etc.

Teachers have different philosophies about how to mix groups. Some prefer to have

a strong student mixed with several weaker students, while others like to put same-

level students in a group. Remember that each scenario has advantages and disad-

vantages. You might choose to change your group assignments several times during

the semester so that each student will have varied group experiences. In terms of
diversity, you should try to assign students in a way that they will have the opportu-
nity to exchange ideas with students who are different from them. However, bear in
mind that too obvious divisions may appear to students as singling them out. For
example, if you have three African American students in your class whom you never
assign to the same group, they may feel you are singling them out, or even penaliz-
ing them for their race. Thus, if you change groups, make sure minority students
work together sometimes and work separately at other times. The random nature of
your choice of groups will make them feel that they are being treated as individuals.

Sharing the Load

Some students who are normally shy in front of the class participate much more
when they have the opportunity to work in small groups. However, in some cases,
the more reserved or shy students continue to remain silent in group work. Further-
more, students who dominate full class discussion are likely to dominate in their

groups. Therefore, structure the group activity in a way that ensures that all members
will participate equally. One way to do this is in your wording of the group activity.
For example, in a group activity you could give the following instruction: “Every

person in your group should give one example.” In addition, during a follow-up
discussion, always have a student in the group present the group’s findings. Try to
have each group work on a separate question or activity so that they are responsible for presenting information to the rest of the class. If you have a small class, have each student from the group present one aspect of the group’s findings. If you have observed that a student in a group was not actively participating, you might have that student speak on the group’s findings, thus holding the student responsible for the group work as a whole.

**Encouraging Debate**

Sometimes students have the impression that they must all reach the same conclusion in their group. By presenting the group activity as an exploration of diverging points of views, you send the message that you expect differences of opinion. For example, in discussing the characterization of female characters in a short story, you could ask students to identify which characters the authors presented positively and which negatively. In a science class, you could debate the hypothetical outcome of an experiment before the class does the experiment or reads about the solution. Ask students to make particular note of where they were in disagreement and to determine the source of their disagreement. Encouraging debate furthers the general goal of teaching critical thinking skills and can bear on diversity issues in particular. You can make the debate less threatening to students who are reluctant to criticize others’ beliefs by using formats that are more like a game where students act out parts. Students in a literature class could put a character in a novel “on trial,” while students in a sociology class could use the format of a popular television talk show to discuss attitudes about controversial topics. Such activities enable students to act out roles that represent different points of view. The acting allows them a safety cushion so that they do not feel personally attacked during the debate.

**Curriculum Issues: Your Syllabus and Class Assignments**

*You Teach What You Are*

The content of a course reflects a teacher’s knowledge, interests, and beliefs. Identify your assumptions underlying your choice of topics and readings and the way you choose to organize your course. What seems to you like an obvious way to present the course content and concepts may seem either arbitrary or biased to students. For example, in a course on the history of political thought, is the history devoted to European and American models only? If so, why are there no examples from Africa or Asia? A bias is not necessarily negative. In fact, no one can teach a course without revealing their own experience with the subject matter. Furthermore, a teacher should feel comfortable about what he or she is teaching; the chosen approach reflects not only the teacher’s knowledge, but his or her interests. The first step in getting students interested in the course is to share your own interests. However, you should
recognize your assumptions and be able to justify the choices you have made in your course.

**Broadening Your Perspective**

While you teach materials with which you are comfortable, you might also take advantage of opportunities to branch out. Examine the assumptions implicit in your course design. Are there gaps in your course you could fill by adjusting your syllabus? When possible, consult with colleagues who have taught the course or similar courses and compare your syllabus with theirs. Teachers often prefer to teach according to their own expertise and to avoid teaching topics in which they know they are not experts. But teaching the new and unfamiliar can help you to broaden your knowledge of the field, and also to rediscover some of the important course concepts from a different point of view. You might also explore tapping your students’ special knowledge. For example, have students majoring in a related field give class presentations. By doing this, you will show students that they have knowledge to share with others and can actively shape the direction of the class.

