

# Strategies for More Inclusive Classrooms

## Case Studies Exercise

- Consider and discuss your case study;
- Choose one of the group to transcribe your notes on the note taking slide, and another to share to the large group;
- Consider possible strategies and solutions, but also barriers that you may face in these situations as well.

## Case #1: Language barriers

You are teaching an introductory level course in your Department with 100 students. You have 4 Teaching Assistants, and each one facilitates a Lab/Tutorial session with 25 of the students. You are told that about half of your students will speak English as an additional language, and many are recently arrived in Canada. You have several weeks until classes start and are planning your syllabus.

How can you build in accommodations and support for your learners into the syllabus and lesson plans? What considerations do you include?

## Case #1: note taking slide

- Facilitating peer support (e.g. allowing students to pair up/meet one another through Canvas or in-person)
- Having a diverse TA group, multilingual, use diverse perspectives to create syllabus and lesson plans
  - Show diverse teaching materials (e.g., TED talks, authors)
  - Encouraging students to incorporate diverse sources (e.g., papers in other languages)
- Use formative assessment to show progress, multimodal assessment
- Provide resources (e.g., TA support) for international students, create safe space to discuss issues
- Across the board approach: Providing everyone with base knowledge about the assessment format, provide materials/resources/rubric before the lab/tutorial so students can prepare
  - Can provide a glossary of terms (can also be collaborative)
- Try out group work, might reduce pressure and allow students to pool their skills
- Self-assessment may reduce fear of judgement
- Creating a collective tool (e.g., google doc) for notes

## Case #2: Working students

You are the Teaching Assistant for a 3rd year course in your department. You know the professor well and have a good rapport. In one of the discussions the professor led in class, the topic of working while in school came up, and about  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the class raised their hands when the professor asked how many were working while in school. When prompted, they mentioned the rising cost of living, rising tuition rates, lack of family financial support, and lack of affordable housing near campus. A few mention the cost of daycare.

The professor has 'no late submissions' policy, and does not offer office hours because in the past they haven't been well attended. You are concerned that the students are not as well supported as they could be. What exactly are you concerned about, and what are some things you can do to support the students?

## Case #2: note taking slide

- No office hours =
  - no way to check whether students are understanding the concepts/teaching team can't get a clear look at the knowledge of the students
  - Environment is only inclusive if it is flexible—there is a need to change to fit the needs of this particular group of students
- Solutions:
  - Talk directly with the prof (because the case study notes you have a good rapport with the prof) about changing the policies, adding office hours
  - Getting together with a group of TAs (if there are more than one for this course) to speak with the instructor
  - Bringing literature to the prof about un-grading, examples of other profs removing late policies
  - Possibility to reach out to the department/institution about needs based funding; letting students know about the financial support options available
  - Encourage students to reach out to the department about deadlines (perhaps staggering deadlines more in the department—though be mindful we don't want to go over the prof's head)
  - Potentially reaching out to the department (maybe department meeting?), this scenario might serve as good rep of what the needs are of the students in the department at large

## Case #3: Old school professor

You are a Teaching Assistant for a first year course in your Department, and a new graduate student yourself. The professor of the course has been teaching it the same way for 20 years, and always does two midterms and one final exam, with no other assessment. Your position entails office hours once a week, invigilation, and grading, as well as attending the classes. You're the only TA.

The professor lectures, but has no active learning strategies or methods. You are concerned that the students aren't going to be ready for the midterms or final exam. You have met some of the students and a few are the first in their families to attend postsecondary school.

What can you do to help support the students? What can you do in your position?

## Case #3: note taking slide

Barrier: New graduate student unaware that this may not be a departmental norm, has little time, clear power differential.

Solution: Consult a mediator to see if this is okay, voice concerns and remain anonymous.

Barrier: Students are unable to succeed given the lack of alternative learning techniques.

Solution: TA can share active learning strategies one-on-one for students who attend office hours (if TA is comfortable, they can relay to the instructor). Concrete example: Give students in-office opportunities to chat in small groups, low stakes quizzes.

Barrier: Misaligned cultural norms (for students who are first in their families to attend post-secondary)

Solution: Have an open mind to learning about how each student learns best (in the context of their culture)

## Case #4: Racism on Campus

You are in the middle of teaching a 3rd year course with about 40 students. Things are going well and the students have a good rapport with each other and with you. This is your first time teaching a course on your own.

A rise in racism and anti-Semitism on campus is directly impacting a few of your students. They feel unsafe and worried. This course is required for graduation in their Department, so they do not feel able to drop out of the course or the semester.

What are some ways in which you can support your learners? How can you address these concerns to the class?



## Case #4: note taking slide

- The problem is happening outside of the classroom but can still be addressed in the course
- Offer the class to be hybrid if anyone does not want to come to campus (e.g. if they are feeling unsafe)
- Encourage folks to be buddies and walk together from bus stops to classrooms (addressing physical safety)
- Fostering a safe space in the classroom and acknowledge what is going on, reinforcing that this is taken seriously in the classroom
- Inviting folks to office hours to discuss what can support learning, making a space for students to talk about these barriers towards their learning
- Finding a way to share resources (e.g. talks, seminars, ceremonies)
- Helping to connect towards a community
- Extending towards outside of the course if you have the power to address this at higher levels
- Being more flexible with deadlines
- Barriers
  - Time
  - Logistics (e.g. how to transition to hybrid course versus in person)
  - Finding a balance between being flexible/understanding but also still having structure and deadlines