

Inclusivity, Equity, & Accessibility:

Bringing an Inclusion Lens to Your Classroom

This document was created by BCIT's Respect, Diversity, and Inclusion (RDI) Office in conjunction with the BCIT Student Association, and other stakeholders within the BCIT community.

*"Teaching inclusively means embracing student diversity in all forms -- race, ethnicity, gender, disability, socioeconomic background, ideology, even personality traits like introversion — as an asset. It means designing and teaching courses in ways that foster talent in all students, but especially those who come from groups traditionally underrepresented in higher education."*¹



The British Columbia Institute of Technology campuses are located on unceded traditional territories of the Coast Salish Nations, including the territories of [Skwxwú7mesh](#) (Squamish), [salilwataʔ](#) (Tsleil-Waututh), and [xwmaθkwəyam](#) (Musqueam).

¹ Sathy, V., & Hogan, K. (2019, July 22). How to Make Your Teaching More Inclusive. The Chronicle of Higher Education. https://www.chronicle.com/article/how-to-make-your-teaching-more-inclusive/?cid=gen_sign_in

By teaching inclusively, we can better ensure that all of our students are able to reach their full potential. To help move us towards a more inclusive, equitable, and accessible learning environment this document is intended to provide a short, *non-exhaustive*, overview of factors instructors may wish to consider.

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Preparing Course Materials

Consider the course materials, textbooks, articles, guest speakers and other resources you will be using, and ask yourself:

- Is there diversity in the authors of materials?
- Are there voices or perspectives that are missing?
- If there are missing perspectives, why is that, and how can you address it?

Consider the scenarios, activities, and examples you are using to demonstrate concepts:

- Do these show people in “stereotypical” ways? E.g. Are leaders mostly men, or couples always heterosexual? Are nurses always women?
- Do these examples reinforce stereotypes about certain groups, such as religions or cultures?
- Are people from underrepresented and equity-deserving groups included, especially in positions of power or prestige?

Consider the authors of the teaching materials you use:

Including learning materials created by people with different backgrounds and perspectives is always important.

However, it is especially important that when equity-deserving groups are the subject of learning, that the resources used include those created by people within that particular group. Their voices and lived experiences should be given more weight than those written by people outside the group. For example, if a class is talking about disability issues in their sector, it is important to include resources created by people with disabilities, and/or have someone living with a disability as a guest speaker.

Including work from underrepresented and equity-deserving groups should not be an “add-on” achieved by one example, but should be used throughout the design/redesign of a course.



What are equity-deserving groups?

Equity-deserving, also called equity-seeking, refers to groups which have historically faced (and still face) barriers to full participation in society and includes (but is not limited to) Indigenous peoples, Racialized groups, people with disabilities, women, and individuals who are part of the 2S/LGBTQ+ community.

Accessibility and Universal Design

Employing universal design principles can lead to increased student interest and engagement with the materials and better learning outcomes.

1

Start by considering your own biases and misconceptions around people with disabilities or neurodiversity and avoid making assumptions about their capabilities.

2

Take steps to be proactive by ensuring your course content and method of delivery is accessible from the start instead of waiting for requests to accommodate students' disabilities.

3

Ensuring accessibility, can be beneficial for *all* students, including those with different ways of learning and/or varying language abilities.

Here are some simple and powerful ways to support accessibility in the classroom

- Ensure that multimedia is accessible, by including closed captioning or descriptive text for videos and photos.
- Ensure you consider [accessibility standards](#), for example, by using high contrast between text and backgrounds and large, non-decorative font.
- Provide notes, or an outline of your lecture in advance to students.
- Include varied methods of delivery for materials such as lectures, videos, and assigned readings.
- Allow recording of lectures so that all students can review the lessons on their own time.
- Create multiple copies of exams or assignments to protect evaluation integrity in case a student requires an extension or alternate time.
- Provide multiple evaluation format options (for example, the option of a paper, a quiz, or a video presentation) to allow students flexibility in how they demonstrate their knowledge.
- Provide all students with additional time to complete evaluations or schedule evaluations before or after breaks to make it easier to provide extended time.
- Contact [Accessibility Services](#) for more information on accessibility and Universal Design.