**Teaching the Conflicts**

No matter what you choose to include in your curriculum, your choice reflects a particular ideological perspective. The great debates over the literary, sociological, psychological or artistic canon, and the controversies over “politically correct” agenda are unlikely to be resolved in the academic community as a whole. The battle between the “educational fundamentalists” who argue that it is possible to determine and to teach “universal” values, and the “relativists” who argue that values are never universal, but rather determined by specific cultural communities, has caused conflict within many academic departments (Graff, 1992, p. 58–59). Rather than worrying about constructing the ideal value-free syllabus, which would be impossible to achieve, teach the conflicts about the curriculum in your field. Let students debate some of the most interesting controversial points in the field. These controversies constitute, after all, a central aspect of what your discipline is about and can help to show students some key concepts important to the field. Pairing the sacred “classics” of the field with the “low” canon of popular culture can help students to ask questions about how certain literary works or scientific theories have come to be part of the canon. As Gerald Graff’s article in *The Politics of Liberal Education* states,

*The point is not to get rid of the classics but to teach the classics in relation to the challenges being posed to them. It is not, in other words, a question of substituting Rambo for Rimbaud so much as putting highbrow and lowbrow traditions back into the dialogical relation in which they have actually existed in our cultural history.*

*(p. 60)*
“Lowbrow” traditions are as much a part of culture as the classics, and they may even determine what we will consider as “classic” in the future. Studying the relationship between “low” and “high” culture will illuminate the problems involved in deciding on a canon. Inviting students to join the discussion about a discipline’s canon will make them feel more involved than those who are merely presented with list of accepted classics.

As discussed in the section on group work, teaching students that debate and controversy are natural and even desirable, and using debates among scholars in the field encourages debate between students. Graff also suggests that professors structure debate in their courses by bringing students from different courses together to engage in a “conference.” (p. 68) For example, a modern French poetry class and the course on current popular film meet to discuss “Rimbaud and Rambo” and students are in charge of giving papers and moderating. It would, of course, be difficult to structure the work of other courses into your courses all the time. Take advantage of the controversies in your field to structure debate within your classroom and within your syllabus.

**Your Syllabus: Tokenism vs. Integration**

Because the student population is becoming increasingly diverse, try to reflect these diverse trends in your syllabus, particularly for humanities and social science courses where sociocultural issues are central. In particular, the results of the 1992 CTL survey at UNC show that Asian students are more likely than other students to disagree with the statement “This course covered material from diverse perspectives, such as non-Western European views, women’s perspectives, perspectives of non-whites, etc.” Many teachers have begun to incorporate perspectives other than the male Eurocentric perspective into their courses. Often, however, the intention to make a syllabus feel more inclusive can have the opposite effect by making “the woman’s perspective” or “the non-European perspective” feel like an empty tribute to political correctness tacked onto the end of the syllabus. Where possible, try to integrate the diverse perspectives into other concepts you teach. For example, in a French literature course, rather than introducing your one African writer to exemplify the non-European perspective, (a perspective which is itself too diverse to be represented by only one writer), contextualize this writer in terms of other issues you have already developed. For example, in studying the Martiniquan author Aimé Césaire, you could introduce him in the context of the surrealist movement rather than simply as the writer of African heritage. By doing this, you can still highlight the writer’s non-European perspective, but you have shown that he is worth studying on his own merits, and not simply because of his ethnic identity.

In addition, avoid placing topics related to diversity last on your syllabus or last within a unit. This can give the impression that this topic is marginal to rather than an
integral part of the course issues. For example, in a course on Impressionist painting, rather than leaving Mary Cassatt as the last painter because she is a woman, place her in a context in the course that has to do with her identity as a painter, not as a woman. Of course, finishing the course with a woman (or African American, or Hispanic, or Asian American, etc.) may be entirely appropriate for a conceptual reason (e.g. her work represents a departure from traditional technique, or her work introduces new questions into the field). Aim to represent diversity while integrating it into important course concepts.

Assignments
The assignments you give indicate to students what you value most in the course. For this reason, choose assignments that both ask students to apply concepts and skills you have emphasized and that allow students to explore the connections between course content and their own interests and experiences. Avoid assignments that could exclude or pose a disadvantage to certain students because of their group identity or background. Not only could the assignment cause the students to perform less well than other students, but it also potentially sends the message that the field may be closed to him or her.

It might sometimes be difficult to choose an assignment that risks offending no student. In such cases, offer a choice of topics (of equal difficulty) so that students can choose the one with which they feel most comfortable. For example, in a French 2 class where students are learning vocabulary for marriage and family relationships, the teacher might decide to have students write a description of their ideal husband or wife. This topic, however, asks students to reveal personal information they might not want to discuss with the teacher, and it could cause a particularly uncomfortable dilemma for gay or lesbian students. The assignment forces them either to lie about their ideal mate or to reveal private information. To make such students more comfortable, offer a less personal topic. You might instead ask them to describe the relationship of a celebrity couple, or a couple from their favorite television program.

