

Resource Guide

Seeing the Diversity in Your Classroom

In thinking about diverse classrooms, we often think of race, ethnicity, nationality, perhaps to sex, gender identity, and/or sexuality. In majority-white classrooms especially, it can be hard to see that the students in our courses come from a range of backgrounds, experiences, identities, abilities, faiths, etc. If we are committed to creating inclusive learning environments, where all students may succeed, we must examine our own assumptions of similarity and difference in our classes; we must actively seek to learn more about – to see – the diversity of learners are in our classrooms, clinics, and labs. Here are three strategies that can help.

- **Uncover your own assumptions and expectations:** In your ideal version of the course, what does student engagement look like? What kinds of students are likely to be successful at this version of engagement? Who might struggle or feel excluded by it? For whom do your primary instruction methods work well? For whom might they be a challenge? Uncovering your implicit biases about what good teaching and learning looks like can help you “see” differences that need accommodation or adjustment.
- **Create meaningful opportunities for students to share information about themselves.** Icebreakers can give students a chance to share information about themselves with you and with one another. They may explore identity, cultural values, prior knowledge and/or experience, or other aspects of students’ backgrounds. Pre-course surveys are another way to learn more about your students. Before the term begins, ask students to complete a brief online questionnaire that asks them to share why they are taking your course, what they hope to learn, and what aspects of the course they might already know about.
- **Assess students’ current skills and/or knowledge:** Often referred to as “diagnostic assessments” or “background knowledge probes,” tasks like pre-tests and other early assessments of skills/knowledge help you to better understand the diversity of abilities and knowledge levels in your class. Activities like these can reveal gaps between your assumptions about where students are and where they actually are. Assign such assessments at the beginning of the term or at the beginning of a new unit of study.

Resources

Barkley, E.F., and C.H. Major. *Learning Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty*.

Berardo, K., and D.K. Deardorff, Eds. *Building Cultural Competence: Innovative Activities and Models*.

Faculty Focus. Icebreakers for the College Classroom. Retrieved 25 July 2016, from <http://www.facultyfocus.com/tag/icebreakers-for-the-college-classroom/>.

For more information or to discuss how you might incorporate these ideas into your courses, contact the Reinert Center at cttl@slu.edu.