Practices for Inclusive Teaching in Synchronous Distance Courses

Dewsbury and Brame (2019, p. 1) define inclusivity as the "practice of including people across differences." Applied to synchronous distance courses, inclusive teaching practices can help avoid situations where students feel uncomfortable, unsafe, or left out. In addition, these practices are useful for cultivating learning spaces that promote a sense of belonging and meet the needs of diverse student learners. Consider the following practices to make your live, synchronous classes more inclusive:

- **Provide options for students to participate beyond just showing their camera**. Participation in live, synchronous classes is often equated with students having their cameras turned on, yet this may not be the preferred choice for many students due to cultural sensitivities or disparities in hardware or connectivity. Growing evidence also suggests that self-perceptions of how we look on camera contribute to stress, cognitive load, and Zoom fatigue (Bailenson, 2021). As you plan a live class meeting, consider when students would benefit from having their cameras turned on and the times they would benefit from having them off. Also consider different ways students can show you that they're present. Can they raise their hand and unmute themselves to speak? Can they post in the chat or respond to polls? Can they work in a shared document?

- **Honor your students' names**. Using student names affirms the distinct identities they bring to your classroom, providing a sense of belonging and value in the process (Addy et al., 2021). Ask students to edit their Zoom profiles to share their preferred names and make an intentional effort to correctly pronounce them during live class meetings. If you're unsure of how to do so, have them correct you and make an intentional effort to correctly pronounce them moving forward. Having students share their preferred pronouns, in addition to their preferred names, can also help create a classroom climate that's receptive to the needs of students across the gender spectrum.

- **Provide structure for student breakout rooms**. Simply putting students together in breakout rooms and expecting them to work together is unlikely to keep them on task. They need to know what they're supposed to be doing and why through clear instructions, proper group management, and feedback (Berry 2021, pp. 93-95). You can provide structure in the form of clear instruction prompts and expectations concerning their participation, possibly by using a participation rubric that's distributed in advance. Structure can also come in the form of assigning student roles in breakouts that are either task (note taker, reporter) or cognitive-specific (discussion starter, skeptic, wrapper). You can further keep them stay on task by having them log their work or submit a handout when class is over.

Resources

Addy, T.M., Dube, D. Mitchell, K.A., and M.E. SoRelle. (2021). What inclusive instructors do: Principles and practices for excellence in college teaching. Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Bailenson, J. (2021). Nonverbal overload: A theoretical argument for the causes of Zoom fatigue. *Technology, Mind, and Behavior* 2(1): pp. 1-6.

Berry, S.E. (2022). Creating inclusive online communities: Practices that support and engage diverse students. Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Dewsbury, B and C. Brame. (2019). *Inclusive teaching. CBE – Life Sciences Education* 18(2): 1-5.

For more information or to discuss how you might incorporate these ideas into your courses, contact the Reinert Center by email or submit a consultation request form.