

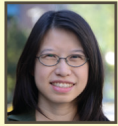
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Classroom Etiquette

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Alison Bailey and Maura Toro-Morn
Illinois State University

Even the most well-intentioned people make mistakes. As instructors, one of our jobs is to make the classroom a place where all learners feel confident enough to participate. This involves challenging our own assumptions as well as those of our students. One way to do this is to be aware of subtle behaviors that make some students feel unwelcome or excluded. Keep the following in mind when you interact with students.

Everyone has race, ethnicity, gender and nationality. Hillary Clinton is just as ethnic as Maya Angelou. To think of persons who are not of European descent as exotic or ethnic reinforces the idea that whites are the norm and all other are defined in comparison to this standard.

Don't mention a student's race unless it is relevant to what you're talking about. Unless you are making a point in which race is relevant, think about whether or not racially labeling is necessary.

Don't ask African-American, Latina/o, Jewish, Gay/Lesbian, Italian-American etc. students to speak for the people of their race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, or nationality. No one wants the responsibility of having what they say being taken to be representative of the entire race, religion, or ethnic group. Students may also be uncomfortable having to defend their race, class, or sexual orientation.

Don't assume racial-ethnic students know their history. You wouldn't call on a white woman and ask her to tell you about Susan B. Anthony because she is a white woman. Don't assume that Black students would know biographical information about Malcolm X. (It does not follow that racial-ethnic students are not knowledgeable about their own lives and conditions. Instructors should not try to speak for them on these grounds).

Don't ask students of color to educate the class on racism. Don't ask women to educate the class on sexism. Don't ask gay/lesbian or bi-sexual students to educate straight students on homophobia, unless they volunteer, or unless you know the student well enough to ask them. These are everyone's issues.

Avoid stereotypes in hypothetical examples, unless you make it clear that you are using this example as a pedagogical tool. Not all African-Americans are on welfare, live in Ghettos, or work in the service industries. Not all Arabs are terrorists. Not all Doctors are "he". Not all single parents are "she." Not all Latinas/os speak Spanish. Not all whites are privileged or rich. HIV and AIDS are not confined to the gay/lesbian community.

Learn student's names and how to pronounce them. Don't Anglicize names unless the student does also. You might ask students if they Anglicize their name.

Keep your audience in mind when preparing lectures and assignments. Don't assume that you will be speaking to a homogeneous group of people. Not all students live in dorms, are supported by their parents, or own computers. Some students work, some have children, some come from single parent households, and some commute. Don't assume that a student's college experience is a reflection of your own. Check your assumptions about students. You may want to consider this when you plan projects or assign extra credit.

Be aware of non-verbal behavior between students and yourself. Are you calling on men more than women? Do you/other students tune out, or talk when students of color/returning students speak? Who is talking in the class? Do you feel that students silence themselves in your class? Are students rolling their eyes when one of their classmates speaks? Failure to address these behaviors contributes to a chilly classroom climate for some students.

Don't let racist, sexist, or homophobic language and comments in the class discussion or essays go unnoticed. Do comments of students have racist/sexist/homophobic undertones? Ask students what evidence they have for their beliefs and to question their presumptions. No name calling.

If you classes are small, spread your eye contact around. At the same time, don't just address Black students during discussion about slavery or civil rights. Don't focus on the Jewish students if you are speaking about the Holocaust or Pogroms. Don't address comments on reproductive rights and sexual harassment only to women. Don't address questions of immigration to Latinos, Asians, etc.

1. **People are not hermaphrodites.** Individuals are not he/she. Vary your examples using "he" and "she". If sex/gender is ambiguous, then use the plural.
2. **When possible integrate questions of difference into your course content and class discussions.** This does not mean adding a few authors of color, or women writers/scientists. Putting issues of diversity in separate units on the syllabus sends a message to students that issues of race, class, and sex are separable from the main course content and have no place in discussions. If possible try to integrate issues of diversity into your main course content.
3. **If you take attendance don't just notice that the students with disabilities, or students of color are absent.**
4. **Make it clear that your classroom is a place where all voices can be heard and that you make mistakes too.**

Centre for Teaching and Learning

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