22 Ways to Create an Inclusive Classroom

Like all institutions of higher education, LMU enrolls an increasingly diverse student body. In order to achieve the university’s mission to encourage learning, faculty seek to employ pedagogical practices that will engage all students. Inclusive classrooms are classrooms where instructors and students jointly strive to create and sustain a safe supportive environment for everyone to express views and concerns. The following research-based recommendations are aimed at helping faculty devise effective pedagogical strategies to promote inclusive excellence.

1. **Examine your teaching behavior** to see which students get the most and best responses from you. Analyze who talks the most, who talks the least, whom you call on to speak, who gets praise, criticism and feedback, who gets called by name, who gets coached, who gets credit for a contribution, etc., and develop a plan to increase participation of those who need to participate more.

2. **Maintain high expectations for all students.** Make it clear to all students that you are confident that they can display excellent performance and succeed in the course.

3. **Use praise as a deliberate strategy**, coupled with feedback about the quality of work and what if anything needs to be done.

4. **Give criticism in the form of a question**, where possible. (“How would your answer be changed if you took into account the environmental impact” rather than “Your answer is wrong because you did not mention the impact on the environment.”) Include praise along with criticism and include specific ways to improve.

5. **Don’t always call on the first hand that goes up.** Alternatively, ask students to write down their answers for themselves and only then ask for their verbal comments. Many students are more willing to participate if they have worked out their response in advance.

6. **“Coach” all students in the class.** Coaching conveys the belief that the student is bright enough to say more. Use questions such as “Why do you think that is?” Using questions that have no “wrong” answer, such as “What kinds of questions do you have about today’s lesson?” also encourages students to participate.

7. **When you ask the class a question, look at all students**, not just the students you consider bright, or those whom you expect to respond.

8. **Listen attentively to all students when they speak**, even if their answer is wrong, even if they speak slowly or hesitantly, or speak English as a second language.

9. **Intervene when students do not show respect for other students.** Do not allow student to interrupt one another. Instructors need to recognize and effectively address tensions or incivilities and to challenge students’ assumptions. Encourage students to connect their feelings to course content and to identify hidden meanings or principles.

10. **Establish guidelines at the beginning of the semester for classroom behavior and conversations.** Early on, practice the appropriate behavior with discussion topics that are not difficult to discuss. This provides a model and reference point for more difficult discussions later on.

11. **Judge students’ contribution to the class by the contents of their ideas rather than by the style of their speech.** Do not assume that an incisive, assured style equals knowledge, or that a hesitant style equals ignorance. Do not assume that students who preface their remarks with an apology (“I don’t know if this makes sense but...”) are not bright, do not know the material, or need to be spared the embarrassment of speaking out loud.
12. **Ask all students the same kinds of questions.** Avoid asking some students the critical thinking questions and others the factual and easier questions.

13. **Use small groups to foster cooperative, rather than competitive learning.** Tell all students that one of the aims of working in small groups is for everyone to encourage each other to participate, to take turns speaking, and to respect each other’s contributions. The ability to work in groups is a valuable skill because they are used to make decisions in the workplace. Leadership should rotate, with group leaders being told that part of their responsibility is to encourage everyone to speak. Groups should be constructed so that they contain diverse students.

14. **Learn the names of all students and use them to call on students.** Do not just learn the names that are easier to remember, or easier to pronounce.

15. **Multiple voices, points of view and scholarly or creative works are represented.** Course content is viewed from multiple perspectives and to the extent possible includes materials by diverse individuals.

16. **Use a detailed syllabus.** Be sure that the syllabus contains clear learning outcomes, and detailed instructions and grading criteria for all assignments along with ADA language, and behavioral expectations. See the CTE template syllabus available at [http://www.lmu.edu/cte](http://www.lmu.edu/cte) under “Resources.”

17. **Design learning activities and assignments that address the learning outcomes and enable students to achieve those outcomes.**

18. **Use varied pedagogical techniques that appeal to various learning styles.** Use relevant visual materials, “hands-on” activities, active experimentation, and technology. Ask questions that apply the concepts learned to the students’ personal experiences.

19. **Devise assessments that measure clearly stated course objectives.** Measure students’ critical thinking and application of course principles, rather than rote learning of details.

20. **Give immediate feedback on frequent assignments.** This strategy gives students’ a chance to benefit from feedback and improve on later assignments.

21. **Provide examples of high quality work.** Examples of excellent student work from previous semesters can be made available to students, or instructors can provide their own model of the type of work that is expected.

22. **Use student feedback to improve teaching.** Use frequent informal questionnaires or student essays to measure the success of pedagogical efforts. Share the outcome of these measures with students and explain to them how you will use their feedback to improve the course.

**These recommendations were compiled by the LMU Center for Teaching Excellence, and are adapted from:**


