

DISABILITY RESOURCE CENTER ADVANCING ACCESS FOR EVERYONE

Creating Community in the Classroom

Tips for Instructors

The following tips are intended to create a welcoming classroom community for all students, including students with varying cultural backgrounds, gender identities, disabilities, and students who are first generation.

These tips are based on practices that were found meaningful in research* conducted in collaboration with the Disability Resource Center.

Learn students' names when possible and honor self-identified personal pronouns

More information about personal pronouns:
z.umn.edu/personalpronouns

Gather information about your students and their learning needs

For example, using an index card or email after class, you may gather information such as:

- their relationship to or prior knowledge of the course content
- identities that they would like to share
- self-identified pronouns
- anything that they would like you to know about their learning
- what they need to be successful in your course



Share information about yourself with the students

This is particularly helpful to model when asking students to share information about themselves.

Discuss the disability and mental health statements in your syllabus on the first day of class

Consider how you talk about the disability statement. Discuss disability as a valued aspect of diversity in the classroom rather than only asking students to share their letters if they need accommodations. Syllabus statements may be found at z.umn.edu/sylstatement

Share and discuss resources with students

Discuss and post mental health and other resources on the first day of class. List resources in a section of your course website and in the syllabus.
z.umn.edu/uresources

Communicate directly with your students

- Demonstrate receptiveness to student communication, and allow for multiple ways for students to contact you (office hours, email, phone).
- Reach out with a message of support or concern to students who you notice are struggling.
- Discuss and honor accommodation requests.





Set expectations for success

Encourage students to meet with you during office hours or to make an appointment. Let them know that you would like to get to know them and invite them to set a time to meet with you outside of class. Let students know that you expect that they can be successful in the course and that you are here to support their learning.

Create guidelines for respect in the classroom

Collaboratively generate guidelines that identify what students expect from one another.

Purposefully bring in diverse perspectives

- Intentionally integrate readings and content from perspectives that may be historically underrepresented or marginalized in the discipline and in your classroom (consider disability, race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, etc.).
- Discuss the work of a diverse array of scholars and use diverse names, pronouns, and contextual information in your examples.
- Bring in guest speakers and panels with people who have different identities.
- Invite students to engage in writing or activities in which they can reflect on their own identities and experiences in relationship to the course content.

Seek feedback from students throughout the semester

- Gather feedback about how the course is going at different points in the semester.
- Discuss the feedback with the class, and consider how to implement changes to facilitate student learning.

Provide opportunities for students to interact by getting to know and learn from each other

- Create opportunities for large and small group discussions. In large classes, consider breaking students into smaller groups for activities and discussions. Assist in the formation of these groups.
- Set up message boards or group chats for students to connect with one another in alternative ways.
- Assist students in setting up informal peer learning teams that they can meet with outside of class as desired.
- Discuss the different roles that students might play in a team to establish comfort and interest in engaging with one another.
- Suggest students consult z.umn.edu/grouproj for information on working in groups.
- Provide opportunities for students to co-facilitate class sessions with their peers and offer support as needed.

Join students in discussion

Sit in the discussion space, respond to comments, and prompt questions.

*Information adapted from:

Ehlinger, E. (2016). *People like me: Disability, identity, & experiences in postsecondary classrooms* (Doctoral dissertation). ProQuest Dissertations & Theses A&I (No. 10252908).



Disability Resource Center
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