Considerations for Inclusive Teaching in Remote Environments

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The Chicago Center for Teaching

In Partnership with the Office of the Provost

The University of Chicago
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Introduction

In Hocking's [Inclusive Learning and Teaching in Higher Education](), inclusive pedagogy is defined as "the ways in which courses, classroom activities, curricula, and assessment are designed and delivered to engage all students in learning that is meaningful, relevant and accessible. It embraces a view of the individual and individual differences as sources of diversity that enrich the lives and learning of [all students]".

Central to including all learners are the following practices:

- Working to be aware of our biases while recognizing students' individuality.

- Providing structure.

- Making our courses as accessible as possible.

- Seeking and giving targeted feedback.

Inclusive pedagogy is not distinct from general principles of excellent teaching; rather, centering inclusion is a way of viewing our teaching through a particular lens, of keeping in mind the distinct and diverse needs of all of our students. First and foremost, inclusion is a mindset. It is a way of reminding us to be intentional as we think about the needs of our students asking, "Who is being left out of the learning process due to the decisions I am making?"

- Given this mindset, some of the concerns about inclusive student learning may differ in this remote environment. Instructors may be concerned about students:

- Not having equal access to technology or internet bandwidth.

- Not having access to quiet spaces to attend class or to study.

- Having to support family members who have recently lost employment.

- Needing to cope with illness and death.

- Students whose learning, psychological, and emotional needs are new and not met.

- Not surfacing their diverse perspectives and learning from each other.

- Continuing to cope with issues of racism, xenophobia, classism, homophobia, sexism, and other social concerns.

Promoting Inclusion in a Remote Environment

Be aware of biases while recognizing students' individuality.

Work to be aware of biases while recognizing students' individuality. Our implicit biases offer shortcuts for how we behave in the world. When we fail to recognize our harmful biases, they can cause us to make decisions that exclude specific groups of students from full engagement.

This particular pandemic has caused different kinds of biases to surface, and we should be aware of how this impacts us and our classrooms. We should keep in mind our own understanding of the local, national, and global contexts, as well as the language we use. And we should remember that our students may be in environments where they are overtly targeted or subtly blamed for this illness or may feel the threat of targeting.

Understand this moment and consider your thoughts about it.

- Explore how the pandemic has differentially affected different communities and consider the experiences from the points of view from people from different communities.

- Take time to explore and identify your own prejudices by taking an [implicit association test](#) or through other means of self-analysis.

Check in with your students.

- At the start of a course, survey students to get to know them and their circumstances. Some may be struggling with this particular moment or have ongoing concerns.

  - It is useful to ask students how they are and what they may need to learn so that you can adjust. You may decide, for example, to provide content warnings of potentially fraught topics or give students choices for assignments.

- To learn students' pronouns, ask students to add their pronouns to their names on the Zoom application.

- Frequently communicate with students. Open synchronous class sessions early to allow casual conversations; send encouraging email messages; encourage students to attend office hours at least once a quarter.

Provide Structure

First generation, low-income, and historically underrepresented students may not have a full understanding of the unwritten rules of university classrooms such as how to effectively challenge an authority figure (Bergenhenegouwen, 1987). In addition, this group of students may feel uncertain about whether they belong in an academic setting, doubt their academic skills, and may not seek help (Karabenick, 2006; Collins & Simms, 2006; Winograd & Rust, 2014).

The online environment adds layers of difficult-to-navigate expectations to this tenuous situation and further distance between students and instructors. It is thus useful to provide a clear, transparent structure to help all students know what kind of learning is expected and how to connect with other students and the curriculum.

Provide clear guidelines.

