

**Syllabus Review Guide for Equity, Justice, and Inclusion**

The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences values and prioritizes equity, justice, and inclusive excellence in its teaching and learning mission. The purpose of this Syllabus Review Guide is to help educators address inequities, injustices, and exclusions of a historical and systemic basis whose legacies affect students today. Although “equity,” “justice,” and “inclusion” do not have universally shared meanings, they typically refer to a recognition of institutionalized disadvantages and barriers that can be remedied only through deliberate action. This guide offers starting points for developing syllabi that optimize success for all students. Rather than serving as an exhaustive checklist, it is meant to encourage continual reflection and to spur lifelong efforts to foster equity, justice, and inclusion in the classroom, on campus, and in the community.

The materials in this guide have been adapted from “[Syllabus Review Guide for Equity-Minded Education](https://www.cuesta.edu/about/documents/vpaa-docs/Syllabus_Review_Protocol_CUE.pdf),” Center for Urban Education (CUE), with a little help from the University of Denver’s “[Checklist of Inclusive Excellence (IE) in Syllabi](http://otl.du.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/IE-Syllabi-checklist.pdf).”

The Council on Diversity and Inclusion recommends that CLAS educators incorporate the following six practices (identified by the Center for Urban Education) in our creation of syllabi to develop equity-minded pedagogical habits and to help all students, but especially minoritized students, be more successful in their learning:

* **DEMYSTIFYING** college policies and practices
* **WELCOMING** students and creating a classroom culture in which they feel safe and their cultures respected
* **VALIDATING** students’ skills
* **CREATING** **A PARTNERSHIP** in which faculty and students work together to ensure success
* **REPRESENTING** a range of racial, ethnic, gender, socio-economic, sexual, disability, and national and other experiences and backgrounds in assignments, readings, and other materials
* **DECONSTRUCTING** dominant norms and systemic inequities

Regular review of our syllabi will result in identifying and incorporating new practices in our courses, and keeping an emphasis on equity and inclusion. According to CUE, “syllabus review is an inquiry process that encourages self-reflection on the teaching beliefs, values, and approaches communicated in syllabi and the impact those teaching beliefs, values, and approaches may have on racially/ethnically [and otherwise] minoritized students. The intended ‘take-away’ of syllabus review is the importance of continuous, structured reflection using artifacts of practice.”

Read your syllabus against the following recommended practices on the next few pages. Think how students might feel going through your syllabus on the first day of class. What perception will they have of you as an instructor and of the course? How will they feel using your syllabus throughout the semester?

As you go through this document, identify areas of your syllabus that need attention, and begin using the six practices to make equity-minded changes. Not all the suggestions connected to the recommended practices will be relevant to all of your courses, but some might be more relevant than you think.

**Demystifying** college policies and practices, **welcoming** your students, **validating** students’ ability to be successful, **creating a partnership** with your students, **representing** students’ experiences in a range of materials, and **deconstructing** dominant norms and systemic inequities through your syllabus are all practices that will help demonstrate to students that you value them and their success. These practices, detailed below, ask you to consider your syllabus from the more straightforward work of description to the harder work of analysis and criticism. This will be a process. Try working with some suggestions from each of the practices at first, incorporating more as your pedagogy becomes increasingly equity-minded.

In this process, be careful not to lean on students of color and students from other minoritized groups to do the work for you. While the knowledge and experience that minoritized students bring to the classroom are assets and should be heard and valued, it is our responsibility as educators to create safe and equitable learning environments, to eliminate inequities, and to change practices.

