

KEEP TEACHING

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FOOD FOR THOUGHT

We listened to students and faculty as they reflected on their experiences with diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) at CSUM. This newsletter offers prompts for each of us to reflect on our own experiences as we aim to create inclusive and equitable classrooms.



For more information on these ideas or for resources that support teaching and course design, please contact:

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What would you do if...?

- In your online class, a student flashes a confederate flag as their background a few times at the beginning of class and giggles.
- A female student approaches you outside of class and relays feelings that she is not respected in her group – that her male peers talk over her or completely ignore her input on group assignments.
- A student makes a comment in class that they'll work on their homework with Cadet X, since Indians (or Asians) are smarter.
- While debating the merits of two presidential candidates, a white student jokes that an African American classmate is concerned that he'd be 'enslaved again' if a particular candidate won.
- During a passionate in-class debate a male student begins his rebuttal to a point being made by a female student by saying, "Honey, let me tell you..."

In case you're wondering: Yes, these are true stories from your (anonymous) colleagues' classrooms here at Cal Maritime. Such "hot moments" can happen in any classroom (face-to-face or virtual) and can be uncomfortable for both students and faculty. If faculty shy away from dealing with such uncomfortable situations, **Dr. Aparna Sinha** cautions that *"students may worry that they cannot depend on the instructor to identify harmful comments or behavior in the classroom and that an instructor may not be able to support them."* **Cadet Nora Anastasi** confirms such situations are all too real and that teachers should just call it out: *"if they see something, or hear something, NIP IT. Don't let it slide."*

So how did your faculty colleagues handle these hot moments? How would you respond to discriminatory comments or behaviors if they surfaced in your class? Come to the Faculty Development Workshop in August 2021 to learn what we can do as faculty to create classroom environments where all students feel welcome, safe to participate, and supported in their learning.

Creating such an environment requires intentional effort and reflection on the part of the instructor. **YFDT** would like to leave you with some food for thought over the summer on how to address diversity, equity, and inclusion in your classrooms.

1. BE AWARE

Faculty can make a world of difference by being tuned in and aware – this allows us to be prepared to address feelings and fears of inability, unpreparedness, exclusion, and so much more. We must be ready from Day 1 to knock down any negative premonitions that students might bring in. Consider becoming aware:

- **Of your own beliefs and biases** (Try taking an [implicit association test](#) with Harvard's Project Implicit.) As **Dr. Julie Simons** points out, *"as a STEM-centric institution, it is easy for us to focus on the science and facts that relate to our students' goals in our classroom and beyond, instead of viewing our classroom as part of a system that inherently is biased towards those with privilege."*

- **That bias and systemic inequities influence student learning** - **Cadet Stephanie Gonzales** says that a more diverse faculty and student body would make Cal Maritime a more welcoming, inspiring place for students from underrepresented groups. **Dr. Sinha** adds a few examples: *“Students of color or female students on our campus often come to class assuming and worrying that their instructor and peers are biased against them and their worldview,”* and *“If a POC needs accommodations or has a learning disability, they might come to class feeling their obstacles make them appear not ready for the course, or not as smart as their peers.”*

2. COMMIT TO INCLUSIVE PEDAGOGY

*Inclusive teaching involves deliberately cultivating a learning environment where all students are treated equitably, have equal access to learning, and feel valued and supported in their learning. Such teaching attends to social identities and seeks to change the ways systemic inequities shape learning dynamics, and influence course and curriculum design. **

Consider these incorporation strategies:

Embrace Diversity

Ensure your course reflects a diverse world by incorporating content representing a variety of perspectives, identities, and experiences. **Dr. Sinha** recommends sharing context or insights from authors who do not share privileged identities in your reading lists, case studies and/or problem sets, noting that *“If a student’s identity is not well represented in the class or in the syllabus, they may fear that their experiences, interests, and perspectives will be treated as marginal, off-topic, or overly political. And they may worry that they will be asked to speak for their entire social group.”* **Cadet Bianca Velazquez** echoes the last point— when considering the dynamics of our often male-dominated classrooms, she recommends: *“avoid directly calling out or singling out the female students for their thoughts on discussions or activities because it can be a little uncomfortable. Having students work in pairs or groups may be beneficial in allowing students to feel more included because they can share their thoughts with their group members without being singled out by the professor.”*

Apply Universal Design for Learning

Apply UDL principles to your course by employing multiple means of representation (content), engagement (activities), and actions and expressions (assessments). For example, when designing assessment activities, **Dr. Simons** asks herself: *“Is a one-size-fits-all, punitive approach to our measurements of student achievement really the way to maximize the potential of our students? Or should we focus on facilitating growth and building in flexibility that allows for that growth, with the mindset that students are diverse and will meet you where they are, not where you are?”*

Foster Belonging

According to Strayhorn (2018), “belonging refers to students’ perceived social support on campus, a sense of connectedness and the experience of mattering, feeling cared about, accepted, respected, being valued and important to the campus community....” Students who feel that they belong in your classroom are more likely to be engaged, academically motivated, and persist. Following are some ways you can foster belonging:

- Create a community – take advantage of discussions, interest surveys, etc. to continually link in different backgrounds to your daily class. YFDT will be happy to provide you with sample surveys.
- Weave in examples of situations relevant to your specific students – this could take weeks, but students will notice.
- Be willing to acknowledge your errors and commit to improving. For example, when you address the entire class with one gender, apologize and acknowledge the student you excluded, and promise to do better.

Model Transparency & Consistent Communication

- Explicitly communicate the purpose, task, and assessment criteria for all class activities and assignments. Identify any assumed skills or prior knowledge embedded in your assignments and connect students to resources that help them bolster those skills if necessary.
- Set the tone. The syllabus is something quick to adjust but holds the power to set the tone for the entire course. Consider including the following: expectations for classroom behavior, availability for and emphasis on support including mental health and DEI statements, information about various resources on campus (link to syllabus newsletter)
- Offer guidance on how students might prioritize various course tasks or requirements and allocate their time strategically.
- Give personalized feedback and periodically check in with students one-on-one.

**Adapted from the Center for Research in Learning and Teaching at the University of Michigan.*

This newsletter was inspired by conversations with Cal Maritime’s Dr. Julie Simons, Gender Equity Committee Chair, Dr. Aparna Sinha, CFA Council for Racial & Social Justice Representative, Cadet Ellanora Anastasi, MET, Cadet Stephanie Gonzales, GSMA, and Cadet Bianca Velazquez, IBL.