

# Guidance for Creating a Diversity, Inclusivity, and Respect Syllabus Statement<sup>1</sup>

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Teaching inclusively means embracing student diversity in many forms — race, ethnicity, gender, disability, socioeconomic background, sexuality, ideology, identity, religion, and personality traits like introversion — as an asset.

Including a diversity statement in your syllabi can signal several important values to your students. A diversity syllabi statement can set the tone for your course. It can set up a supportive learning environment, and it can transparently set expectations for dialogue on difficult topics. Much of this is dependent on the kind of statement you create and what values are important to you in the classroom.

Communicating your commitments to diversity, equity and inclusion to your learning community is a nuanced and highly contextual endeavor. Who you are, who your learners are, and the content and process of your teaching will each shape your values and commitments.

Before you begin drafting your syllabus statement, consider:

- What's your vision?
  - In your own words, how do equity and inclusion efforts connect to the success of your course, learning outcomes, or the mission of your program?
  - If equity and full participation of all learners is achieved, what will that look like, sound like, and feel like in your classroom?
  - How do you hope learners will describe their experience in the classroom, their relationships with their peers, and their relationship with you?
- What's your strategy?
  - How will you demonstrate and reinforce each student's legitimacy and value in the learning environment?
  - How will you ensure that all student voices are heard, respected, and valued?
  - What expectations will you set for classroom discussion and cooperation?
  - What expectations will you set to guide dialogue on difficult subjects related to sociopolitical issues?
  - How will conflict be engaged and resolved?
  - How will you attend to power asymmetries in the course and support learners who are disproportionately marginalized or harmed in difficult dialogue?
- What's your accountability?
  - How will you create an environment where feedback to improve the learning environment is welcome?
  - Where can students turn if they are not getting their needs met, and are not comfortable bringing concerns to you?
  - Who will you partner with to ensure you receive and integrate critical feedback?

Additional considerations while drafting your syllabus statement. You may find it useful to:

- Use a variety of examples to describe or illustrate concepts.

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<sup>1</sup> This guidance was adapted from our University Innovation Alliance colleagues at Georgia State University. Information was taken from their [Center for Excellence in Teaching, Learning & Online Education](#).

- Provide guidelines for how to engage in respectful classroom discussions.
- Include your students in the planning of standards for classroom discussions and class climate.
- Ensure your syllabus has a warm tone.<sup>2</sup>
- Assert that diversity – as represented in your discipline, course content, and classroom – is an asset for learning.
- Signal to learners potentially contentious topics in the course content.<sup>3</sup>
- After drafting your statement, check whether the rest of your syllabus and course design matches your diversity statement in tone and spirit.
- Explore the guidance for DEI learning listed on the [Office of Institutional Diversity's website](#).<sup>4</sup>
- If you would like additional assistance while creating a syllabi statement, you can reach out to the Office of Institutional Diversity for a one-on-one consultation. Schedule your consult [here](#).

As you prepare a unique statement, it may be helpful to consider the statements of others. You may review and draw upon the following list of examples. All of the statements below are suggestions and may be edited or revised to meet the needs of your class.

### **SAMPLE: General**

In this course, we will be having hard conversations about identity, power, difference and discrimination. We will be discussing social barriers and how they appear historically and in day-to-day life. We all have different opinions on these topics, and I expect that you be open to learning about experiences outside of your own.

Respect for each other and our occasionally differing viewpoints is essential. While we may disagree, an absolute requirement in this course is to treat each other with empathy, dignity and respect. This means that you should think about potential impact of your words on your classmates. I ask that you consider whether the intent of your words matches the potential impact – often we don't intend to do harm, but harm occurs anyway. This also means that you should try to approach viewpoints with which you do not agree with curiosity and questions, rather than judgment. Our classroom is a space where everyone must feel able to fully participate in difficult conversations. We will work hard together to create this inclusive learning environment. This means holding each other, including me, accountable to this commitment.

If at any time during the course you have questions, thoughts, ideas, feedback or concerns about the learning environment, please connect with me after class, during office hours, or over email. If you have concerns that you do not feel comfortable discussing with me, you may submit a bias incident report at <http://biasincidentreport.oregonstate.edu>.

### **SAMPLE: Difficult Dialogue**

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<sup>2</sup> OSU's own Dr. Regan Gurung, associate vice provost and executive director of the center for teaching and learning and professor and director of the general psychology program, published a [recent study](#) on warm tones that was featured in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Dr. Gurung found that a warm tone on the syllabus made students more likely to reach out for help.

