INCLUSIVE COURSE DESIGN

WHAT IS INCLUSIVE COURSE DESIGN?

Inclusive Course Design is a key strategy used to create inclusive learning environments, one of many strategies within a larger set of practices referred to as .

Inclusive teaching emphasizes the importance of acknowledging and valuing the diversity of experiences and identities that instructors and students alike bring to the classroom. It creates learning experiences that benefit all students in the class, including those who come from groups that have been historically underrepresented or marginalized in higher education.

By putting Inclusive Course Design into practice, instructors can create more learner-centered courses and better attend to learners':

- Sense of belonging;
- Diversity of experiences ; and
- Relevance and connection to their intellectual growth drawing on their experiences.

Benefits of Inclusive Course Design

By using Inclusive Course Design strategies, all students in class are more likely to succeed.

- Research shows that students learn better in inclusive environments that value their identities and wellbeing.
- Inclusive learning environments foster important trans-disciplinary learning outcomes, such as critical thinking and effective group work skills.
- Intentionally engaging with and valuing diverse perspectives and experiences helps students to achieve these learning outcomes more effectively.

Beyond Inclusive Course Design

Inclusive Course Design sets the tone and structure for your course to support and enhance diverse students' learning experiences.

However, for inclusive design to really have an impact, it needs to be accompanied by a consideration of inclusivity in teaching practices. For example:
- How are diverse students invited to participate during class time?
- How are you, as an instructor, accounting for stereotype threat?
- How are microaggressions in student comments addressed?

SIX STRATEGIES FOR INCLUSIVE COURSE DESIGN

1 Highlight diversity competencies in learning outcomes.

Inclusive learning environments foster many learning outcomes that are essential across disciplines - such as critical thinking and effective group work skills. These skills build diversity competencies in students by enhancing their capacity to live, grow, and participate in a diverse and complex world.

TRY THIS

Think about your course learning outcomes. How can you connect them to diversity competencies and inclusion? How can you highlight these connections for students?

2 Use multiple and diverse examples.

When designing course materials, include examples that are relevant to diverse audiences, and represent different perspectives and experiences.

This helps a wider range of students connect to the material, because it helps them see to themselves included in the discipline, and to draw on existing knowledge to contribute to the course.

Be mindful not to perpetuate negative associations. For example, do not always discuss African countries in relation to poverty, or gay men in relation to HIV. This further marginalizes students who belong to these groups, and negatively affects their experience.

TRY THIS

If you use case studies, how can you highlight diversity in the situations you present?
If you use images or videos that feature people, how can represent people of different ethnic backgrounds, gender identities, abilities, etc.?

3 Use many forms of assignments and assessments.

By varying assignments and learning assessment types, you can assess a broader range of skills and give students different ways to demonstrate their mastery of the course content and learning outcomes.

Multiple forms of assessment also help to motivate students by better engaging them and showing them how the skills they are learning can be applied outside of class.

TRY THIS

Consider using concept maps in your assessments to help students who are not as fluent in English demonstrate proficiency of the learning outcomes for your class.

Try peer feedback as part of your assessment process. It can help boost confidence in students who underestimate their abilities because of common stereotypes about a group of which they are a part.

4 Create an inclusive and diverse reading list.

Reading lists give students a sense of what perspectives are included in the class.

Ideally, a reading list includes authors of different identities, perspectives, and backgrounds. This diversity may not always be obvious based on the name of the authors, and you may choose to draw students' attention to diversity when introducing the course.

TRY THIS

Check your reading list. How have you showcased the contributions of diverse people to your discipline?

5 Rework the tone and content of your syllabus.

The syllabus sets expectations for your course The tone and content of your course syllabus will affect whether students perceive you as approachable, and that will change how comfortable they are coming to you for help.

Syllabus wording has the most impact on first- and second- year students.

TRY THIS

Shift to a rewarding, rather than punishing, tone, for example: late essays will be graded down 10% vs. late essays will only be eligible for 90% of the grade.

You could also consider adding a statement of equity, inclusion, or non-discrimination to set the tone for your class.

6 Pay close attention to accessibility.

Accessibility has many components, including but not limited to physical (both visible and invisible), and financial accessibility.

When designing a course, consider barriers that could impede the participation of some students in your course. You can reduce many of these barriers by using Universal Design for Learning.

TRY THIS

Ensure that the class and building are accessible for students with mobility impairments.

Locate nearby washrooms for people of all genders, including an accessible, all-genders washrooms.

Design online materials to facilitate student engagement, for example, by using easy-to-read font, verbally describing data found in charts, and using descriptive alternative text for images.

Ensure subtitles are available for videos. Reexamine added course costs beyond tuition (e.g. textbooks, field trips). Are these potential barriers?

INCLUSIVE COURSE DESIGN AND UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a framework for creating learning environments that can accommodate individual learning differences and some disabilities.

Inclusive Course Design builds on UDL's principles to think about inclusion more broadly, such as how the course syllabus and curriculum consider, reflect, and actively engage with the diversity of students' lived experiences.

UDL focuses on providing students with multiple means of:
- Representation, taking into account various ways of acquiring knowledge;
- Expression, taking into account various ways of demonstrating knowledge; and
- Engagement, taking into account various ways of engaging and motivating people to learn.

UDL is often emphasizes support for students with disabilities, such as students with visual or auditory impairments, in a way that makes course materials more flexible for other learners as well. For example, subtitles are essential for deaf students, but also help students for whom English is an additional language.

This guide was created collaboratively by the Student Diversity Initiative and Indigenous Initiatives at the Centre for Teaching, Learning and Technology.

For a complete list of references and more resources for inclusive teaching practices, please visit inclusiveteaching.ctlt.ubc.ca.