1. Does your syllabus **DEMYSTIFY** college, department, and course policies and practices?

* Provide students with the information they need to successfully complete the course and navigate your department and the college.
  + Include basic information about the course (e.g., course description, learning objectives, instructor contact information and office hours, grading scheme, attendance policy, schedule).
    - Think about the ways that mandatory/zero tolerance attendance policies enforce ableism. These policies do not take into consideration the difficulties disabled and chronically ill students sometimes confront to get to and stay in class. Flexible attendance policies show students you respect and support their varied needs.
    - Explain how you use “Early Alert” to support students in your course.
    - Explain what a “credit hour” means – for most classes, a credit hour is equivalent to an average of three hours of work (in class and out).
  + Make explicit what skills and knowledge you will assess in the course (and how you will assess, i.e., description of assignments).
    - Consider including tips for success and how these might help new students.
  + Include information on how and where additional support can be obtained, from the instructor, learning/teaching assistants, and campus support centers.
  + Use inclusive language regarding accommodations for students with disabilities/medical issues, religious holidays, military service, etc.
  + Describe what to expect in class meetings as well as in other course-related settings, e.g., office hours or scheduled appointments.
* Present information in such a way that a first-time college student can easily make sense of the syllabus and feel included in the learning experience.
  + Communicate clearly, in plain language, with limited academic jargon.
  + Highlight what students need to know to maximize their learning and success in a clear format and order.
    - While we all want jazzy and attractive (and interactive) syllabi, too much visual stimulation on a syllabus can sometimes disrupt a student’s understanding of content.
  + Clearly state the purpose behind activities/assignments and clearly state the intent behind format of course/activities.
    - Studies of personality types, life experiences, and other social contexts show that certain types of pedagogy (e.g. think pair share) are uncomfortable for some students and inhibitory for others. If you clearly state your intent behind activities, it can help students better understand why the format for an activity is important in successful learning of the course material.
  + Remind students that you are there to ensure their success in the course and beyond and that teacher/student communication is important.

2. Does your syllabus **WELCOME** students and create a classroom culture in which they feel safe and their culture respected?

* Communicate care and support.
  + Use language that make students feel cared for and valued.
* Convey appreciation of students’ entering skill level.
  + Communicate that you recognize that students enter the course at a variety of different skill levels.
* Convey a willingness to work with students who need extra help.
  + Indicate how long it takes you to respond to email, so students don’t feel like you are ignoring them.
  + Tell students that office hours are for them. Use language that demonstrates openness and encouragement to students about attending office hours to seek help/feedback, discuss next steps in their academic careers, or even to visit when they don’t have a specific question.
* Establish respect and inclusion as class norms.
  + Set ground rules for respectful class discussion or a statement about creating a respectful and safe learning environment for all.
    - You could note that you will create ground rules the first day in collaboration with the students.
  + Include a class anti-discrimination policy.
  + Include department mission statement of commitment to equity, justice, inclusion, and student success.
  + Communicate your commitment to talking through racist and discriminatory comments or behaviors that arise in class or on campus.
* Take into account religious holidays when scheduling major assignments or deadlines.
* Let students know that you are happy to honor their requests to address them by an alternate name or gender pronoun.

3. Does your syllabus **VALIDATE** students’ skills?

* Communicate your belief that all students can succeed.
  + Articulate that students are capable of obtaining their educational goals.
  + Note that aspects of the course can be challenging, and suggest that it is acceptable and beneficial for students to seek help, whether or not they are struggling.
    - Communicate that struggles are common, not a reflection of their self-worth.
    - Communicate that being challenged is part of the process of learning, and that despite challenges, you believe students are capable of succeeding in the course.
    - Stress the use of office hours and other ways to contact you and other sources of help, like the Writing Center, Learning Resources Center, etc.
  + Offer a variety of types of assignments and forms of assessment that give students multiple ways to demonstrate their learning and strengths.

