

TIPS FOR INCLUSIVE TEACHING

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It started with a blogpost Maha wrote about how we often reproduce marginality in open online spaces (Bali, 2016a) This got Steve thinking about ways of being more inclusive in regular classrooms, and our discussion led to some of these (non-comprehensive) tips for creating classroom atmospheres that are inclusive of students who are minorities, uncomfortable speaking in class, or non-native speakers. It is important for the instructor to determine what the problem is for each particular class. Are some students uncomfortable speaking because they have little experience doing so? Are they afraid that they will have nothing substantive to contribute, or that others will think what they have to say is silly or incorrect or stupid? Do they think they won't fit into the group because their experiences are different from the others? Each of these problems can be addressed by the instructor.

1. **Reflection/writing time** before speaking time. Some students who are more reflective (or non-native speakers who need time to put their thoughts into sentences) can benefit from opportunities to stop and write before the discussion is opened up to the whole class. This is, of course, unless extemporaneous conversation is a key learning goal for your class. In Steve's experience, all students are more comfortable speaking when you've asked them to write first, because it quite literally gives them something to say. The writing can be assigned before as homework, but due at class time. Or you can ask them to take 1-5 minutes in class before you start discussion. This also allows quiet students to "compete" with dominant personalities.
2. **Small group vs large group.** Shy and minority students may feel more comfortable speaking up in smaller groups rather than larger groups. However, as a teacher, it may be wise to walk around and listen in – occasionally one very dominant personality in a small group conversation can silence others. It is always important to remember that when we let go of some of our authority as teachers, other power dynamics remain in the room, based on race, class, gender, sexuality, ability and yes, even just personality. Dominant personalities come in (at least) two types: Students who regularly have something interesting and substantive to contribute, and students who dominate because they like talking, they like being the center of attention, or they really want to get whatever points are available towards a grade for class discussion. One way to address the latter is speaking to them outside of class and telling them, while their enthusiasm is great, we also need to give other students a chance to speak. Steve suggests they might like to wait before speaking to give other students a chance. If they do so, other students will often say what they had wanted to contribute. The former type of students are more challenging because you don't want to shut them up. Fortunately, the same approach of speaking to them outside class also works. In fact, these students tend to be more receptive than the other group to allowing others to speak first. One approach to these students is to provide a limited amount of time for each student to speak (although Maha finds this problematic as less fluent speakers usually need more time to say the same thing). Steve usually starts the term by pairing students up and asking them to spend a few minutes introducing themselves, and then coming back together and asking each student to introduce their partner. This creates the precedent that every student will have a chance to speak. He tries to pair students with similar personalities to start: dominant speakers together and quiet students together.
3. **Recording vs Presenting Option.** Unless public speaking is an essential element of your class, you can give students the option to record a video instead. Steve says UMW's Speaking Center

offers the facilities for students to practice presentations privately, while making a video recording of the speech. The Center's tutors, who are also students, then go over the presentation with the presenters. More often than not the students say that the review with the tutor was less stressful and more helpful than they expected. When students do not perform well the first time — on their video— the tutors can help them do better and point out that public speaking is very much a learnable skill with practice. With practice, students may come to realize that their public speaking is quite good and that may lead them to speak up in the classroom in lieu of creating a video to speak for them. At the same time, developing skills to create a good video is useful as an end in itself.

4. **Use personal response systems** to increase participation. Maha has found that this works for some classes where students aren't very talkative (e.g. an engineering class she was once doing an in-class assessment with). Instead of having the same 3-4 students answer all questions on behalf of the class, using a personal response system such as NearPod, Socrative or even Google Forms can allow all students in the class an opportunity to participate. This may not fit with very small classes, but is occasionally useful for classes as small as 20. Personal response systems have the potential to draw students more deeply into the class session, which makes it more likely that they will have something to say later.
5. **Digital and Analog Participation.** Give students credit for participating differently online vs face to face. Some may prefer one mode over another. As long as there are enough opportunities for both throughout your course, and unless one mode is essential to your learning goals you can encourage students to participate in whatever mix makes sense to them. Steve shows how this can be mixed up in a fully online course: students interact daily over Twitter and he also hosts weekly Google Hangouts for students who want to speak and listen more directly. Often the participants in those two groups are different and both types of participation get credit.
6. **Question Your Content and Pedagogy.** Ask yourself if your content is inclusive of different cultural perspectives or if it privileges one (and how this affects non-dominant students). Ask other faculty and even students to contribute alternative content. Consider whether your pedagogical approach privileges particular students all the time (e.g. eloquent speakers, those comfortable with debate, good writers) without supporting other students to develop in those areas. Find ways to support students who need more support (e.g. get help from campus) or offer alternatives yourself. In seminars, Steve often begins the course by asking students to identify 2-3 questions on the subject of the course which they would like to explore in the course. He then sorts and collates the responses to create the list of topics they will study throughout the semester, but he may also add a few topics of his own to ensure that everything necessary is covered. He hopes students will take more ownership of the course if it studies topics of interest to them. Maha often takes a content-independent approach to teaching, which she has written about previously (Bali, 2016b).
7. **Don't Assume, Give Choices.** Don't assume certain students will prefer one option over another — just make the choices available.

There are many ways to be more inclusive. What do you do to make your classes more inclusive of shy or minority students? Send your comments to bali@aucegypt.edu

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