

Inclusive Excellence Guidance for Syllabi

This document is a formative tool for continuous improvement.

Critical consciousness: the ability to identify, critique, and challenge the social forces that produce inequity and oppression (Gay, 2000; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2000).

Self-Assess Your Syllabi

1. [Using Critical Consciousness to Challenge Inequity](#). Use this resource to:
 - a. Review the definition of critical consciousness.
 - b. Review the actions and strategies teachers can use to develop their students' critical consciousness.
 - c. Consider the extent to which you currently perform – or could perform – these actions.
 - d. Prioritize actions and strategies for implementation in your classroom.
 - e. Reflect on outcomes and engage in the process again.
2. Additional self-assessment resources:
 - a. [University of Kansas - Creating an Inclusive Syllabus](#)
 - i. [Self-assessment tool instructions](#)
 - b. [University of Michigan - Inventory of Inclusive Teaching Strategies](#)
 - c. [Colorado School of Mines - Inclusive Teaching Checklist](#)
 - d. [Loyola University of Chicago - Anti-Racist Course Design](#)
 - e. [Academics for Black Survival and Wellness - Decolonizing Syllabi](#)

Acknowledging and Respecting Difference

3. Include a syllabus statement that fosters an inclusive learning environment (see GSE EDJI [statement](#) and [other examples](#)), as well as information about university resources such as [Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion](#), [Accessibility Resources](#), and [Counseling Services](#).
4. Clearly articulate overall learning goals and specific learning objectives, which students and faculty can measure progress towards achieving. Instructors should reflect on whether the learning goals are relevant to students of all backgrounds and if not, why. [Source](#)
5. Check use of syllabi terminology; avoid general use of male pronouns and avoid cultural phrasing that does not translate from English easily (e.g., avoid idioms like 'assignment will not be a piece of cake'). [Source](#)
6. Develop guidelines/ground rules for course discussions with student participation. If this cannot be done, at least provide guidelines in the syllabus. Points to emphasize can include: engaging in respectful disagreement without attacking individuals; sharing discussion time with peers so that a few students do not dominate; making clear that no student speaks for all other people who share a characteristic with them (e.g., racial identifier); and having the courage to learn even when we are uncomfortable. [Source](#)
7. Include a statement about personal names and pronouns. Transgender, gender diverse, non-binary, and students in general will know that their identities will be respected in the classroom. [Source](#)
 - a. For example: This course affirms people of all gender expressions and gender identities. If you go by a different name than what is on the class roster, please let me know. Using correct gender pronouns is important to me, so you are encouraged to share your pronouns with me and correct me if a mistake is made. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me. [Source](#)

Practical Matters

8. Consider the costs of textbooks when creating reading lists; textbooks can cost a month or more worth of rent each semester for some students. If possible, assign texts that have used or online copies available. Aim to have required textbooks be the book(s) that students will benefit from having on their personal or professional shelves in future scholastic years and/or after graduation. [Source](#)

9. Related to item 8 and considering the cost of textbooks, review [UB Libraries Copyright and Fair Use Policies](#) when selecting texts. [Consult with University Libraries Contacts](#) with any questions regarding Copyright and Fair Use. Where relevant, include a justification for how the text will be used to increase transparency for students and help them reduce textbook costs where possible (e.g., “We will only read Chapters 4 and 5 of this text.”)
10. Make course due dates, especially for graded work, clear and avoid major changes at all costs. Consider holidays, religious occurrences, and break periods with regard to establishing class sessions, activities, and assignment due dates. [Source](#)
11. Be cognizant of technology expectations to succeed in class. Not all students can afford laptops, printers, smartphones, specialized software, or even color printing. If learning requires one or more of these more expensive tools, make sure students can feel comfortable approaching you to find accommodations. [Source](#)
12. Make attendance policies and expectations clear. In courses that take advantage of in-class, active learning pedagogies, make clear that attendance is truly mandatory because groups/teams cannot function when members are absent. [Source](#)

