Northwestern Principles of Inclusive Teaching

A Preview: Principle 1

The Principles will be available Spring 2021.

Developed for Northwestern instructors by Northwestern partners in the Searle Center for Advancing Learning and Teaching, the Office of Institutional Diversity and Inclusion, the Office of Equity, and the Office of the Provost. This document is part of an effort to create a set of educational opportunities and resources for instructors that will help us establish more inclusive teaching and learning environments across campus. The resource provides both theoretical principles and practical suggestions that are relevant across disciplines and classroom formats, including remote and in-person.

**Principle 1: Consider your and your students’ social identities and positionalities.**

**Principle 2: Establish and communicate clear course standards and expectations.**

**Principle 3: Offer multiple ways for students to demonstrate their learning and knowledge.**

**Principle 4: Communicate sources of support for learning.**

**Principle 5: Cultivate a welcoming and inclusive course climate (learning environment).**

**Principle 6: Consider diverse teaching and learning frameworks and methods.**

**Principle 7: Assess your inclusive teaching.**

**Principle 8: Stay current with Inclusive Teaching literature and strategies.**
**Principle 1: Consider your and your students’ social identities and their implications for learning.**

“*Even though I come into the classroom as a professional teacher, I do not leave my social identities at the door … I need to monitor the gaps in my knowledge and sensitivity, areas in which I still have ignorance, fear, and uncertainty*” – “Jerry” (in Weinstein & Obear, 1992)

The demographic makeup of college students is shifting radically with a noticeable increase in students who identify as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). At Northwestern, for example, from the class of 2013 to the class of 2024, the percentage of Black students grew from 6% to 10%; of Hispanic/Latinx students from 7% to 16%; first-generation college students from 9% to 13%; and Pell Grant eligible students from 12% to 21%. These changing student demographics are a critical focal point for educators as they engage in new and innovative ways to teach.

Adapting to new realizations and expectations can be difficult for instructors, particularly if they are asked to modify their teaching techniques and classroom material to be more inclusive. It is even more difficult when the instructors have been taught, overtly and covertly, that the traditional westernized method of teaching is the best one. Weinstein and Obear contend, “expectations are increasing for instructors not only to be sensitive to issues of gender, race, ethnicity, and multiculturalism, regardless of their academic specialization, but also to treat these issues as part of their teaching responsibilities.”

Social identity refers to those aspects of an individual’s self-concept that derive from the social categories or groups (e.g., gender, race, ability, social class) to which they perceive they belong, with the value and emotional significance attached to that category or group membership. Social identities and the responses they evoke can affect student learning. For example, the existence of a negative stereotype about a group to which one identifies with (e.g., gender) can result in the negative performance on a given task (e.g., an exam). This phenomenon is referred to as stereotype threat and is often reported by students who identify with marginalized/minoritized groups in educational contexts. Studies of stereotype threat in learning environments highlight the need for instructors to understand how beliefs and behavior can be interpreted and how they can influence the learning experience of all students.

It is essential that instructors educate themselves about students from different social groups. To change the classroom environment, all members of the university community must engage in understanding differences and accepting their own roles in the present campus culture. The knowledge of how identity develops for students can help further the understanding needed to help them all succeed. The knowledge of how identity is cultivated by environment can help develop successful teaching strategies for all students.

Based on the idea that a person must recognize their own culture before truly understanding another person’s culture, instructors must also reflect on their own identities. Instructors are not blank slates when they enter a classroom. They have inevitably acquired biases and opinions that affect their teaching. As educators, we can have unconscious feelings toward particular students related to their identities, and “these powerful, emotional reactions to a student signal an internal conflict and a need to consider whether the problem lies in the student or in yourself.” Unintentional prejudice is a process by which society’s unwritten rules about status, respect,
and worth can be perpetuated by even the most egalitarian educators. Instructors should continuously work to address their biases and other prejudicial behaviors that can have a negative impact on student learning.

Contributing to the development and success of all students requires educators to be aware of their multiple social identities and how their corresponding lived experiences tied to those identities have implications for their teaching. By failing to acknowledge the influence of social identity and background on their pedagogy and teaching practices, instructors may unknowingly perpetuate inequities in the learning environment.

**Teaching Strategies**

1. **Instructors should engage in work around their personal racial, ethnic, and multicultural identity development** to increase their awareness of privilege, oppression, and racial consciousness. Those in positions of power and privilege can work to unlearn their prejudicial behavior or abandon racism. For example, those who identify as White can learn the different ways they may unintentionally perpetuate microaggressions towards their racially/ethnic minoritized students and in turn take the necessary steps to mitigate this form of subtle racism. Instructors should engage in this ongoing work by seeking educational development workshops and other resources such as literature on social identity, equity and inclusion, and anti-racism.

2. **Instructors should reflect on how their identity impacts their teaching.** We all have salient identities that grant us membership into groups characterized by race, gender, class, nationality, ability, and other sociocultural groups. These group memberships create the lens through which we see and experience differences among members of other groups. Our beliefs, assumptions, values, and attitudes show up in the ideation of course content, student expectations, engagement, and ascriptions of intelligence (both positive and negative). Do stereotypes about race, gender or other identity affect who you call on most frequently, for example? Do you hold all students to the same high standards for expected achievement?

**Example**

Before the start of each academic term an instructor may engage in one or more activities that require them to reflect on their different social identities. For example, a queer Latinx woman who teaches in a STEM department may consider which identities are salient to her as she develops her course content, modality of teaching, and how the many identities she holds may impact her interpersonal communication and relationships with her students. She may also ask herself, do my identities relate to any preconceived notions I have about teaching courses where it is likely that the majority of students will be White males? A tool that may be useful in her reflective process is the Social Identity Wheel. By engaging in the Social Identity Wheel activity she may become more cognizant of the different identities may impact the way she sees her students as well as how her students may perceive and treat her.
Further Reading


Resources

- Accessibility, Counseling, Inclusivity, Psychological Services
  - AccessibleNU
  - InclusiveNU
  - Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)

- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at NU
  - Admissions Statement on Diversity
  - Bienen School of Music
  - Campus Inclusion and Community (CIC)
  - Counseling and Psychological Services Diversity Value Statement
  - Diversity and Media at the Medill School of Journalism, Media, Integrated Marketing Communications
  - Diversity & Inclusion at the Graduate School
  - Diversity & Inclusion at the Feinberg School of Medicine
  - Diversity & Inclusion at the Kellogg School of Management
  - Diversity & Inclusion at the Pritzker School of Law
  - Diversity & Inclusion at the Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences
- Learning and Teaching
  - Academic Support and Learning Advancement
  - Affordable Instructional Resources
  - Searle Center for Advancing Teaching and Learning
  - Social Justice Education

- Student Services
  - Books for Cats
  - International Student and Scholar Services
  - Multicultural Student Affairs
    - LGBTQIA+ Resources
  - Student Enrichment Services
  - Student Veterans’ Resources
  - Undergraduate Advising

- Related Centers and Offices
  - Gender and Sexuality Resource Center
  - Native American and Indigenous Initiatives
  - Office of Equity
  - Office of Institutional Diversity and Inclusion
  - Office of the Provost
    - Faculty Diversity and Excellence
  - Religious and Spiritual Life
  - Women’s Center

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