

Philosophy of Equity and Inclusion

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The ideas of equity and inclusion in the classroom boil down to fairness and accessibility. A large part of this idea is the celebration of diversity in our students. As stated in “Scientific Teaching” (Handelsman, Miller, and Pfund, 2007):

“Human diversity refers to the variation of human experience, ability, and characteristics. Diversity should be considered in teaching because (1) we owe all students education about the diverse world they live in, (2) diversity enhances learning, and (3) each student will experience the classroom differently from everyone else in the class. Differences in education, experience, cognitive styles, personalities, abilities, cultural backgrounds, physiology, and innate characteristics conspire to make the classroom experience unique for each student. Incorporating human diversity into science education and recognizing student differences and our reaction to them can prepare students more effectively for the global community, enable us to reach more students, and enhance the vibrancy and quality of research and teaching on college and university campuses.”

This quote beautifully summarizes the best elements of why we should appreciate, encourage, and celebrate diversity in the classroom. Understanding that all students do not come to classroom on equal or equitable footing allows instructors to adjust their teaching style to be accessible for all students. For students with physical, mental, or emotional challenges, accommodations in the classroom, like extensions of due dates, multiple platforms for learning (classroom vs online), quiet rooms for tests, hearing and vision tools, and other school resources can make or break their success.

At Portland State University there are many resources for students such as the Disability Resource Center, the Women’s Resource Center, the Queer Resource Center, and more. As an instructor, I am responsible to my students to help them identify and connect with the resources that they may need for the success as students, or in other aspects of their lives. To being this process it is imperative that I listen to my students. I need to ask them what their needs are then guide them towards resources that can be helpful. In my syllabi I do my best to give a primary introduction to the services that are available to them at our institution.

I also strive to make accommodations for the diversity of student needs. This may take shape in many ways such as accessible documents that are able to be read by programs that dictate documents for vision-impaired students, allowances for students who are parents to have excusable absences for child care emergencies or allowing children in the classroom, and asking students that are comfortable to share their preferred pronouns.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion are driving values in my life both inside and outside of the classroom. I am to create a safe and equitable learning environment for my students to provide the best possible space for students share, learn, and grow. I also acknowledge that I am still

learning about how best to be equitable and inclusive. Therefore I spend reflective energy on my classroom practice to find ways to improve myself as a supporter and practitioner of equity and inclusion.