

# Why Inclusive Teaching?

Inclusive teaching refers to intentional approaches to curriculum, course design, teaching practice, and assessment that create a learning environment where all students feel that their differences are valued and respected, have equitable access to learning and other educational opportunities, and are supported to learn to their full potential. It is not a checklist, but rather a lens for instructors to consider and address the ways historical and systemic inequities continue to shape students' learning experiences.

In this resource, we answer some common questions you might have if you are beginning to explore approaches to inclusive teaching, or are curious about the benefits of this practice. To learn more about specific aspects of inclusive teaching, explore [resources for faculty at Inclusive Teaching @ UBC.](#)



## “How can inclusive teaching benefit students?”

Studies show that engagement with equity, diversity and inclusion through inclusive teaching improves the experiences of students, including by helping them develop a stronger grasp of the class material (*Clayton-Pedersen et al., 2008; Salazar et al., 2017*).

This is especially true in environments where certain groups are underrepresented. For example, a study of women students' experiences in men-dominated STEM settings showed the impact of instructor support and interventions in the course. Engineering instructors helped women to interpret adversities and worries about belonging as a normal part of the experience in engineering, rather than as a symptom of permanent lack of belonging because of their gender. This process offered them a more hopeful lens with which to view daily adversity in their field, ultimately helping them form more bonds with their classmates, decreasing their experiences of social marginalization, and helping boost their overall performance in the course (*Walton, et al., 2015*).

Like the women in this study, many students with marginalized identities come with the knowledge and experiences of how their identity groups are stereotyped or stigmatized in their field, and in society. If their instructors reinforce these types of stereotypes — by setting low expectations for their academic achievement, for example, or by providing only negative feedback — the student may suffer from a self-fulfilling sense of failure (*Canning et al., 2019*).

Similarly, when racialized students see their group being misrepresented or not represented at all in the course materials, for example, these experiences limit the effectiveness of classroom dialogues, resulting in few opportunities for growth and development — not only for these students but also the other students in the course (*Linder et al., 2015*).

In essence, fostering a sense of belonging among students of varying identities and life experiences is a crucial element of teaching, which helps students perform to the best of their abilities (*Brandon & Charlton, 2011*).

## “What are the potential benefits of inclusive teaching for instructors?”

Investing time to proactively design your course with inclusion as an underlying thread can ensure a smoother term for both students and instructors. Courses designed with diverse student needs in mind from the start reduce the need for 'retrofitting' the course to be more inclusive later on.

For example, adding alt-text on your lecture slides, or structuring a handout or web page using heading levels, will help students who use a screen reader follow and grasp the content of the materials. It is much more efficient to design your course with these features in mind, rather than trying to make changes in the middle of the term after a student requests that you do so.

Making your course accessible to student needs also means that your students will have more mental bandwidth to devote to your course, because they won't have to spend time and energy advocating for their needs to be considered (*Arkilander, 2020*).

When you teach with diverse students in mind proactively and throughout the course, it communicates to students that you see and care about them. This contributes to developing a strong rapport between you and your students, ultimately supporting your teaching effectiveness as well as student success (*Yeager et al., 2014; Salazar et al., 2017*).



## “A lot of research on inclusive teaching takes place in a U.S. context — does this really apply in Canada?”

Research on the impacts of inclusive teaching conducted in Canada (*Lombardi, Vukovic, & Sala-Bars, 2015*) show that there is no evidence that these impacts differ dramatically from what U.S.-based research has shown. Regardless of where the studies were conducted, the outcomes show that students do not learn as well when they feel that the course material is not relevant to them and their identities.

When people feel stereotyped and a lack of belonging, they are demoralized and their performance suffers — and this is true across borders.

## “Why should I change my whole teaching approach just to accommodate one person’s needs?”

Inclusive teaching is more than accommodating one person’s needs.

Many aspects of students’ identities are invisible (e.g., Indigenous ancestry, gender identity, first generation college attendance, learning disabilities, and others), so you never know who or how many students might benefit from inclusive teaching.

Many strategies for making your teaching more inclusive can also benefit a wider group of students. For example, closed captions on videos used in your course can help support students who are hard-of-hearing or deaf — but they can also support students with English as an additional language, and students who may be viewing this content in loud environments (e.g., while on transit).

These types of strategies are not only individual accommodations, though individual students may directly benefit from certain practice. Inclusive teaching creates an environment where all students ultimately are better supported to learn and engage with the class (*Clayton-Pedersen et al., 2008; Salazar et al., 2017*).

### *Learn more*

Learn more about potential benefits of inclusive teaching, and ways you can make your courses more inclusive, by visiting [Inclusive Teaching @ UBC](#)

Find the full [list of references at the Why Inclusive Teaching? wiki page](#)



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