Assignment Formats and Evaluation of Students
Testing and Writing Formats
Keep in mind the students' varying academic strengths and weaknesses. For many students, performing under pressure, such as a timed in-class composition or exam, has a negative impact on their performance. Although you may feel the need to evaluate students in class, and may be required to give an in-class final, try to provide other formats that do not disadvantage students who have difficulty working under pressure. Offer take-home finals and papers, or provide options so that students can choose the format that will allow them to best show what they know. If you have students with physical or learning disabilities, they will often need more
time or special facilities to complete assignments or tests. These needs will be discussed in more detail in Chapters 13 and 14.

**Participation**

Just as you do not want to penalize students who do not work well under pressure, be aware that you may penalize shy or reserved students by making participation a significant portion of their grade. Furthermore, when using participation as a grading criterion, make sure that students have the chance to participate in small groups, and tell them that their small group work is part of their participation grade. Make your participation criteria explicit to students. Keep them informed of their participation grade throughout the semester by giving them a summary of your criteria when you give them their first participation grade.

**Flexible Grading Scales**

Some teachers have structured their course requirements in a way that adapts to each individual student’s needs. Students can choose early on how much they want the different aspects of the course requirements to count. The teacher sets a range of points within which students can choose. This system allows students to perform to their potential, but does not give them unlimited freedom. For an example of a flexible grading scale, consult Appendix B.

**Grading Criteria**

No matter what kind of assignments you give, give students explicit information about how you will grade their work. This becomes a particularly important issue for students who may already be sensitive about their status at the university, or students who fear being penalized or privileged for their group affiliation. These students may have had past experiences where teachers singled them out for special treatment, whether the treatment was harder or easier than for other students. Your students may very well bring expectations based on these experiences to your classroom. Thus, when students see a set of grading criteria that appear objective, they will more likely feel a true sense of accomplishment when getting a good grade and understand the reasons when getting a lower grade. For paper assignments, give a list of criteria for A–F papers. If possible, give students an example of a good student paper or journal writing, and show them why it is good. Give explicit feedback on early assignments that will help students to improve on future assignments. When possible, allow students to rewrite for a better grade, since this kind of practice will help them to improve their writing.

**Nonstandard English**

The issue of nonstandard English in writing has been a controversial one, especially because it can affect how students from various backgrounds learn. For example,
when students take English 10, 11, and 12, they learn to use writing conventions accepted within particular “discourse communities.” Although composition teachers at UNC recognize that students’ speech may reflect the discourse communities of their hometown or peer groups, students in basic composition courses are taught to use conventions accepted within professional communities such as business, social sciences, natural sciences, or humanities. Instructors discourage dialect and non-standard English because these kinds of writing may put the student at a disadvantage in the working world.

You need to decide the extent to which you want to emphasize particular writing standards in your courses. Perhaps you will require a greater degree of adherence to conventions in a course for majors than in a course for non-majors or in an introductory course. In any case, make very clear what you expect from students’ writing. Whenever possible, give students the chance to rewrite drafts so they can improve.

You might also consider giving some assignments in which nonstandard English is appropriate. Creative writing assignments can allow students to use course concepts, but in a way that sounds more “natural” to them. For example, in order to have students in a literature course illustrate their understanding of the relationship that is developed between the story’s narrator and its readers, you could have students write a short story in which a narrator (perhaps speaking in dialect) establishes a particular rapport with his or her readers. You would allow students to determine the kind of voice the narrator would have, leaving the parameters open enough so that each student could use the kind of language that feels right to him or her. The idea is not to replace more formal writing such as research papers, but rather to supplement it with activities that encourage students to perform well in a way that feels comfortable to them.

Furthermore, by encouraging your students to use nonstandard English, you help to educate all students in the class about the diversity issues inherent in language. In other words, by showing students that there are varieties of English, rather than simply one “correct” English, you help them to see that students from backgrounds different from their own speak a language that reflects their particular culture. Ensuring that your students understand the diversity of linguistic cultures within the United States facilitates their acceptance of the diversity of all Americans.

The Writing Center
If you do find that a student needs assistance in writing standard English (or in any aspect of writing skills), suggest that the student make an appointment at the Writing Center. Staff can administer private or group tutorials on particular skills, help students to organize their papers, or help them to revise drafts. Staff at the Center will send you a summary of the work session with the student so that you understand the nature of the student’s work outside of class.
Outside the Classroom

Office Hours

According to a survey conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute in 1994 (as cited in Shea, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*) only 19.2% of freshmen said that they frequently had asked a teacher for advice after class in the past year. This statistic suggests that students do not initiate contact with a teacher outside of class, even if they do have a concern. University policy requires that all teaching staff hold regularly scheduled office hours in their departments, yet teachers often complain that they sit in their offices waiting for students to come. You can encourage students to come see you by scheduling informal consultations before the first assignment’s due date. Even if the appointments are optional, by having a sign-up sheet, you send the message that you will be waiting for that individual student. Furthermore, if students have concerns later in the semester, they will be more likely to see you since they have already done this before in a neutral situation. In addition, many students at UNC now have e-mail accounts. Giving the class your e-mail address as well as the e-mail addresses of other students can provide an informal, non-threatening arena outside of class where students can pursue questions or concerns in a more relaxed manner.

