



CREATING A POSITIVE CLASSROOM CLIMATE FOR DIVERSITY

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WHY THE CLASSROOM CLIMATE IS IMPORTANT FOR LEARNING

THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT in a class can affect student engagement and performance. Whether the class is in a large lecture hall, a small seminar, or a laboratory section, a learning environment where all feel safe, valued, and respected is necessary for students to achieve and demonstrate their full potential. Since a negative environment can be an obstacle to learning, it is essential to understand how to create and sustain a positive climate for all students. Elements of the learning environment that need to be addressed include the physical—providing adequate materials or reducing noise—to the psychosocial—how students feel and are treated in the classroom. In order for a classroom to have an inclusive climate for diversity, students must feel supported in the components of the course, including content, discussion, physical/structural aspects, and class meeting times.

Although all participants (students, teaching assistants, and instructors) in a course play a part, the faculty member's role is central in the formation of the climate for diversity. Faculty have the power to select course content, facilitate discussion, and reward learning—all of which can affect the classroom climate. In order to make sure that the climate is conducive to learning and to the success of all students, faculty should consider the elements that affect classroom climate when planning a course.

STUDENT DIVERSITY IN THE CLASSROOM

ACKNOWLEDGING THE VALUE OF DIVERSITY

In order to encourage all students to achieve, instructors need to communicate the importance of diversity in the practice of all disciplines in the university. Acknowledging the value you place on diversity is essential to creating a positive classroom climate from the very beginning of the course. Including a statement in the syllabus is a good place to start, for example:

Respect for Diversity: I consider it part of my responsibility as instructor to address the learning needs of all of the students in this course. I will present materials that are respectful of diversity: race, color, ethnicity, gender, age, disability, religious beliefs, political preference, sexual orientation, gender identity, citizenship, or national origin among other personal characteristics. I also believe that the diversity of student experiences and perspectives is essential to the deepening of knowledge in a course. Any suggestions that you have about other ways to include the value of diversity in this course are welcome.

In scheduling midterms and other exams, I have tried to avoid conflicts with major religious holidays. If there is a conflict with your religious observances, please let me know as soon as possible so that we can work together to make arrangements.

Sources: E. C. , <http://www.education.uiowa.edu/dean/policies/syllabus/>; C. A. M. , <http://www1.umn.edu/ohr/teachlearn/tutorials/syllabus/expectations/atmosphere/index.html>; F. G. , <http://www.fctl.ucf.edu/TeachingAndLearningResources/CourseDesign/Syllabus/statements.php#diversity>

experiences occur. If, for example, a student takes a risk and raises a perspective from a historically marginalized group (not knowing how the contribution will be received), the instructor can build on the student's contribution in a productive and validating way. Such a result promotes learning for everyone. In classrooms, historically marginalized groups and perspectives are both validated in spontaneous discussions and are intentionally and overtly integrated into the content.

These courses also often contain written ground rules for discussion and course policies to foster inclusivity and sensitivity to the experiences and perspectives of all students.

CLIMATE IMPACTS LEARNING

AN EXTENSIVE BODY of research documents how various elements of the climate—formal and informal interactions, the numerical representation of individuals from diverse social identities, or individuals' perceptions of the environment—may impact student learning (Hurtado et al. 2012). While extensive and complex, this body of research generally shows that positive interactions with other groups, higher levels of compositional diversity on a campus, and positive perceptions of the campus climate are all positively associated with student learning, satisfaction, and success. Negative experiences with these same elements of the climate can have negative effects on student outcomes. Even though many of these studies focus on measures of the climate at an institutional level, these findings have important implications and applications for the classroom as well. Given that it represents the center of the educational experience for students and faculty, the classroom is a critical sphere where many aspects of the campus climate materialize.

Studies that have specifically focused on hostile classroom climates document marginalization on the basis of gender (Hall, 1982; Hall and Sandler, 1984; Pascarella et al., 1997; Sandler and Hall, 1986; Whitt et al., 1999), race and ethnicity (Hurtado et al., 1999; Watson et al., 2002), and sexual orientation (DeSurra and Church, 1994). Classroom climates that are hostile toward historically marginalized groups are not only less hospitable for those groups but also inhibit the motivation to learn and the cognitive

development of students (Ambrose et al., 2010; Hall and Sandler, 1984). Expressing or validating stereotypes is a powerful way that faculty can create negative learning experiences for students from historically marginalized groups.

