Tips for Inclusive Teaching in EEB - Graduate and Undergraduate
Compiled from various CITL websites by EEB Grad Program Director Spencer Hall (sprhall@iu.edu)[1]
Department of Biology, Indiana University | Version 1, August 2022

Purpose: In Spring 2022, EEB Graduate Students requested more dialogue with faculty about the inclusivity of learning environments in EEB. In (partial) response to that request, I have compiled a list of selective, relevant suggestions from various CITL websites concerning inclusive teaching and discussion. This compilation will hopefully remind us of what we do already. Perhaps it will also lead us new interventions that we can use to improve the learning environments in our classrooms, discussion groups, journal clubs, lab meetings, etc.

Used by: EEB graduate students and faculty

Communication of expectations to students

Questions to ask yourself as instructor / leader:

- Do you communicate your <u>standards</u> and <u>expectations</u>, along with a <u>path</u> to academic success?
- Do you communicate your belief that students can succeed if they follow your suggested path?
- Are your expectations <u>transparent</u> so that students know what and how you want them to learn and do?

Taking question in multiple formats

Questions to ask yourself as instructor / leader:

- *A priori* work: Consider asking students to brainstorm, then write down their thoughts, before sharing out to the class; then, collect these written thoughts to capture all students' engagement with the content.
- *Reflections*: Offer students space to share their reflections through journals submitted after class or have an open discussion forum on Canvas that also contributes to their participation grade.
- *Zoom chat?* Can you replicate the zoom chat function (somehow)? Many students who do not normally ask questions find the chat function liberating.

Opportunities for feedback about the course, including about inclusivity

Questions to ask yourself as instructor / leader:

- *Feedback opportunities*: Do you provide students frequent opportunities to give feedback on the course, including anonymous feedback about suggestions for improvement?

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[1] A 'deliverable' from a 2021-2 Kovener Teaching Fellowship through the College of Arts and Sciences

- *Barriers and solutions*? Do you ask students to share barriers to their success in your class? Do you ask them for possible solutions?
- *Reporting back on feedback*: Do you discuss their feedback to let them know which suggestions you can and cannot implement, and why or why not?

Setting the ground rules for discussion

Questions to ask yourself as instructor / leader:

- Do you discuss community norms and how to communicate with one another in your class?
- Do you provide a variety of ways for students to contribute to discussions to ensure that everyone's voice is included?
- Do you discuss what to do when conversations become heated?

The possibility to set guidelines:

- *Developing guidelines:* Work with students to establish a set of explicitly-defined guidelines for class discussion. Input of students is important here so the rules become part of the classroom community, not just rules you impose.

- *Some possible guidelines include:* Perhaps these can be used to create a handout? They might include:

  - *Share responsibility for including all voices in the conversation.* If you tend to have a lot to say, make sure you leave sufficient space to hear from others. If you have a tendency to contribute often, give others the opportunity to speak. If you tend to stay quiet in group discussions, challenge yourself to contribute so others can learn from you. If you have an idea, don't wait for someone else to say it; say it yourself.

  - *Listen respectfully.* Don't interrupt, turn to technology, or engage in private conversations while others are speaking. Use attentive, courteous body language. Comments that you make (whether asking for clarification, sharing critiques, or expanding on a point) should reflect that you have paid attention to the previous speakers' comments. Build on your classmates' comments. Acknowledge them, even if you disagree with them

  - *Be open to changing your perspectives based on what you learn from others.* Try to explore new ideas and possibilities. Think critically about the factors that have shaped your perspectives. Seriously consider points-of-view that differ from your current thinking.

  - *Understand that we are bound to make mistakes in this space,* as anyone does when approaching complex tasks or learning new skills. Strive to see your mistakes and others' as valuable elements of the learning process.

  - *Understand that your words have effects on others.* Speak with care. If you learn that something you've said was experienced as disrespectful or marginalizing, listen carefully and try to understand that perspective. Learn how you can do better in the future.

  - *Take pair work or small group work seriously.* Remember that your peers' learning is partly dependent upon your engagement.

- *Understand that others will come to these discussions with different experiences from yours.* Be careful about assumptions and generalizations you make based only on your own experience. Be open to hearing and learning from other perspectives. Respond to what is said in class, without attributing motivation to the speaker (this can be very challenging). Consider the difference between responding to express yourself and responding to get an idea across to people who have different preconceptions than yours. Consider who gets left out, who is marginalized, under-represented, or erased by particular claims.

- *Make an effort to get to know other students.* Introduce yourself to students sitting near you. Refer to classmates by name and make eye contact with other students.

- *Understand that there are different approaches to solving problems.* If you are uncertain about someone else's approach, ask a question to explore areas of uncertainty. Listen respectfully to how and why the approach could work. aid attention to the previous speakers' comments.

Actively managing discussion

Running a successful discussion can take a lot of active work and intentional thought. Here are some tips:

- *Active steering*: Be ready to <u>prompt</u> students as needed for follow-up, additional explanation, or evidence. Be ready to <u>remind</u> students of the discussion guidelines, and let them practice re-stating comments as needed. And be ready to <u>steer</u> the conversation back to the stated goals of the discussion.

