

STEM - FIT

FORUM FOR INCLUSIVE TEACHING

12/7/2020

TIPS AND TOOLS FOR INCLUSIVE TEACHING

CONCEPT

Inclusive Syllabi

Creating an inclusive syllabus is a critical step in creating an inclusive curriculum and learning environment. Course syllabi are the first means instructors have for sharing goals, guidelines, assignments and expectations, but they also set the tone for the course and communicate the values and ideals of the instructor. When well-constructed, syllabi can positively shape students' perspectives about their instructor and encourage them to engage with the instructor and their classmates.

TIPS AND TOOLS

Below, we provide a few suggestions with some links to resources for faculty to adopt or adapt inclusive language for their syllabi.

- **Use an inviting tone.** The syllabus is often the first impression students receive about the instructor and course. If the language used in the syllabus is warm, students tend to view the instructor as approachable and interested in helping them learn. Cold or punitive language can increase anxiety and hinder success. Language is particularly important in gateway courses and those with high failure rates or equity gaps. See a comparison of “warm” vs. “cold” language here: <https://tinyurl.com/y5ceyccx>
- **Consider including a diversity statement** that welcomes, respects and affirms diverse voices, perspectives and experiences. This may include an invitation for students to share their preferred pronouns or a positionality statement that acknowledges the instructor's identities and indicates that student views can differ from those of the instructor and their peers. See examples of diversity statements here: <https://tinyurl.com/y4zbb24v>
- **Promote growth mindset and share expectations for success.** Ensure students that you have a desire for, and confidence in, their success. Students from historical disadvantaged communities and non-traditional students benefit from explicit language that defines and provides guidance for achieving success. This may include providing strategies for effective studying and learning and information about tutoring/success centers, but may also include providing the locations of important campus resources, such as the wellness center and food pantry. See attached CSUS resource guide.
- **Avoid dominant language or assumed norms.** Use language that is accessible to students of diverse cultural backgrounds and those who may be unfamiliar with the norms of the academe. This would include avoiding slang, acronyms and language specific to dominant cultures (e.g., using male pronouns or referencing Christian holidays). Learn more about designing culturally-responsive curriculum here: <https://tinyurl.com/y549qeo6>

RESOURCES

Centers for Teaching and Learning often provide resources that invite faculty to adopt and adapt language from syllabi that promote inclusion:

- Center for Teaching & Learning Excellence - The University of Utah: <https://tinyurl.com/yyf4bomb>
- Inclusive Teaching - University of Michigan: <https://tinyurl.com/yyw3yhkh>
- Kansas University - Center for Teaching Excellence: <https://cte.ku.edu/creating-inclusive-syllabus>
- Sac State Center for Teaching and Learning: <https://tinyurl.com/y4zertza>

For a broader view of inclusive excellence, Tess L. Killpack and Laverne C. Melón (2016) discuss the role of faculty in creating an inclusive classroom environment in STEM with practical strategies and recommendations. Toward Inclusive STEM Classrooms: What Personal Role Do Faculty Play? <https://tinyurl.com/y6bu9s22>