Strategic Use of Assignments and In-Class Exercises

13. Students have a range of learning and expressive styles. Varying the way we teach (e.g., lecture, videos, presentations, discussion, small group collaborative work) and asking students to demonstrate their learning (e.g., power point, storytelling, term papers, oral and written exams, performances, individual vs. group assignments) is an important component of inclusive teaching. This may also include sharing course resources in advance to offer reading/processing time and allowing students to choose their preferred method to demonstrate their learning for a particular assignment. [Source](#)
14. Scaffold assignments such that assignments are broken up into pieces that build cumulatively over the course of the semester. Scaffolding assignments also provide students with opportunities to receive feedback, revise their work based on the feedback, and synthesize multiple assignments into a final product. [Source](#)
15. For all tasks students are asked to complete – in-class exercises and out-of-class assignments – be able to clearly articulate how the task(s) are relevant to the learning goals and objectives of the class. If the relevance cannot be clearly explained, consider why it is being asked of students. [Source](#)
16. For assignments and exams, are instructions clearly worded and accessible to students from all backgrounds, including students with English as a non-native language? Are students provided rubrics that make expectations and grading criteria clear? Are examples of previous students’ work available to serve as models? [Source](#)
17. Do assignments engage students with real-world applications that will be broadly relevant and interesting? Do the assignments provide students opportunities to apply their own cultures, identities, and backgrounds? [Source](#)
18. Discussion guidelines and classroom norms should be provided by the instructor on the syllabus or added after the students develop the guidelines as a group on the first day of class. This is extremely important for both physical and online classrooms. In physical classrooms, these guidelines provide group structure and agreements so that instructors can effectively facilitate challenging discussions that may arise. Online discussion boards should have clear guidelines on what are appropriate and respectful comments, and what consequences may ensue should students choose to post something inappropriate. [Source](#)
19. Consider the ways in which extroverted students’ voices may be being attended to over introverted students’ voices; create ways to support introverted students in active learning assignments and activities. [Source](#)

Evaluation and Application of Lessons Learned

20. Apply lenses of diversity, equity, and inclusion throughout course materials. [Source](#)
 - a. *Linguistic justice*: How are students encouraged to develop and use multiple literacies, languages, and modalities to engage with, and intervene in, course material?

- b. *Epistemic justice*: How are multiple ways of knowing centered? How does the course actively honor the cultural knowledges that students bring to the learning community?
 - c. *Racial justice and intersectionalities*: How is your pedagogy actively diversifying representation without resorting to tokenism? How are you decentering whiteness?
 - d. *LGBTQ2SIA+ and women/girls allyship*: How is your pedagogy actively diversifying representation of gender and sexual orientation without resorting to tokenism? How are you decentering what has historically been centered (e.g., misogyny, sexism)?
 - e. *Universal design*: How have you accounted for the ways in which some might be disadvantaged by classroom policies (e.g., lateness, attendance, formatting, etc.)?
 - f. *Strengths-based pedagogy*: How does your pedagogy draw out students' strengths? How do you center the talents, strengths and experiences that all students, especially those who have been historically marginalized, bring with them to their college environment?
21. Attend to *universal design* and *accessibility* of materials for all learners. [Source](#)
- a. Include information about disability resources and accommodations toward the front of the syllabus rather than at the end.
 - b. Include varied instructional material formats to increase options for students.
 - c. Consider syllabus length, using a table of contents, and a separate file for the course schedule.
 - d. Ensure syllabus and course materials are accessible, including reviewing links to outside resources (e.g., videos are captioned, readings are screen readable, materials include alt-text descriptions for pictures). [Source](#)

Consider Who Is Included in Course Materials

22. Consider who is represented in the readings in terms of topics covered. Is there a reason why one group or another is not represented (e.g., BIPOC scholars) or represented frequently (e.g., white scholars)? Whenever possible, include multiple perspectives on each topic. Additionally, include materials written and created by people from different perspectives, rather than allowing one author or creator of materials to summarize all perspectives. [Source](#)
23. Consider who is represented in the readings in terms of authors. Is there a reason why one group or another is not represented or represented frequently? [Source](#)
24. When covering a theory or research by a member of a marginalized group, explicitly state this information and perhaps even show an image of the person; students in the same group benefit from seeing examples they can clearly identify with, just as in traditionally dominant groups do in their own lives. [Source](#)

Framing Difference in Context

25. Do texts, theories, curriculum support deficit models that blame marginalized groups for the inequality they experience? Can asset-based reading and readings that address institutional and systemic discrimination replace or complement deficit model readings? [Source](#)
26. Can course topics and content be adjusted to speak to diversity and inclusion? Can examples used to illustrate concepts, theories, or techniques also present a variety of identities, cultures, and worldviews? [Source](#)

Supporting Resources and Ideas

- [USC Race & Equity Center](#)