- Create common structures across assignments to orient students to the environment.
    - Consider consistently listing the purpose of the assignment, specific tasks to complete it, and criteria used to assess it.
- Because not all students know how to use discussion boards or interrupt during a synchronous interaction, give clear instructions on how students should:
    - Participate in class (e.g. using the raise hand function on Zoom)
    - How and when they should use the chat function or other tools to endorse or refute an idea (e.g. thumbs up or down).
    - Check these different modes of communication often – perhaps ask a TA or student to monitor them for you.
- Create discussion roles for students and rotate them. You may find it useful to try roles such as: devil's advocate, summarizer, or elaborator.
    - When discussion begins, call on these students first and build on their comments.

Help students connect with each other in structured ways.

- Use Canvas discussion tools and provide clear instructions for initial posts and for replies. Guidance that asks students to extend or synthesize peers' posts can promote rich discussions.

- Set norms for discussion. You may remind students to continue treating classmates with respect, to post with care, and to ask clarifying questions when necessary.

- Help students create study groups, understanding that learning from each other helps with inclusion and connection. Facilitating the creation of study groups will help students in different time zones as well as those who find it difficult to connect with peers in a virtual space.

Offer structured choices.

Principles of universal design include providing different means of demonstrating one's learning. This is a practice that gives more access to students with different learning, psychological, and emotional needs; it also addresses students who now may feel a sense of helplessness in this difficult time. It also can help students connect new material to their diverse backgrounds.

- Consider flexible deadlines and asking students how they may best share what they have learned.

- Consider allowing students to complete different, final assignments that respond to the same prompt– e.g. an essay, a recorded presentation, or a digital presentation.

- Assign a final project that requires students to connect a newly learned concept to an example of choice.

Make your courses accessible.

The University of Chicago is committed to providing an accessible and inclusive environment. Digital accessibility is the ability of a website, mobile application or electronic document to be easily navigated and understood by a wide range of users, including those users who have visual, auditory, motor or cognitive disabilities.

Here are some initial ways instructors can create more accessible courses, for additional information and resources, please visit [Student Disability Services](#) or the [Center for Digital Accessibility](#) for specific guidelines and standards.

- Create accessible course content:

  - [Create accessible PDFs](#) by Microsoft

  - [Create and verify PDF accessibility using Acrobat Pro](#) by Adobe

- Use sufficient [color contrast](#). For hyperlinks, keep in mind that the color must have sufficient color contrast not only with the background, but with the surrounding text.

- Use [meaningful link text](#). Eradicate ambiguous link text such as "click here" and "learn more." Link text should be specific, clear, and ideally should match the title of the page to which you're linking.

- For multimedia content, provide appropriate [captions and transcripts](#).

- Additional UChicago Resources:

  - [Planning Accessible Course Materials](#).

  - [Creating Accessible Courses](#).

  - [Zoom Considerations for Teaching Students with Disabilities](#).

Seek and provide feedback to students.

We may assume students' lack of engagement in Zoom sessions based on their muted voices and videos. This may or may not be true. They may be listening, taking notes, and independently considering what is being discussed. They also may choose not to invite their peers into their homes or have quiet places to work.

In either case, we will not fully understand the limits of their participation unless we ask. Checking in with students about what is working or could be adjusted can improve their participation. Consider sharing a version of this survey twice during the quarter:

- What is helping you fully engage in this course?

- What are we doing now that we might change to help you better engage in this course?

- What could we start doing to help you fully engage in this course? In addition, students need to understand if they are on the right track.

Historically marginalized students may also struggle with stereotype threat and benefit from [WISE feedback](#) – targeted feedback and an assurance that they are capable of achieving the high standards you set (Yeager et al., 2014).

When giving feedback, make it targeted and timely. In this mediated environment, it may not be as easy to guide student work in a productive direction; so, take time to provide individual feedback about students' work and participation. Explain to them that you will

provide feedback on certain elements of their work and assess that work for a grade at a later time. This will help keep students on track and improve their confidence.

Additional Resources

8 Ways to Be More Inclusive in Your Zoom Teaching

Inclusive Teaching in an Open Curriculum

How to Make Your Teaching More Inclusive

References

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