

EDI Guidance Document: Teaching and Social Location

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What's this about? This past summer, an undergraduate student from an equity-seeking group brought concerns to the department and the university about the ways their group was represented in our department's teaching, in negative, stereotyped ways (i.e., it was not one course or one instructor, but a concern about a number of courses we offer). They noted this made them feel excluded and unwelcome in our discipline and department. The student has considered leaving the discipline and the university.

What's the issue? There are a few:

1. Members of equity-seeking and other marginalized groups (other than majority women) are underrepresented in our discipline, department, and university, and have communicated about their feelings of exclusion, tokenization, erasure, and marginalization. We want to make a break with this while understanding it, too, to make our department (and discipline, and university) a place where members of equity-seeking and other marginalized groups can thrive.
2. When our teaching touches on equity-seeking and other marginalized groups, we usually rely on findings and textbooks from our discipline, but the mainstream of our discipline does not typically take EDI concerns into account in its research. The history of research with equity-seeking groups in our discipline tends to focus on them as a problem, and not the ways that majority cultures makes problems *for* them. This means that we can present information about equity-seeking groups that are decontextualized from the very aspects that make them equity-seeking, e.g., racism, ablism, misogyny, transphobia, homophobia, settler colonialism. Presenting a problem that an equity-seeking group might experience without explaining providing context for that problem can end up further marginalizing that group. Bringing up an equity-seeking group *only* in the context of a problem they experience can also further marginalize them. This affects the group members who are present in our classroom directly, and indirectly when majority group members see this happening.

What to do when this happens? If someone from a marginalized group comes to you with a concern about the way you are presenting information about their social location, you might consider:

- Listening.
- Apologizing (I'm sorry I did this / this happened in my class / that this led to a harm for you / etc.).
- Thanking the student for having the courage and wherewithal to bring it up with you. Often, students will bring up concerns with faculty they see as open to change – it could be a positive that they think you can hear what they are saying! (It can be very hard for students to speak to professors at all, much less those in charge of their grade!)

- Explaining (not excusing) how or why this might have happened (e.g., I hadn't realized I only spoke about this group once this semester, and only in this stereotypical way).
- Offering a way to change this in the future (e.g., I am going to look over my class notes to see whether it makes sense to keep this example / how I can incorporate more context for it / ensure I don't only present this group when it accords with pejorative stereotypes / etc.).
- Asking if there is anything else the student wants to communicate or needs about the issue.

How to prevent this from happening? Whether this has happened to you or not, there are ways to prevent it from happening in the future. Here are some ideas:

1. Skim through your class notes and make a record of mentions about equity-seeking or other marginalized groups (e.g., how often, in what context, and with what goal).
 - a. If you only mention a group once or twice, seek other content to increase their representation in your teaching.
 - b. If you only or predominantly mention a group in relation to its stereotyped, negative, or problem attributes, consider whether this is pedagogically necessary. If so:
 - i. Seek other content to increase their representation outside that framing in your teaching;
 - ii. Provide context for why this example is important to mention.
 - c. If you provide no cultural/EDI context for mentioning the group, add some of that context.
2. Do a word search or skim through your textbook and/or articles for mentions of equity-seeking or other marginalized groups. Of course, these are not materials you created, but students will see them as material you chose to share and thus see you as responsible for them. Follow the process for 1 above. And, if you feel the materials present the groups in ways you do not agree with, communicate that directly with the students, including why you do not agree, and why you chose the materials anyway (e.g., what were their benefits, and why they outweighed their costs).
3. Think about ways to incorporate equity-seeking and other marginalized groups into your teaching, including in terms of representation (whom is pictured, named, referred to, etc.) as well as whose work you teach and whom you teach about. The more you incorporate EDI concerns into your teaching from the get-go (including that important cultural context!), the more empirically accurate your teaching will be, the more underrepresented students see themselves, and the more overrepresented students will see that broad experiences matter beyond their own.