Quick tips to make your classroom inclusive

Students will come to your class with diverse life experience. Some will have lived their whole lives close to campus, some will have travelled from the other side of the globe, some will come from families of academic scholars, others may be the first in their family or community to attend post-secondary education, some may be straight out of high school, and some may have been out of school for decades.

Given the diverse experiences of your students, it is important not to assume they know what is expected of them. Rather, it is a better practice to clearly and specifically articulate expectations you have of them, both in terms of learning outcomes as well as with regards to class behaviour and participation. Expectations should be shared in multiple ways, such as written in the syllabus, verbally, and in presentation notes both at the beginning of the term and throughout.

Ensure your syllabus sets the tone for diversity and inclusion

- Recognize traditional territories with a [land acknowledgment](#).
- Remind students of their right to accommodation and the [process](#) for making such requests.
- Ensure [gender neutral language](#) is used.
- Reference BCIT's Harassment and Discrimination [Policy](#) and [Procedure](#) which prohibits discrimination, harassment, sexual harassment, and bullying.
- Review a [multifaith calendar](#) to avoid scheduling tests and due dates on significant religious or cultural holidays.



Provide resources

- Advise students of resources available to them, such as [Early Assist](#), [Counselling Services](#), [Accessibility Services](#), [Indigenous Initiatives and Partnerships](#), and the [Student Association](#).
- Remind students that any instances of discrimination, harassment, racism etc. can be reported to you, the [RDI Office](#), or [Student Association's Advocacy Office](#), and any safety concerns can be reported to [Safety, Security and Emergency Management \(SSEM\)](#).



Establish clear expectations for classroom interactions

- Highlight the importance of respectful and civil interactions and the obligations on students and yourself to contribute to an inclusive and respectful learning environment.
- Clearly communicate that inappropriate behaviour such as offensive "jokes," stereotypes, and other negative comments will not be tolerated. Ensure students understand why this is inappropriate and what the consequences will be for this behaviour.



Be the example you wish your students to follow

- Model inclusive and respectful language. Ensure it is clear, gender-neutral, and person-centered.
- Make time for celebrations, both small and large.
- Consider introducing yourself with your gender pronouns and encourage (but do not require) students to do the same. You can include your pronouns in your email signature and zoom screen name, and encourage others to do the same.
- Take care to avoid making assumptions of your students. For example, assumptions that all international students come from privileged backgrounds, or that people from certain countries are better at certain subjects can be very harmful.
- Remember that just because a student is affiliated with a particular group, for example gender, race, religion, or national origin, that does not mean they are experts on issues related to the group, nor are they a spokesperson for that whole group.
- Invite and be open to feedback on your own behaviour. Recognize your reaction if someone informs you that you've hurt them, and be willing to make changes.




Actively work towards inclusivity

- Intervene if you observe or become aware of inappropriate action or behaviour. As an instructor you have an obligation to take reasonable steps to prevent or terminate comments or behaviour which are harassing or discriminatory. Seek assistance from your Program Head, Associate Dean, or the RDI Office if you don't know how to respond.
- Provide correction when you witness microaggressions. Silence will be seen as condoning the behaviour. Examples of microaggressions may include telling a non-white student they have "good English", or commenting that a person with a disability is "inspiring" just for completing a regular everyday task.
- Provide context or explanation when using idioms, metaphors, or pop culture references – these won't be interpreted or understood the same by everybody.
- Identify why certain perspectives are missing or underrepresented in course materials.
- Be aware of how your unconscious bias may impact your view of, or interactions with, students.
- Look for ways to limit or remove the opportunity for unconscious bias to impact you, especially when making important decisions about students, such as recommending them for placements, scholarships, or evaluating their work.



Further increase your knowledge about issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion

- Remember, staff and students can contact the RDI Office anytime to get more information about training opportunities, resources, or to discuss any concerns related to respect, diversity, and inclusion.
 - There is no single book or course that will make someone an inclusion expert, but there are many resources available to BCIT staff to help them along their learning journey.
 - BCIT offers free online courses (through the Learning Hub), workshops, and webinars on topics such as unconscious bias, Indigenous awareness, racism, and microaggressions.
 - Follow the [Respect, Diversity, and Inclusion page on The Loop](#) for announcements on available training opportunities, useful resources, and RDI's monthly newsletter.
-  For more inclusive practices and information: [Inclusive Teaching Practices Toolkit](#) | [ACUE](#)



Above graphic from www.intdevalliance.scot

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