Because stereotypes can inhibit learning and performance in the classroom, it is essential that faculty consider the messages they are sending and actively communicate respect and expectation of success for all students. Steele and Aronson's (1995) groundbreaking study on the influence of stereotypes

understood and discourages them from asking questions. It's important to give students the opportunity to ask questions without feeling stigmatized or self-conscious.

- Do you use outdated terms for social groups? It is important to be sensitive and use appropriate language for social groups.
- Do you make an effort to learn the names of your students and pronounce them correctly? Showing respect for your students will help them succeed in your class.
- Do you prepare yourself to address diversity issues in class discussions? Don't assume that your discipline is immune.
- Do you treat your students equally? Do you make less eye contact with some students?
- Do you respond differently to white students or to women students? When you notice that a student is unprepared for class, do you respond differently depending on your perceptions of their social group? Do you find yourself assessing the attractiveness of students? Does their attractiveness affect your treatment of them?
- Do you allow students to interrupt each other?
- Do you give feedback that includes praise?
- Do you use group activities to foster student confidence?

EXAMINING YOUR CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR

When thinking about your approach to teaching in the classroom and its effect on student learning, be introspective. Consider the messages you might be sending. Below are some questions to ask about your attitudes and classroom behavior. If you hear that students are concerned about your sensitivity to diversity issues, don't ignore the issue. Consult a colleague or the UCLA Office of Instructional Development.

- Do you use inclusive language? It is important to use "she" as well as "he." Or, try using singular "they." When using anecdotes to illustrate points, avoid always using male protagonists.
- When lecturing, do you use phrases such as "It's easy to see..." or "I'm sure the answer is obvious to all..."? Such phrases implicitly exclude students who may have not

Sources: <http://www.smu.edu/Provost/CTE/Resources/TeachCourse/TeachingSituations/Inclusion/>; http://www.crlt.umich.edu/gsis/p3_2/; <http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/html/icb.topic58474/TFTrace.html>

more effectively bring the needs and concerns of those at the margins to the center. Learning about others may also help instructors draw on examples from various cultural reference points so that diverse students feel included and valued.

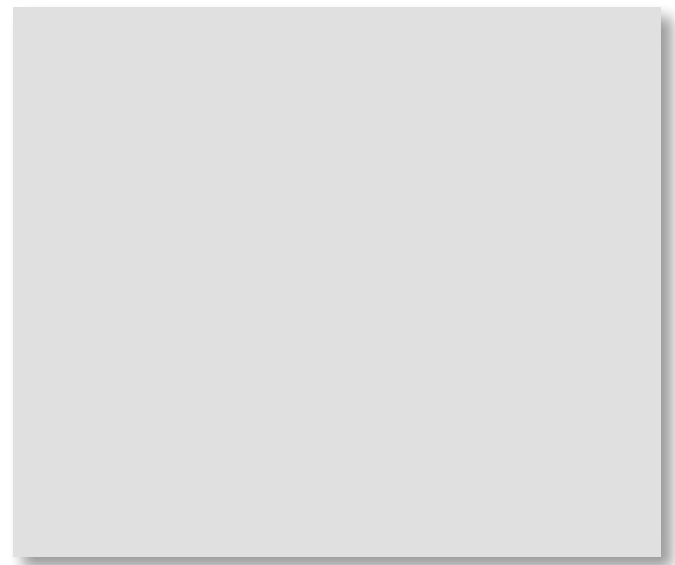
Accommodations. Students with disabilities may require academic accommodations—to have equal access in a course and to have an accurate measure of how they perform. In addition, particular religious holidays and practices may require that some students miss class certain days or receive other accommodations (not provided by the Office for Students with Disabilities). The class syllabus should recognize the need for such accommodations and provide information on how to submit them. Include statements such as “If you have a documented disability, please contact the Office for Students with Disabilities as soon as possible” and “If you have other requirements and wish to discuss non-disability related academic accommodations, please contact me as soon as possible.”

After a student registers with the Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD), a counselor will contact the professor to discuss recommendations for the appropriate academic accommodation(s). For some disability-related academic accommodations (such as note-taking), the OSD may not contact the professor, if the accommodation can be provided with minimal to no disruption to the class. OSD requests should be given full consideration by instructors and be handled as expeditiously as possible. The OSD welcomes dialog and is committed to working with faculty to ensure the best possible outcome for the student. It is important to be aware that materials for the course may need to be selected early so that students have time to address their learning needs before the quarter begins.