When and Where to Have Office Hours

Because students often are reluctant to visit a teacher’s office to discuss their concerns, some UNC teachers have held their office hours in more public places such as coffeehouses or bars, which they thought would provide a more relaxing and informal atmosphere. Although these teachers reported that more students came to see them as a result of holding their office hours in these places, some students avoided meeting their teachers in this situation. Consider, for example, a female student whose male teacher holds office hours in a bar. The teacher has put the student in a situation which may make her feel that she is the object of the teacher’s personal, rather than professional, attention (in addition to undermining the intellectual climate goals for the University). Other well-intentioned teachers have held their office hours in the Black Cultural Center (BCC) hoping that African American students would feel more “at home,” and that other students would explore the BCC, which is open to all students. However well-intentioned, holding office hours in the BCC creates the impression that the teacher favors the African American students over other students. Therefore, while you might consider offering some office hours in non-traditional places, be careful that you choose places that are neutral and non-threatening to all students.

Also consider the time that you hold your office hours. If you hold office hours late in the afternoon or in the evening, when there are few people in the building, you may make students feel uncomfortable. Female students may be concerned for their
personal safety if they have to walk to your building after dark, or if they have to enter a darkened building. When meeting with students, keep your door open or slightly open unless there is a third person in the room. By keeping the door open, you create a less personally threatening atmosphere in your office.

One way to make students more comfortable coming to your office is to offer both group and individual office hours. Students who typically avoid one-on-one office meetings with their professors might be more likely to come if they know that all the attention in the meeting will not be focused on them. For example, if you find that several students exhibit similar writing difficulties after the first paper, suggest to that they come to your office together, if possible, for a mini-tutorial in a workshop format. The students will realize that they are not alone in their difficulties and can learn from each others' mistakes. However, some students want and need one-on-one attention. Do provide a variety of ways for students to meet with you.

**Dating and Personal Relationships**

Particularly if you are a younger teacher, students may take a personal interest in you, whether as a romantic infatuation or as an academic role model. *Teaching at Carolina*, a Center for Teaching and Learning handbook, (1991) suggests that you discourage such personal relationships by developing a friendly, yet detached rapport with students: “Teachers should strive for an arm’s length distance from students—close enough to be helpful and friendly, but far enough away that you don’t feel any inappropriate obligations to them” (p. 56). Keep in mind that if you yourself are perceived as belonging to a minority group, some students from the same group may feel closer to you personally and seek frequent interactions with you outside of the classroom. They may even expect you (perhaps unconsciously) to extend preferential treatment to them. While you should encourage such students to pursue you on a professional level, and act as a role model, you should discourage them from viewing you as a “buddy.”

According to a University policy established in April of 1995, teachers are prohibited from having amorous relationships with students whom they evaluate. The policy states that:

> Faculty members or other instructional staff shall not initiate, pursue, or be involved in any amorous or sexual relationships with any student whom they are in a position to evaluate or supervise by virtue of their teaching, research, or administrative responsibilities.

Even if a student consents to an amorous relationship with a UNC teacher, it is considered to be a violation of the policy. The entire text of the UNC Amorous Relations Policy is included in Appendix F of this handbook.
Guidelines for Inclusive Teaching

- Get to know your students as individuals rather than as representatives of particular groups.
- Never ask a student to speak for a whole group (e.g., for women, for Hispanics, for Muslims).
- Accommodate different learning styles and promote collaboration between students.
- Do not let injurious statements pass without comment.
- Allow students to disagree with you or others, but within guidelines that promote a safe learning atmosphere in the classroom.
- Reflect diverse backgrounds on your syllabus, in your readings, and in other materials such as visual aids.
- Depersonalize controversial topics and structure assignments to let students choose topics with which they are comfortable.
- Understand why you have designed your syllabus in the way that you have.
- Make your course goals clear to all students and give continual feedback on how students are meeting them.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented general guidelines that will help to establish a more comfortable learning environment for all students, regardless of their diverse backgrounds. The number of suggestions in this chapter may feel overwhelming. However, you are probably already applying many of the principles for inclusive teaching we have discussed. It is unreasonable to expect to completely change your teaching style overnight. Allow yourself time to gradually apply diversity issues to your course, focusing first on the aspects of your course that are easiest to change while developing strategies to address the more difficult aspects.