Equity Toolkit: Inclusive Teaching and Learning
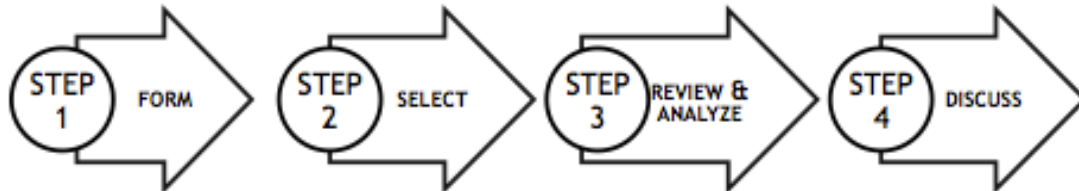
DESIGNING AND IMPLEMENTING AN INCLUSIVE COURSE

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SYLLABUS REVIEW PROTOCOL

The syllabus review process proceeds in four steps.

Once the team agrees to work together to undertake a syllabus review and collects the syllabi that will be the focus of the activity, the teams breaks up into small groups to undertake the activity. The objective is for the team to examine the syllabi with "fresh eyes." The protocol promotes reflection on how information is expressed, and what assumptions are being made. For example, syllabi:

- May not adequately consider the unique backgrounds that students, especially students of color who are traditionally underrepresented in higher education, bring to the institution.

- May promote institutional policies and practices that indirectly—but effectively—work against students of color.

Following the prompts is a table to record observations, interpretations, and proposed recommendations for enhancing the syllabi under review.

- **Observations** are what you see or don't see that has the potential to impact the success of students.

- **Interpretations** is your understanding of how students may interpret what is included – or not included - in a syllabus.

- **Recommendations** are constructive suggestions that reflect how the syllabi could be made more effective, for students of color in particular.

PROMPTS

1 Does the syllabus clearly state course goals and expectations? For example, are:

    a. Students asked to be responsible for the success of the class through active and respectful engagement with others in the learning community?

2 Does the syllabus provide students with the information and resources to achieve course goals and expectations, and to do so at a high level? For example, are:

    a. Assignments clearly described?
    b. Support services (e.g. tutoring) outlined?
    c. Policies for grading and making up missed work articulated?
    d. Steps for accessing technology required for the course offered?

3 Does the syllabus utilize language conveys a willingness to help students succeed? For example, is the language:

    a. Clear and coherent to students?
    b. Respectful, encouraging, and supportive in tone?
    c. Motivational and non-threatening in tone?

4 Does the syllabus incorporate content that fosters diversity, inclusivity, and empowerment? For example, content that:

    a. Reflects the diversity of students' racial-ethnic experiences?
    b. Addresses issues of social inequality along lines of race, class, gender, etc.?
    c. Addresses real-world problems facing diverse communities?
    d. Promotes social consciousness and agency around issues of equity?

5 Does the syllabus include a variety of assignments and assessments that take into account students' diverse backgrounds and promote critical thinking? For example, assignments and assessments that:

    a. Build on students' prior knowledge and experiences?
    b. Validate students' different strengths?
    c. Validate students' diverse backgrounds?
    d. Asks students to question and challenge their own beliefs and actions?
    e. Asks students to evaluate critically alternative viewpoints or beliefs on a topic?

6 Does the syllabus mention that the course will provide students with opportunities to:

    a. Share their cultural knowledge?
    b. Engage in discussions of real-world problems from diverse perspectives?
    c. Undertake collaborative work?
    d. Get feedback on their performance?

7 On the whole, does the syllabus convey the message that learning is a shared responsibility between students and instructor, specifically, that learning emerges from what students bring to the classroom (i.e. their knowledge, experiences, effort, motivation) *and* an instructor's pro-active efforts to support their learning?

OBSERVATIONS	INTERPRETATIONS	RECOMMENDATIONS
Capture what you see or don't see in the syllabus that has the potential to facilitate or hinder the success of students.	*Draw on your observations to describe how a student might "read" what is included—or not included—in a syllabus.*	*Based on your observations and interpretations, provide constructive suggestions for how the syllabus could be made more useful - to student of color in particular*

EXAMPLE: Syllabus from an English course

Class rules:
1. <u>No late paragraph or paraphrases are accepted</u>. No make up quizzes will be given. If you miss a paper or quiz, you will be given a zero for that assignment.
2. No cell phones/pagers in class. If they ring or disturb the class, you will be given a verbal warning. The second time it occurs, you will be excused from class.

Attendance
Regular attendance and punctuality are expected by this instructor, and points for both attendance and punctuality are factored into the course grade. Absent students or those arriving late or leaving early do not earn these points. Consult with the instructor if there are any concerns or problems regarding either attendance or punctuality. In case of illness or emergency absences, please leave a message on the instructor's voice mail.

Attitude / Participation / Conduct
Civilized behavior befitting professional men and women is the standard of the class. Participation, cooperation, respect and courtesy are expected. No food or beverages (water in an enclosed container excepted) are to be consumed in the classroom. Because of extensive oral participation, gum chewing is discouraged. Clarity in both oral and written work is favored by this instructor. Cell phones must be turned off during class sessions.

Recommendations included several changes:

- Removal of the word "rules";

- Shift from a more authoritative / disciplinarian tone, to one that is more collaborative and respectful;

- Recognition that emergencies can be a factor in absences and late assignments;

- Incorporates a process for getting in touch with the professor regarding absences;

- Communicates positive expectations for class community: "Civilized behavior befitting professional men and women is the standard of the class."

GUIDE: GROUP DISCUSSION AND ACTION PLANNING

Once the syllabus review is complete, reconvene to share observations and findings. An important outcome of the group discussion is to determine how the syllabus can be modified to be more equity-minded and culturally inclusive, as well as to consider how faculty might try new approaches (if necessary) that are specifically aimed at supporting underrepresented minority students in the classroom.

Possible questions to facilitate discussion include:

1. Think about the indicators in the protocol. From these indicators, what is generally present in the syllabus reviewed? What is generally missing?

2. What do these syllabi reveal about the culture of the classroom, as well as faculty members' attitudes towards students, teaching styles, and classroom practices?

3. Now, think about the syllabi from the point of view of students, particularly those who are underrepresented in higher education. Reading each syllabus, how did you feel about the instructor and the course?

4. What are some issues that should be raised for departmental discussions?

5. How can these syllabi be modified?

    a. Identify possible changes that could be made to the syllabi that could further support racial and ethnic equity for student success.

    b. Determine whether these possible changes are "within reach," or are "beyond reach."

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