- *Encountering trouble spots and modeling solutions*: If there is some <u>hesitancy</u> in the conversation, consider <u>asking</u> why it is difficult to discuss, and be ready to reassert any course or disciplinary framework that will help people respond. <u>Admitting</u> your own discomfort in addressing such issues can make students more comfortable with their own discomfort, especially if you explain or <u>model</u> how you can work past it. You can set an example by expressing some personal <u>vulnerability</u>, a willingness to take risks and make mistakes, and a willingness to learn and grow in a public setting.

- *Stopping to write first?* Consider how you can <u>structure opportunities</u> for everyone to stop, think, and reflect, particularly when the conversation lags or becomes contentious. Ask students to <u>write</u> for a few moments, share answers with a neighbor, and come back to the broader discussion with that new focus. Sometimes a short writing break is useful in diffusing tension and refocusing the conversation. Many students are much more likely to speak up if they have some <u>notes to speak from</u>. At the same time, you will be promoting equity in the conversation, allowing everyone in the class to gather his or her thoughts before speaking rather than privileging the bold or the entitled, who can otherwise dominate the discussion.

- *Small group discussions first?* Students are more likely to join in discussion if you divide them into pairs or small groups and assign a specific discussion question. After a few minutes of

small group discussion, ask several groups to report out their ideas to the entire class. This often helps to get discussion going because students have had a chance to "try out" their ideas on their peers.

- *Keeping quite yourself*: Weigh the impact of you sharing your own opinions on an issue, knowing that could silence students who hold other views.

- *Re-evaluations and do-overs*: Ask students what they would have liked to have done differently in the conversation—either a reflection on the whole group's behavior or (perhaps more importantly) on how they participated. You might remind them of any frameworks or guidelines as a structure for their reflections. In some cases, it might be worth giving the group a second chance at a discussion.

- *Broadening participation*: If the same students answer all the time, you might say, "Let's hear from someone else." Then don't call on students who have already spoken. Do not allow one student to speak for an inordinate amount of class time. Take that person aside and ask him or her to limit comments in class. If the student does not respond to this hint, tell him or her an exact number of times he or she will be allowed to respond in class, and do not call on him or her after that number has been reached in any class period.

- *Confronting inappropriate language:* If a student makes an inappropriate comment—racist, sexist, or otherwise offensive—letting it go without intervention can seem like a tacit endorsement of those views. And whether the slight is intentional or not, the impact is the same. Letting such comments pass unchallenged can seriously harm students' trust in you and their sense of belonging in the class and the university. Responding directly to microaggressions and other inappropriate language may feel uncomfortable, but our discomfort as instructors has less impact than discomfort experienced by marginalized students.

- *Creating accessible classrooms:* Consider having breaks in your classes for those who need a rest from focusing or from socializing.

Emphasis on the process of learning
With careful assignment construction, instructors can help students engage in and prioritize the process of learning. This will not only improve students' performance; it can also increase their time on task, which can benefit all students.

- *Growth mindset*: Adopt a growth mindset in your teaching by emphasizing that students can succeed in your course with hard work and effort
- *Fundamental importance of practice*: Give students frequent opportunities to demonstrate their learning, including low-stakes chances to practice skills and assess their own progress toward course goals
- *Scaffolding*: Scaffold students' work to facilitate building skills, and offer frequent feedback on students' progress
- *Revisions*: Allow students to revise their work to respond to your feedback

- *Reflection***:** Help students reflect on the processes they used to respond to major assignments or to study for exams

Transparency and Equitable Grading

These steps make it clear students the purpose of assignments and activities and how to succeed on them. Being transparent with students ensures that all students can succeed, not only those with privileged educational backgrounds.

- *Transparency about intent and process***:** Be transparent in your assignment design by specifying in each assignment its purpose, the process or task students should engage it, and the criteria that will be used to evaluate it
- *Share the rubric:* If you will use a rubric or grading standards to evaluate students' work, share it when making an assignment so that all students understand how their work will be evaluated
- *Feedback***:** Provide feedback along with grades to help students understand the strengths and weaknesses of their work and how to improve it
- *Avoid "magical grading":* grading on the basis of factors or traits that are not articulated, or that are assumed to be "implicit"
- *Consider ways to reward learning:* Consider whether it is more equitable to weight assignments done early in the semester more lightly and those done later more heavily, after students have had a chance to learn about your standards and expectations.

Resources: The tips above are drawn from a variety of CITL websites. These include:

- Information about course design, esp. backward designs (starting with the end in mind) and decoding the discipline (which makes expert knowledge accessible to novices)

- Techniques to encourage attendance and discourage dishonesty

- A whole array of resources about creating more inclusive classrooms,
  * starting with crafting syllabi,   * enhancing accessibility,
  * considerations for design of assignments,   * creating a sense of belonging,
  * considerations from a trauma-informed perspective (relevant to covid),
  * creating inclusive classroom environments for discussion, which is very useful for grad classes, too

 etc. *There is a wealth of fantastic material there. What will you try new this year?*

For a longer read, "what inclusive instructors do" may also appeal.

Also, CRLT @ U of Michigan: Guidelines for classroom interactions (link)
IUPUI's Division of DEI resources on empathy, inclusion, and civil discourse (link)
Vanderbilt's compilation of resources (link)