CULTIVATING AN INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM

Dr. Sheila Contreras
Associate Professor of English
Director, Chicano/Latino Studies Program

Dr. Melissa McDaniels
Assistant Dean, The Graduate School
Director, Teaching Assistant Programs

The Graduate School
Michigan State University
Workshop Overview

• Introductions & Big Questions

• Framework for Inclusive Teaching
  • Issues
  • Strategies

• Conversation & Next Steps
What Questions Do You Have?

(questions are neither too small or too big!)
Framework for Inclusive Teaching

Adapted from a variety of sources including:


An instructor concerned about inclusive teaching will reflect upon these areas:

1) Course curriculum / content
2) Your personal assumptions & awareness of issues
3) Course structure / planning
4) Your understanding / knowledge of your students
5) Your decisions, comments, behaviors in the classroom
Course curriculum / content

• **Voices & perspectives represented**
  - Who is writing the articles/books you assign?
  - Who are you holding up as role models / examples?
  - What paradigms in your field are you favoring or marginalizing?

• **Nature of this representation**
  - How are certain groups portrayed in learning materials?
  - How might you be further marginalizing a group and favoring another?
Course curriculum / content – IDEAS

• Use a variety of written, visual and oral examples
• Structure project groups, guest panels so the membership and leadership roles are balanced
• Assign work of women
• Assign work of scholars of different cultural backgrounds
• Assign work of scholars of different paradigmatic backgrounds
• Acknowledge limitations of course material with regard to representation
• Acknowledge that “race” is more complex than the simple binary of black and white
Personal assumptions & awareness

- **Stereotypes** about students from specific groups: intellectual / not intellectual; responsible / irresponsible; talented / not talented in certain subjects;

- **Inaccurate assumptions** about learning behaviors & capacities. Poor writing = low intellectual ability; students will seek help when struggling;
Personal assumptions & awareness (cont.)

• Associating certain groups of people with particular (negative or positive) characteristics
• Believing that students from a perceived minority group speak for all other people you assume to be like them
• Assuming that students are experts on issues you associate with their group
• Expecting homogeneity of thought within groups different from your own
Other inaccuracies:

- Assuming that students whose cultural affiliation is tied to non-English speaking groups are bilingual or non-native speakers
- Assuming that all students identify with one of two genders
- Others?
Personal assumptions & awareness - IDEAS

• Get to know your students as individuals
• Design opportunities for students to interact with each other
• Diversify assessments you use
• Grade papers anonymously
• Other?
Course Structure / Planning

- Accommodations
- Attendance Policy & Tracking
- Grading
- Instructional Approaches
- Student feedback / critique / input
- Assessment
Course Structure / Planning - IDEAS

• Familiarize yourself with policies of your institution; include language about accommodations in syllabi
• Take attendance in consistent way
• Be explicit about grading criteria and encourage questions early
• Utilize diverse instructional strategies to appeal to diverse learning styles
• Carefully plan for but encourage discussion on controversial topics
Knowing Your Students

• Creates engagement

• Provides you with information about their learning styles and needs

• Creates trust and good will
Knowing Your Students - IDEAS

• Get to know names! (pictures, name cards)

• Get to know something about them (assign mini autobiography, encourage office hour visits)

• Listen to and observe them. Eye contact!

• Check-in with them. Refer them to resources.
Comments / Behaviors

- Be open to student reactions / critique
- Anticipate the unexpected
- Be aware of gender/race dynamics in classroom
- Activate student voices
- Set and model standards for classroom interactions
Comments / Behaviors - IDEAS

- Interrupt marginalizing behaviors in class – make your expectations for interaction explicit
- Anticipate the unexpected – strategy for modeling civil discourse and difficult conversations
- Apologize when you find yourself not being inclusive.
  - Develop self-awareness and model the behavior you want to see