

## Setting Expectations for Inclusion

Establishing expectations at the beginning of the semester sets the tone of a class, signals to students your interest in their questions and points of view, provides guidelines for conduct and discussion in an academic environment, and decreases instances of incivility. The goal is to create a space where people can listen, share openly, and challenge ideas, with a structure that guides students in what's appropriate and expected, while still allowing for growth, development, and differing perspectives.

### Creating a shared learning environment

- Express your commitment to inclusion in your syllabus.
- Find ways to check-in with students periodically to get input on how they are experiencing the learning environment.
- When conflict arises, refer to discussion guidelines established at the beginning of the course. When discussions become unexpectedly heated, you have a way to remind everyone of their aspirations for how to interact with each other. For example, you might say: "Let's quickly revisit our expectations. What do we need from each other in this moment to live up to these goals?"
- Notice who speaks in class, and create opportunities for more students to participate. Activities such as pair or group work may give more students an opportunity to engage in discussion. Ask students about how they can help ensure that everyone has a chance to speak.

### Empowering students for increased engagement

Allowing students to participate in establishing guidelines can lead to a greater investment and engagement in the course. Students have perceived a better class environment when they had the opportunity to develop their own guidelines, and in evaluations, they rated their instructors as more courteous, willing to answer questions and hear different points of view, and as being more encouraging of discussion (DiClementi & Handelsman, 2005).

Consider establishing discussion guidelines as a group. This allows for the inclusion of different perspectives on communication styles, reduces the chance of exclusion, allows for planning on how to handle conflict, and clarifies expectations.

## Establishing shared discussion guidelines

- Ask students to take a moment to recall the attributes of learning environments in which they felt most comfortable speaking up and listening closely to others.
- Individually, or in pairs or small groups, ask students to consider: Which of those attributes do they want to aspire to in this class going forward? What conditions are needed for students to feel confident participating in class? What is considered acceptable or unacceptable behavior?
- Invite students to reflect on ways in which communication may differ in different contexts and to discuss what kinds of contributions may be expected in an academic environment compared to informal environments.
- As an instructor, you can always suggest attributes you think are important or essential. Share your expectations, and explain why you hold them.
- Write down the guidelines and post them somewhere for easy reference.
- Setting discussion guidelines together is a low-stakes opportunity to model inclusivity.

## Selected Sample Guidelines for Class Participation (UMCRLT, n.d.)

Respect others' rights to hold opinions and beliefs that differ from your own. When you disagree, challenge or criticize the idea, not the person.

Listen carefully to what others are saying even when you disagree with what is being said. Comments that you make (asking for clarification, sharing critiques, expanding on a point, etc.) should reflect that you have paid attention to the speaker's comments.

Be courteous. Don't interrupt or engage in private conversations while others are speaking. Use attentive, courteous body language.

Share responsibility for including all voices in the discussion. If you have much to say, try to hold back a bit; if you are hesitant to speak, look for opportunities to contribute to the discussion.

Recognize that we are all still learning. Be willing to change your perspective, and make space for others to do the same.

### References

- Barkley, E.F. (2010). *Student engagement techniques: A handbook for college faculty*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- DiClementi, J. D., & Handelsman, M. M. (2005). Empowering students: Class-generated course rules. *Teaching of Psychology* 32, 1, 18-21.
- University of Michigan Center for Research on Learning and Teaching (UMCRLT). (n.d.) Examples of Discussion Guidelines. Retrieved from <http://www.crlt.umich.edu/examples-discussion-guidelines>.