Diversity in the Classroom: Avoid Stereotypes, Reduce Bias in Grading, and Understand Student Accommodations

Description:
Would you like to develop strategies for avoiding bias when grading student work? How can you leverage the diversity in your classroom to promote positive student interactions and enhance learning? Is your teaching accessible to students with a diverse range of abilities and learning styles?

This workshop investigates how your unique identity and background affect how you communicate with your students and evaluate their learning. We’ll consider methods to address controversial topics and ensure that all students have an equal voice. Finally, we’ll design flexible classroom activities that integrate multiple learning modalities in order to accommodate the diverse backgrounds of your students.

Learning Outcomes
• Explore the impact of social identity on one’s personal teaching and grading style
• Create ground rules for a productive and inclusive classroom where all students have an equal voice.
• Develop strategies to address controversial topics and sensitive situations in the classroom.
• Design a flexible assignment that accommodates diverse learning styles.

Example Agenda:
(may be tailored to your course needs and meeting time)

* = indicates active learning/group participation activities

1. Cultural References Exercise (10 minutes)
Participants individually brainstorm lists of people/things meeting different criteria (e.g., Asian-American scientists, TV shows from childhood), and share answers, revealing areas of commonality and difference, as well as prompting reflection on potential “blind spots.” (adapted from a workshop by A.T. Miller)

2. Small Group Discussion: Social Identity Exercise* (10 minutes)
• TAs explore their social identity as individuals, answering questions on the first page of the handout “Social Identity Exercise.” (adapted from a workshop by Sara Xayarath Hernandez)
• TAs form pairs and share their “social identity pie charts,” discussing how their identity might influence their teaching.
• Facilitator asks volunteers to share insights with the group and writes common threads/identities on board
3. Presentation on Strategies for Using Diversity to Enhance Learning and Facilitating Controversial Topics (5 minutes)
Facilitator shares 2-3 slides discussing why one might want to leverage diversity and the benefits of setting “ground rules.”

4. Ground Rules Exercise and Case Studies* (25 minutes)
• TAs break up into groups of 3-5, and each group creates a list of potential ground rules for a productive and inclusive classroom.
• Small groups work through case studies on sensitive situations or controversial topics in the classroom, reflecting on whether any issues that arose prompted the need for new/modified ground rules.
• Participants share case study strategies and ground rules with the large group.

5. Presentation on Federal Requirements for Student Accommodations (5 minutes)
Facilitator presents 2-3 slides about federal requirements for post-secondary education and discusses the difference between modification and accommodations, providing examples of common modifications offered at Cornell and a handout with more resources.

6. Discipline-Specific Breakout* (15 minutes)
• TAs again form groups of 3-5, and review a provided list of 3 learning outcomes for students centered around a discipline-specific topic.
• Groups select a learning outcome from the list or another of their design and outline a homework assignment that would offer all students flexibility on exactly how they demonstrate the learning outcome (e.g., students will apply course concepts about science and society by selecting a topic and creating either a written report OR a short video addressing specific points provided by the instructor).