**Create an Inclusive Teaching Environment**

When inclusive best practices are used as a model for creating learning environments it becomes the norm for classroom and lecture design. On this page, we cover creating inclusive teaching though classroom environment initiatives and effective communication with students with disabilities.

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## Initiatives for an Inclusive Classroom Environment

To help make your teaching more inclusive review our recommended professor initiatives and the strategies to encourage student collaboration.

### Professor Initiatives

Use these initiates to create an inclusive classroom.

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|  | **Initiatives** | **Inclusive Practice** |
| 1 | Include, as much as possible, materials written or created by people of different backgrounds and/or perspectives | * Ensure that the course materials value the experiences of underrepresented groups * Present materials from all cultures and backgrounds as diverse and of equal value |
| 2 | Take into account students’ religious holidays and practices that may require accommodations at certain times during the academic calendar year | * At the beginning of the semester, ask your students to let you know if their attendance, their participation in class, or their ability to complete an assignment on time will be affected by their observance of religious holidays or practices |
| 3 | Encourage students to let you know if they have any accessibility needs | * Indicate that you welcome hearing about individual’s learning needs during office hours or after class |
| 4 | Arrive to class a few minutes early, engage students in conversation and greet students as they enter the classroom | * Make an effort to greet each student, to ensure that ALL students feel valued |
| 5 | Have the same expectations for all students | * Specify and explain your expectations in the course outline, so that ALL students understand what is expected of them |
| 6 | Set reasonable expectations for the students and make these clear early in the semester | * Ensure that the material can be covered in detail in class time * Make sure that the required readings or other class preparations can be completed within the designated time for the course |
| 7 | To the greatest extent possible, set up your classroom so that students with wheelchairs or service dogs have room to navigate into and around the class | * For example, if the classroom is set up with workstations, consider leaving an open spot—without a chair—at multiple tables |
| 8 | Check on the physical accessibility of other learning spaces such as labs and locations for class outings | * Encourage students to tell you about their accessibility needs, so that you can accurately evaluate the accessibility of other learning spaces |

Initiatives that Require Student Collaboration

Use these initiatives to encourage students to be participants in their own learning.

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|  | **Initiative** | **Inclusive Practice** |
| 1 | Encourage students to reflect critically and ask questions about course content | * Be open to students’ reflections about the course material * Find time in class to address students’ questions and concerns regarding the course content |
| 2 | Establish agreed upon ground rules for class discussions early in the semester | * Students may need to be reminded of these rules throughout the semester |
| 3 | Ask students for suggestions regarding outside resources and guest speakers for your course topics | * Provide multiple options for students to give suggestions (e.g., during class discussions, via e-mail, and during office hours) |

## Communicating with Students with Disabilities

Here are some general tips and specific information to help you better communicate with student with disabilities

### General Communication Tips

1. Ask a student with a disability if they need help before providing assistance
2. Speak directly to the person with a disability, not to an assistant or interpreter
3. Only refer to a person’s disability if it is relevant to the conversation
4. Do not interact with a person’s guide dog or service dog unless you have received permission to do so
5. Do not touch mobility devices (e.g., wheelchair) or assistive technology (e.g., tablet) without the student’s consent
6. Understand that not everyone uses eye contact
7. Some students need their personal technology to take notes in class or to read instructions or the textbook
8. Provide information in a variety of formats (e.g., written, spoken, diagrams)

## Understanding Specific Disability Communication Needs

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| **Types of student** | **examples** | **Inclusive practice** |
| Students who have difficulty seeing | blind or low vision | * Be descriptive. For example, say, “The computer is about three feet to your left.” * Speak all of the projected content when presenting and describe the content of charts, graphs, and pictures * When guiding students, offer them your arm |
| Students with reading and writing difficulties | learning disabilities | * Offer directions and instructions both orally and in writing |
| Students with difficulties communicating | speech impairments | * Do not simply pretend you understood what the student said * Repeat what you think you understood and then ask the student to clarify or repeat the portion that you did not understand * Ask the individual what their preferred means of communication is (for example, they might prefer to chat on computer rather than speak face to face) |
| Students with difficulties hearing what is said | deaf or hard of hearing | * Face students with hearing impairments when speaking, and avoid covering your mouth, so they can see your lips * Avoid chewing gum or eating while talking to students * Speak clearly at a normal volume. Only speak louder if requested * Repeat questions posed by other students * If a student uses an interpreter to communicate, look directly at the student when talking to them |

## Resources

**Resources for Inclusive Classroom Environment**

Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching. (n.d.). *Explore ways to create a welcoming learning environment.* Iowa State University. <https://www.celt.iastate.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/explore-ways-to-create-a-welcoming-learning-environment.pdf>

Suanders, S., & Kardia, D. (1997). *Creating inclusive college classrooms.* University of Michigan- Center for Research on Learning and Teaching. <https://crlt.umich.edu/gsis/f6>

**Resource for Communicating with Students with Disabilities**

Burgstahler, S. (n.d.). *Equal access: Universal design of instruction*. DO-IT. <https://www.washington.edu/doit/equal-access-universal-design-instruction>

**How to reference:** Jorgensen, M., Havel, A., Fichten, C., Ruffolo, O., Harvison, M., & Chiarelli, L. (2021, September 24).Create an inclusive teaching environment. Adaptech Research Network, E-Access Concordia.