

Drafting an Equity Statement for your Course Syllabus Policy adopted October 17, 2019

Including an equity statement on your course syllabus is one of the recommendations of the Equity Issues Committee that can help increase diversity and inclusion in teaching. Such inclusions are important, as the PICRDI report notes, for the “increased visibility of equity and inclusion goals and resources.”

There are various ways such a statement can be formulated. This memo includes some resources and guidelines that can help instructors. Below are three elements that could be useful to draft an equity statement on a syllabus.

1) Queen’s Educational Equity Policy

<https://www.queensu.ca/secretariat/policies/senate/educational-equity-policy>

One or more of the following statements could be included on course syllabi, with a note that they are official Queen’s policy:

“Queen's University recognizes that the values of equity and diversity are vital to and in harmony with its educational mission and standards of excellence. It acknowledges that direct, indirect and systemic discrimination exists within our institutional structures, policies and practices and in our community. These take many forms and work to differentially advantage and disadvantage persons across social identities such as race, ethnicity, disability, gender identity, sexual orientation, faith and socioeconomic status, among other examples.”

“Queen's is committed to counteracting discrimination in this institution and developing a climate of educational equity that recognizes and respects the equal dignity and worth of all who seek to participate in the life, work and mission of the University. Such a climate is created and maintained by developing a university-wide commitment to and understanding of educational equity, supported by policies, programs, curricula, practices and traditions that facilitate individuals - and equity-seeking groups- free, safe, and full participation.”

“Equity in an educational institution is achieved when all members of our society have fair and equal opportunity to participate in and enjoy the benefits of an education, including the opportunity to experience success and human dignity while developing the skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary to contribute as leaders and citizens in society.
Diversity and Equity Policy at Queen’s”

2) Four Directions Indigenous Student Centre

A syllabus could include the Four Directions acknowledgement of territory:

<https://www.queensu.ca/fourdirections/resources-queens-community/acknowledgement-territory>

"To begin, let us acknowledge that Queen's is situated on traditional Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee territory. We are grateful to be able to live, learn and play on these lands."

"To acknowledge this traditional territory is to recognize its longer history, one predating the establishment of the earliest European colonies. It is also to acknowledge this territory's significance for the Indigenous peoples who lived, and continue to live, upon it and whose practices and spiritualities were tied to the land and continue to develop in relationship to the territory and its other inhabitants today. The Kingston Indigenous community continues to reflect the area's Anishinaabek and Haudenosaunee roots. There is also a significant Métis community and there are First people from other Nations across Turtle Island present here today."

3) Tailored Examples

The following are examples from Celia Romulus' syllabus (some elements inspired by Geraldine King's syllabus). Celia is an Equity Issues Committee member, and has a lot of training and expertise on these matters.

Under students' responsibilities, Celia notes that "During this course, students are expected to define and contribute to fostering an optimal teaching/learning environment (see accountable ontological environment below). Because learning about decolonial politics can be emotionally, politically and spiritually charging for some individuals, you are tasked with being mindful of other peoples' location and proximity to colonialism and colonial violence."

Under the professor's responsibilities, Celia's syllabus has the following (among other elements):

"Foster an accountable ontological space. This means that I will not tolerate any form of oppression within the classroom including (but of course not limited to): racism, homophobia, transphobia, Islamophobia, anti-Blackness, sexism, classism, ableism, silencing or otherwise assuming power over another person. I expect students to contribute to shaping and fostering an optimal teaching/learning environment so we will determine a set of rules of interaction as a group."