Development on Demand

Diversity and Inclusion

Who Studies at UTSA?

UTSA is proud of its diverse student population and the richness of experiences and opinions it brings to our classroom.

These may include:
- Age
- Race
- Gender
- Socioeconomic status
- Military and military related
- Religion
- First Generation
- LGBTQ
- International Students
- Political belief
- Family Status
- Students with physical or psychological needs

UTSA’s Diverse Student Population

*Data from The UTSA Fall Semester 2016 Student Profile Census Day – Preliminary Paid Report
To learn more, or to schedule a consultation with our Teaching & Learning Consultant, click here.

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Diversity's Role in Student Learning

Research on student learning links students’ academic confidence and sense of belonging with higher GPA’s and persistence and retention rates. Beyond academic achievement, we know that diversity enhances the learning experience for all students. 

- Diversity promotes creative and critical thinking. We learn more when we interact with people who differ from us.
- Diversity expands students’ world views. It may be the first time some students have had a chance to interact with people from different backgrounds and begin to consider multiple viewpoints.
- Diversity prepares students for future career success. America’s workforce is more diverse than at any time in our history, and it’s only expected to become more so.
- Studies show that the impact of attending a diverse school like UTSA has effects long after students graduate. Students with the most diverse interactions in college reported the most cross-racial interactions five years after leaving college.

With these advantages come challenges for students and faculty including creating cohesiveness, effective communication, as well as concerns over increased anxiety and discomfort.

How Diversity Influences Our Interactions in the College Classroom

Implicit bias
No matter how objective we may try to be, many of us are inevitably affected by the stereotypes which the media propagate about various groups. Such stereotypes are particularly evident for cases where the student’s group affiliation is visually evident, such as racial background or physical disability. Although teachers should consider the potential needs of such students, it is equally important to focus on students as individuals.

Additionally, some students might have issues, not evident at first glance, that influence their learning. The may be LGBTQ, have strong religious convictions, or have an ethnic identity that is not immediately obvious. These students’ issues are “invisible,” but may affect their learning experience.

Classroom Discussion
Instructors should control the classroom climate and establish an atmosphere that encourages critical thinking, understanding, and learning. Because many issues are emotionally charged, students may have anxiety about speaking about them in class. Students may also have experienced situations in which other students’ statements were deemed hurtful or dismissive.

To help:

- Establish an environment in which students feel comfortable expressing their ideas and opinions.
- Encourage a diverse range of opinions and experiences.
- Never ask a student to speak for a whole diverse group.
- Share goals for class discussion.
- Establish ground rules with your class and update them if problems arise.
- When a hurtful statement is made in class, don’t let it pass without comment.
Sample Ground Rules:

a. This is a learning community. Everyone in class has both a right and an obligation to participate in discussions.
b. Do not ridicule others.
c. Use respectful language and civil tone with your classmates.
d. Always listen, with an open mind, to the contributions of others.
e. Ask for clarification when you don’t understand a point someone has made.
f. If you challenge others’ ideas, do so with factual evidence and appropriate logic.
g. If others challenge your ideas, be willing to consider their views, and change your mind if they demonstrate errors in your logic or use of the facts.
h. Don’t introduce irrelevant issues into the discussion.
i. If others have made a point with which you agree, don’t bother repeating it (unless you have something important to add).
j. Be efficient in your discourse; make your points and then yield to others.
k. Agree to try to respect the beliefs and experiences of others, even if they differ from yours.

Assignments

We write assignments with our own experience in mind, but they could pose a disadvantage to certain students because of their identity or background. Some essays may ask for personal information students are not prepared to share. Students also have varying academic strengths. Some may not:

- perform well on a timed assessment
- understand academic jargon
- have experience reading academic material.

Students’ speech and writing may reflect the discourse of their communities or peer groups, rather than what’s accepted within professional communities. To help, we need to reinforce the importance of standard English/Spanish/other in academic assignments.

Transparent Assignments

To create an inclusive learning environment, make assignments more transparent. Simple changes can impact student success.

**Explain the Assignment Purpose**

- Skills students will practice
- Content knowledge gained
- How students will use these going forward both in and out of school

**Describe Assignment Task**

- What to do
- How to do it? (What are the steps? What are the common roadblocks and mistakes?)

**Provide Detailed Criteria**

Provide a Checklist or Rubric (How will the student know they are on the right track?)
Research shows that more transparent assignments give students:

- academic confidence,
- sense of belonging, and
- mastery of the skills that employers and academics value.

Part of transparency is sharing the extent to which you emphasize particular communication styles and standards in your courses. Make very clear what you expect from students’ writing and speaking. Whenever possible, give students the chance to rewrite drafts so they can improve and learn. Finally, consider depersonalizing assignments or letting students choose from multiple topics.

**Resources:**
We’ve presented a few basic principles and ideas for inclusive teaching. The UTSA campus has many resources to support faculty in the teaching of our diverse student population.

UTSA Disability Services  
UTSA Diversity  
PIVOT First Generation, Low Socioeconomic and Hispanic Students  
UTSA Student Center for Community Engagement and Inclusion  
UTSA Allies Program in support of GLBTQ students  
Veterans and Military Affairs  
UTSA Teaching and Learning Services  
Diversity and Inclusion Online Module

We also recommend these additional resources to learn even more about diversity in the classroom:


Inclusive Teaching Strategies: Reflecting on Your Practice, U-M Center for Research on Learning and Teaching (CRLT). Some content adapted from Linse & Weinstein, Shreyer Institute for Teaching Excellence, Penn State, 2015 [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1QXOsiu5aDsbksadPpt0HqwNLXdLYfQayHa4miQ6PPpM/edit#heading=h.30j0zl](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1QXOsiu5aDsbksadPpt0HqwNLXdLYfQayHa4miQ6PPpM/edit#heading=h.30j0zl)

Creating Inclusive College Classrooms. Shari Saunders & Diana Kardia; Center for Research on Learning and Teaching (CRLT). University of Michigan. [http://www.crlt.umich.edu/gsis/p3_1](http://www.crlt.umich.edu/gsis/p3_1)

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iv Manzoni, Strebel, and Barsoux, 2010; Herring, 2009; Page, 2007; Putnam, 2007; van Knippenberg and Schippers, 2007; Mannix and Neale, 2005; Cox, 1993