Course Content. When selecting course content, it is important to consider whether the perspectives and scholarship of diverse groups are being represented. Focusing solely on the experiences of one group or on a single perspective is likely to exclude diverse viewpoints. Such exclusion sends the message that only the experiences and scholarship of some groups are valued and may lead to particular students feeling marginalized. Depending on the topic and

focus of the course, instructors should include scholarship or materials developed by people of various backgrounds and/or perspectives.

It is also critical that 9(r)13-6(a-9(eg)740d(f)9(o)-9(c)-7(u)



RESPONDING TO VIOLATIONS OF GROUND RULES

When responding to the violation of ground rules, it is important for an instructor to remain calm and consider the violation a teaching opportunity for all, including the student who violated a rule.

Be prepared. Develop strategies for these situations and consider what your own vulnerabilities and “hot buttons” might be. Check out some of the resources provided in this booklet.

Don’t ignore it. Ignoring a violation gives the impression that you don’t take the rules seriously.

Remain calm. It can be hard to remain calm when students in the class are upset or the situation is divisive, but taking a measured approach will help everyone in the class to stay calm as well.

Model the behavior you would like students to use. If a student makes a clearly discriminatory remark such as “You people are always...,”

respond with “I felt upset when you made that remark. I felt that it marginalizes a whole group of people. Can you tell us what you were trying to express?”

Use inclusive language by reframing. If a student, for example, speaks heatedly and seems angry, respond quietly by saying, “It sounds like you have a strong opinion about..., I am interested in hearing more. Can you expand on your point?”

Avoid “you” statements. If a student interrupts another, don’t say, “Stop! You are interrupting X.” Instead, say, “X was in the middle of making a point. We’d all like to hear the rest of it.”

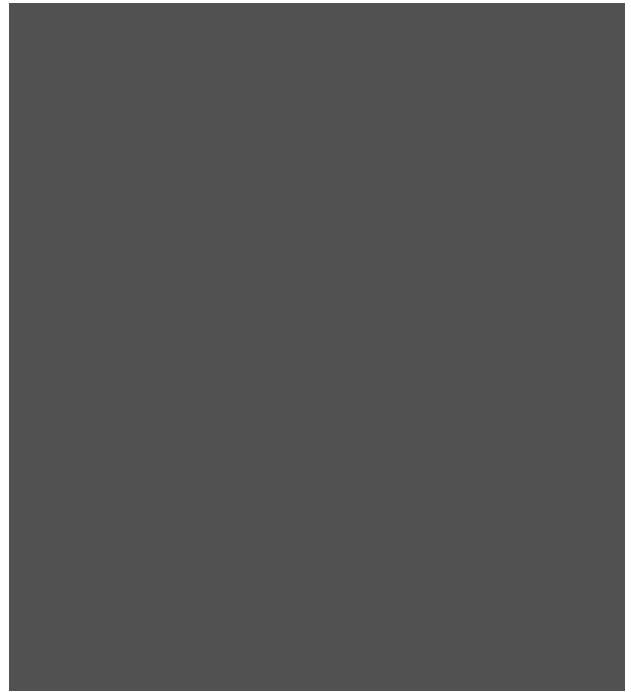
Sources: C. G. C. D. K. G. M. G. K. D. E. C. H. C. <http://www.cfl.umich.edu/sis/1>; M. G. K. D. E. C. H. C. http://academics.holycross.edu/sites/all/files/Center_for_Teaching/2014%20January%20Workshop/Interrupting_Microaggressions_January2014.pdf

course, use inclusive language. When lecturing, don't use phrases such as "It's easy to see..." or "I'm sure

MICROAGGRESSIONS IN THE CLASSROOM

Microaggressions come in many forms in the classroom: instructor to student, student to instructor, or student to student. All have a negative effect on classroom climate. When discussing the merits of a group project, for example, an instructor might exclude the lone female participant, implying that male members of the group had done all the work. Or, a male student might inappropriately challenge a female instructor on a grade.

