

## **DIVERSITY**

- Inclusive Teaching
- “Invisible” Diversity
- Teaching Adult Learners

### **Inclusive Teaching**

How can you best help all of your students succeed? One answer is known as "universal design." This is based on the principle that pedagogical strategies known to boost learning among students with diagnosed disabilities also help students without diagnosed disabilities.

Here are some practical ways to incorporate the principles of universal design in your classroom:

#### ***1. Overcome communication barriers***

Present information in multiple formats. Reinforce oral expression of ideas with visuals: For example: PowerPoint slides, graphics, concept maps.

#### ***2. Monitor student learning***

In addition to our typical methods of assessment -- such as quizzes -- integrate informal methods. These might include: 1) Think alouds -- where students must articulate, in their own words, a concept or theory you have discussed; or 2) In-class problem-solving exercises by a student team.

#### ***3. Improve students' note-taking skills***

Effective note-taking is a skill that surprisingly few students bring to college. In a small group of no more than five students, group members evaluate each others' notes. This exercise 1) helps students learn what constitute effective notes at a college level, and 2) encourages students to better organize and focus their notes.

#### ***4. Help students anticipate exam questions***

One way to reduce student anxiety and promote learning is to have the students collaborative formulate questions and answers. Members of a small group devise questions based on a particular lesson's learning objectives. They also generate answers to the questions, which they share with the entire class. This exercise reinforces students' understanding of the course's concepts and content. Note that small groups help to create "communities of learning" within your classroom and also tend to facilitate communication among students outside of class.

#### ***5. Have students demonstrate their knowledge and skills in varied ways***

In addition to traditional tests and term papers, consider incorporating other modes of assessment into your class. You might devised "authentic assessments" modeled on the kinds of work characteristic of your discipline: e.g. policy briefs, literature reviews, or historiographical essays. You might also have a long-term project that students complete in stages, providing them with constructive feedback along the way.

#### ***6. Provide clear performance expectations***

Providing students with clear grading rubrics and sample answers that spell out your expectations.

## **“Invisible” Diversity**

Diversity is more than race, gender, age, or physical disability. It encompasses less immediately visible, but equally important, forms of difference, including sexual orientation, religion, political views, parental status, chronic illness, learning disabilities, immigrant status, or class or regional background.

Your students may be hesitant to disclose these forms of diversity out of a fear of social stigma. What can you do?

### ***1. Be acutely aware of your own biases.***

Be sensitive to terminology. Don't make blanket assumptions about particular groups. Don't give assignments that coerce students to “come out” against their will.

### ***2. Assume that your class is diverse.***

Don't assume everyone is heterosexual or Christian or middle class or politically liberal. Not everyone in your class shares the same attitudes or values, so don't treat certain ideas or behaviors as normative.

### ***3. Make the invisible visible.***

Acknowledge difference and incorporate multiple perspectives and experiences in your class.

### ***4. Respond immediately to biased or bigoted remarks or gross generalizations and stereotypes.***

These remarks are hurtful and shouldn't pass without comment.

### ***5. Get to know your students as individuals.***

Respond to signs of alienation or distress among your students and find out whether the classroom atmosphere is contributing to their unhappiness. Take the initiative, and ask if there is anything you can do to facilitate their learning.

### ***6. Don't ask students to speak for a whole group.***

Treat students as individuals, not as representatives of a particular group.

### ***7. Incorporate diversity in your course planning.***

Be inclusive. Question assumptions about consensus and uniformity, and include, where appropriate, the perspectives and experiences of those whose views have been marginalized in the past.

## **Teaching Adult Learners**

Adult learners are a joy to work with. They come to our classrooms with a high degree of motivation. They also bring a foundation of life experience, skills, and knowledge.

But adult learners pose unique challenges. They are time stressed and highly demanding. They are goal-oriented. They want practical, relevant skills and information. They hate rote memorization and passive learning. And they are eager to participate in their own learning and share their expertise.

Remember:

**1. *Adult learners have expertise.***

Take advantage of their existing skills, knowledge, and real-world experience.

**2. *Adult learners are especially sensitive to slights.***

They hate being condescended to or talked down to, and hate being passive recipients of information.

**3. *Adult learners need to know why something is important to know.***

They are in the classroom because they want to be there. But they are busy and have many competing demands on their time. They need to understand why a topic is relevant and significant.

**4. *Compared to the typical undergraduate, adult learners tend to be:***

- More self-directed: They are eager to take control of their learning and eager to set their own learning goals.
- More likely to learn through experience