4. Does your syllabus **CREATE A PARTNERSHIP** in which faculty and students work together to ensure success?

* Communicate a commitment to working with students for their success.
  + Describe your philosophy of teaching.
  + State what you expect of students as learners, and what students can expect from you as an instructor.
  + Articulate a willingness to receive feedback from students about your teaching practices.
    - Be open to hearing inclusive feedback from students. Acknowledge their lived experience and perspective, and your commitment to learning.
  + Articulate a willingness to use a variety of teaching approaches to foster learning.
    - This whole section and some of the earlier questions could be included in a syllabus section “About your instructor.” The section could discuss some background about you, your approach to teaching, your beliefs about student success, how long it takes you to respond to email, etc.
* Communicate respect for students as learners.
  + Articulate respect for students as autonomous, critical, and reflective learners.
  + State how class and course objectives will help students succeed in future academic work, advance career and life goals, and foster equity.

5. Does your syllabus **REPRESENT** a range of racial, ethnic, gender, socio-economic, sexual, disability, national, and other experiences and backgrounds in assignments, readings, and other materials?

* Include readings, videos, etc. by scholars from a variety of different minoritized groups.
  + Say something about the diversity of scholars you have included.
    - Be ready to discuss how your field may be influenced by privilege and the lack of minoritized scholars.
* Communicate the value of students’ backgrounds as sources of learning and knowledge.
  + Include or refer to CU Denver’s land acknowledgment or an abbreviated portion.

Read the following together with your students from your syllabus: “Acknowledging that we reside in the homelands of Indigenous Peoples is an important step in recognizing the history and the original stewards of these lands. Land acknowledgements must extend far beyond words. The United States has worked hard to erase the narratives of Indigenous Peoples over time. Land acknowledgement statements can help to remind us of the history, the contributions and the sacrifices Native peoples have made.

“We honor and acknowledge that we are on the traditional territories and ancestral homelands of the Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Ute nations. This area, specifically the confluence of the Platte and Cherry Creek Rivers was the epicenter for trade, information sharing, planning for the future, community, family and ally building, as well as conducting healing ceremonies for over 45 Indigenous Nations, including the Lakota, Kiowa, Comanche, Apache, Shoshone, Paiute, Zuni, Hopi among others.

“We must recognize Indigenous peoples as the original inhabitants, stewards and relatives of this land. As these words of acknowledgment are spoken and heard, remember the ties these nations still have to their traditional homelands. Let us acknowledge the painful history of genocide and forced removal from this territory and pay our respect to the diverse Indigenous peoples still connected to this land. Let us also give thanks to all Tribal Nations and the ancestors of this place.”

* + Include readings, activities, and assignments that are culturally responsive and inclusive.
  + Include assignments that ask students to draw on their experiential knowledge and/or knowledge from their communities.
  + Include assignments that ask students to investigate real-world problems affecting the communities from which they come.

6. Does your syllabus **DECONSTRUCT** dominant norms and systemic inequities?

* Promote awareness and critical examination of students’ assumptions, beliefs, and privilege.
  + Include readings, activities, and assignments that ask students to critically examine their assumptions about different minoritized groups, and the privileges or disadvantages they accrue by virtue of their identity.
* Promote awareness and critical examination of dominant norms and broader social inequities.
  + Include readings, activities, and assignments that ask students to examine the history and contemporary experiences of people and communities that face discrimination, racism, and marginalization.
  + Include readings, activities, and assignments that ask students to question dominant, discriminatory norms, including systemic and institutionalized inequities (e.g., in education, health, law).
  + Include readings, activities, and assignments that ask students to critically examine dominant norms and social inequities in your discipline.

If you would like help in creating a more equity-minded syllabus, we have resources! Please feel free to contact

[Marjorie Levine-Clark](mailto:marjorie.levine-clark@ucdenver.edu), Associate Dean for Diversity, Outreach, and Initiatives in CLAS; members of the Council on Diversity and Inclusion would be happy to work with you, too.

For STEM disciplines, [Amanda Beyer-Purvis](mailto:amanda.beyer-purvis@ucdenver.edu), Project Manager of the Office of Inclusive Excellence in STEM.

**Syllabi and parts of syllabi that demonstrate equity-minded thinking will be posted as resources**.