<sup>3</sup> For instance, does your discipline or course content explicitly or implicitly raise sensitive or controversial topics related to diversity and inclusion? If so, your statement could acknowledge the emergence of these topics in class discussion.

<sup>4</sup> Reading through OID's information on competencies such as utilizing inclusive and affirming language, embracing collaboration across difference, practicing cultural humility, and maintaining global consciousness can help you develop or update language.

My vision for this course includes classroom discussion in person and/or on the Canvas discussion board, where all members of our community feel comfortable to respectfully share their viewpoint even in disagreement. This means we approach each other with kindness and empathy and does not include yelling, all caps responses, hurtful comments, slurs of any kind, etc. My goal as a faculty member is to provide a safe learning environment where all students can reach their full potential. I am committed to providing course readings from diverse communities, ensuring that all students feel comfortable in this class, and acknowledging places in our discipline where systemic bias has historically occurred and may be a persistent problem during our times. As a class community, I hope that we can all embrace these values in how we engage with each other.

### **SAMPLE: Bias in the Classroom**

As a student in this course, you matter. During the first week of class, we will collectively set expectations around course discussion, our interactions in the classroom, and respectful disagreement. As an instructor at Oregon State University, I am committed to equity, diversity, and inclusion and making sure that all student voices are heard in my classroom. That said, I will not tolerate hate speech of any kind. If at any point you feel you have experienced bias or harassment from anyone in my classroom, please reach out to me. OSU defines bias as “an act directed toward an individual or community based upon actual or perceived background or identity including: age, color, disability, gender identity or expression, marital status, national origin, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, or veteran status.” You are also within your rights as a university student to file a report with the [Bias Incident Response Team](#). The Bias Response Team can provide resources and support to students who have experienced bias. Read [the FAQ](#) to learn more about what bias is and what happens in the process of reporting.

### **SAMPLE: STEM<sup>5</sup>**

In an ideal world, science would be objective. However, much of science is subjective and is historically built on a small subset of privileged voices. I acknowledge that many of the readings for this course were authored by white men. Furthermore, the course often focuses on historically important experiments/data/studies, which were mostly conducted by white men. Recent edits to the course reader were undertaken to include more diverse perspectives and achievements of folks from marginalized groups/examples from the field conducted by folks from marginalized groups. However, I acknowledge that it is possible that there may be both overt and covert biases in the material due to the lens with which it was written, even though the material is primarily of a scientific nature. I am continually learning about ways to create an inclusive classroom, one that recognizes historical biases.

Furthermore, I would like to create a learning environment for my students that supports a diversity of thoughts, perspectives and experiences, and honors your identities (including race, gender, class, sexuality, religion, ability, etc.). If you have a name and/or set of pronouns that differ from those that appear in your official records, please let me know!

### **SAMPLE: STEM**

As a course focused on community and ecosystem ecology, this class may seem to operate outside issues of diversity equity and inclusion; and in an ideal world, science would indeed be entirely and unequivocally objective. However, much of science can be subjective, and scientific fields have been historically built on a small subset of privileged voices. Therefore, even though the material in this

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<sup>5</sup> This STEM statement was adapted from guidance on inclusive teaching statements at Brown University: <https://www.brown.edu/sheridan/teaching-learning-resources/inclusive-teaching/statements>

course is primarily of a scientific nature, I acknowledge that it is possible there may be both overt and covert biases in the material due to the lens with which it was written. Ultimately, integrating a diverse set of experiences is important as we advance our field and develop a more comprehensive understanding of ecology.

Within this classroom and in all classroom interactions, respect for each other and for our occasionally differing viewpoints is essential. While people may disagree, an absolute requirement in this course is to treat each other with empathy, dignity and respect. It is important that we create a learning environment in which everyone feels safe and respected (which in-turn increases everyone's potential to learn). I, like many people, am still in the process of learning about diverse perspectives and identities. I will work to be as forthright and respectful as possible in considering a diversity of perspectives and identities, and I ask that you do so as well. We will work *together* to create an inclusive learning environment. This means holding each other, including me, accountable to this commitment. If something is said in class (by anyone) that makes you feel uncomfortable, please talk to me about it, or if you are more comfortable remaining anonymous, you may provide feedback by contacting staff at OSU's Office of Institutional Diversity (<http://leadership.oregonstate.edu/diversity>), at the OSU Equal Opportunity and Access office (<http://eo.oregonstate.edu/>), or at the OSU Diversity and Cultural Engagement program (<http://dce.oregonstate.edu/>). I believe the learning environment should honor your identities (including race, gender, class, sexuality, religion, ability, etc.). To help accomplish this, if you have a name and/or set of pronouns that differ from those that appear in your official OSU records, please let me know.