

INCLUSIVE TEACHING RESOURCE

CHOOSE INCLUSIVE CONTENT

Recognize diversity and acknowledge barriers to inclusion

This resource is part of the **Inclusive Teaching Toolkit** which is designed to assist faculty in understanding the concepts of inclusive teaching and incorporating these ideas into your classroom. This toolkit is part of the [GWSPH DEI Initiative](#) that is being developed to respond to a societal call for social justice by changing the way GWSPH works to integrate DEI into every sphere of our work. This initiative encompasses Academics, Research, Practice, and Operations. The **Inclusive Teaching Toolkit** is one of many aspects of the Academic branch of the initiative

BACKGROUND

Content plays a large role in creating an inclusive learning environment where students see themselves as reflected and valued — or the opposite. Choosing content for an inclusive classroom is complex. Some faculty who teach content representing perspectives that are traditionally marginalized could consider their course safe from scrutiny by virtue of the texts they choose (for example, “I teach Health, Human Rights, and Displaced Persons. My class is inherently inclusive!”). Others, who teach content that is typically considered “neutral” might consider their courses immune (for example, “I teach Bioinformatics Algorithms and Data Structures. There’s no race/gender in numbers!”). It is important to recognize that there are inclusive ways to consider content in the classroom, regardless of what subject matter one teaches or whether the course content focuses on marginalized groups or not.

Course readings are a critical place to start but are not the only aspect of content up for consideration: students can absorb messages about who does and who does not belong from a variety of classroom interactions. The concept of content is broad, including “examples and metaphors instructors use in class and the case studies and project topics we let our students choose. Just as important as those used are those omitted, because they all send messages about the field and who belongs in it.”

Being mindful of the demographic aspects of statistics/data presented is important when you select course content. For example, showing only people of color in presentation slides when discussing diabetes could send the signal that only people of color receive the diagnosis. It is also important to acknowledge historical and contemporary absences of women/people of color when applicable and discuss institutional barriers to disciplinary inclusion when appropriate. Transparency on such issues lends validity to students’ feelings and critiques and invites critical discussion.

Think through and reflect on a few important questions to review your course content and consider implementing the inclusive teaching strategies outlined in this checklist.

CHECKLIST

WHOSE voices, perspectives, and scholarship are being represented?

- Include *multiple perspectives* on each topic of the course rather than focusing solely on a single perspective.
 - If the topic is access to care for minority groups, the content should not focus on one minority group, but should discuss the differences across minority groups.
 - It would also be important to include the experiences and views of people with different socio-economic statuses in this example, which many include a discussion of poor white patients along with those who identify with a minority group.
 - If you have difficulty finding such materials, you should bring other perspectives into course lectures and discussions
- Include, as much as possible, *materials written or created by* people of different backgrounds and/or perspectives.
 - When all the authors or creators of materials in a course are male (or female), white (or another group), liberal (or conservative), etc., it sends a message about the voices that are valued and devalues the scholarship of others who have written or created materials on the topic. (In some cases, the focus of the course is to better understand a particular perspective or world view. Even these courses, however, should be attentive to the range of possible voices on a given topic.)
 - On a related note, it is important to include works authored by members of the group that the class is discussing. For example, if the course deals with topics related to individuals with disabilities and the syllabus does not include materials written by individuals with disabilities, the message sent to students may be that you devalue the contributions of and scholarship produced by that population.

HOW are the perspectives and experiences of various groups being represented?

- Include materials (readings, videos, etc.) that address underrepresented groups' experiences in *ways that do not trivialize or marginalize these experiences*. Books that include a section on some aspect of diversity at the end of the text or books that highlight women, people of color, people with disabilities, gay men, lesbians, etc., in boxes and not in the body of the text can be seen as examples of the marginalization of these topics, groups, and group members' contributions. When it is important to use such books for other reasons, make students aware of the texts' limitations at the beginning of the course and to facilitate students' ability to read critically with these issues in mind.
- Be aware of and responsive to the portrayal of certain groups in course content. For example, if another country's environmental policies are being used to contrast American policies, the policy of the other country should not always be used as a negative example or always used as a positive example. You need to address the role of culture in foreign policies and not present policies as either wholly good or bad. Such treatment ignores the complexity of other cultures' policies or practices.

With permission, this content is based on the [Guide for Inclusive Teaching at Columbia](#) from the Center for Teaching and Learning.