When addressing student-to-student microaggressions in the classroom, an instructor needs to consider the learning needs of all the students. Dealing with them is not



When grading writing assignments, faculty should be sensitive and supportive of different writing styles, which can differ for cultural, symbolic, or political reasons. Many students may write in ways that on the surface may appear to faculty members to be incorrect or nonstandard English. These styles, however, may be a deliberate form of expression that is in line with a student's ways of knowing, views, or political stance. It is important to recognize that many standards apply when evaluating good writing. Before making the decision to lower a student's grade, the instructor should discuss with the student the use of a particular writing style—for example, using capitals vs. lower-case for "Black" when referring to culture or people or using gender-neutral pronouns. Rather than asserting that such choices are "incorrect," faculty should discuss the issue

with the student and come to an agreement about standards for the course. Faculty should also use the opportunity to consider their own assumptions.

Grading schemes can have a significant normative influence on student behavior and development. For example, grading on a curve creates and exacerbates competitive environments in classrooms as students objectify their classmates as opponents. Such an environment may impede the development of empathy and altruism (Fines, 1997). As a result, students may engage behaviors that skew the competition in their favor (for example, not sharing notes, cheating on exams, and not sharing information about important opportunities with one another). Grading on a curve is often used as a way to help students achieve higher grades, but other grading approaches may be more appropriate to help students achieve higher scores without compromising class climate and desired student outcomes.

Creating and sustaining a positive climate for diversity in the classroom is essential to making sure that all students in the university are supported and have the tools they need to succeed. Faculty can build and maintain such a climate by actively incorporating inclusivity in course development, syllabi, teaching methods, and interactions with students. If your teaching methods communicate respect and the expectation that all students can succeed in your class, you will be closer to making that success happen.

RESOURCES: CLASSROOM CLIMATE

"Allowing" Race in the Classroom: Students Existing in the Fullness of their Beings, J.A. Helling, New Horizons for Learning, Johns Hopkins School of Education, https://www.jhu.edu/~education/essays/allowing_race_in_the_classroom/

Ground Rules for Discussion: A Roadmap for Student Voices in Multicultural Education, D. C. McKinney, <https://www.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED481501/150106.pdf>

Creating Inclusive College Classrooms, S. Saunders and D. Kardia, Center for Research on Learning and Teaching, University of Michigan, <https://www.crlt.org/2014/06/creating-inclusive-college-classrooms/>

Diversity and Inclusive Teaching, Center for Instructional Development and Research, University of Washington, <https://www.washington.edu/cidr/diversity-and-inclusive-teaching/>

Inclusive Teaching Strategies, Center for Teaching Excellence, Cornell University, <https://www.teachingexcellence.org/inclusive-teaching-strategies/>

Incorporating Diversity, Center for Teaching Excellence, Cornell University, <https://www.teachingexcellence.org/incorporating-diversity/>

Preparing Future STEM Faculty for Diverse Classrooms at University of Wisconsin–Madison, <https://www.wisconsin.edu/~stem/prepare-future-stem-faculty-for-diverse-classrooms-at-university-of-wisconsin-madison/>

Teaching for Retention in Science, Engineering, and Math Disciplines: A Guide For Faculty, M.K. Brown, C. Hershock, C. J. Finelli, C. O'Neal, CCRLT Occasional Papers No. 25, Center for Learning and Retention, University of Michigan, <https://www.crlt.org/2014/06/teaching-for-retention-in-science-engineering-and-math-disciplines-a-guide-for-faculty/>

Whether the class is in a large lecture hall, a small seminar, or a laboratory section, a learning environment where all feel safe, valued, and respected is necessary for students to achieve and demonstrate their full potential. Since a negative environment can be an obstacle to learning, it is essential to understand how to create and sustain a positive climate for all students. Faculty can build and maintain such a climate by actively incorporating inclusivity in course development, syllabi, teaching methods, and interactions with students. **Creating a Positive Classroom Climate for Diversity** provides guidance in using inclusive teaching practices to create a classroom environment that values diversity and encourages success.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Juan Carlos Garibay is an assistant professor at the University of Virginia's Curry School of Education. He holds a Ph.D. in Education (with an emphasis in Higher Education and Organizational Change), M.A. in Education, and B.S. in Applied Mathematics all from UCLA. His research uses a variety of statistical methods to examine issues of diversity, equity, social justice, and sustainability/environmental justice in higher education. Dr. Garibay's scholarship has been published in various peer-reviewed education journals, including *Review of Higher Education*, *American Educational Research Journal*, *Journal of Research in Science Teaching*, and *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*. Before joining the faculty of the University of Virginia, he served as a research analyst for UCLA Diversity & Faculty Development. He examined faculty diversity issues from the recently administered UC-wide Campus Climate Survey to help support institutional decisions and planning. He also authored *Diversity in the Classroom*.

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