

Promote Inclusiveness via your Syllabus

Communicate expectations and send a welcoming message to all students.



Students new to the U.S. university experience might be encountering a course syllabus for the very first time. How do you talk about the course syllabus with your students? What message are you sending about the value of diverse linguistic, cultural, and educational experiences in your classroom?

Considerations for engaging all students in your syllabus:

1. **What is a syllabus and why is it important?** Talk about the course "agreement" that all students and you as the instructor will use to guide the course. If you take time to discuss this question, students will listen.
2. **How do you want students to engage with it?** Provide time for students to engage with the content rather than just handing out the syllabus on the first day. A syllabus quiz is a great way to hold students accountable. As an alternative, ask students to generate questions about the course. Then distribute the syllabus and ask students to find the answers and report back to the class.
3. **What messages can you include that welcome all?** See the examples below for helping students feel comfortable participating and collaborating in your classroom.
4. **How will you talk about support resources?** Including links to resources in your syllabus is a great first step, but help students connect to them by providing timely reminders throughout the semester.

Syllabus Statement Examples

Including a paragraph to your syllabus like the ones below is a simple way to encourage inclusivity.

Learn from Diversity

Students come to this university from over 130 countries in the world, bringing with them an enormous variety of linguistic knowledge, cultural traditions, belief systems, and educational experiences. Such variety in linguistic and cultural background presents many challenges and offers many opportunities. I encourage you to be curious, get outside of your comfort zone to get to know other students, and work to overcome communication challenges related to linguistic and cultural differences.

Ask for Clarification

Because not all students and faculty share the same native language in our classroom, there may be times when comprehension of course content is a challenge. If you are confused by new vocabulary or cultural examples shared by your instructors or classmates, please ask for clarification.

Engage in Productive Discussions

Your classmates may express themselves through many different communication styles. Factors such as educational background, cultural differences, and individual preferences will influence the ways in which students participate in class. Some students may be more comfortable staying silent, but you should not assume that they do not have contributions to make. Observe how others interact in your discussions and respond with sensitivity. Be careful of making assumptions, and work hard to include everyone in the conversation.

Overcome Challenges in Group Work

Research demonstrates that working in groups with diverse peers can be very challenging, but when group members work to overcome the challenges, they can experience significant gains in critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and the final group product is likely to be of higher quality and more creative. You should expect to have conflict and misunderstanding in groups, but I encourage you work to find strategies to overcome the challenges, and consult with the professor and TA as needed.

Student English Language Support

If you are an international undergraduate student and you need English language support, SELS is an on-campus service that offers free, 45-minute consultations to international undergraduate students to help develop their English skills. During a consultation, students can work with trained consultants on any English language skill, including writing, speaking, pronunciation, social skills, and listening. To make an appointment and/or to find our schedule for walk-in hours, please visit the SELS website at: <https://ccaps.umn.edu/eslhelp>. You can also email SELS at: eslhelp@umn.edu