



## TIPSHEET

### CREATING AN INCLUSIVE COURSE AND CLASSROOM: STRATEGIES FOR INSTRUCTORS

Strategies outlined in this document can help you to ensure that your course and classroom are inclusive to as many students as possible. Inclusive teaching aims to eliminate common barriers to student success and to provide all students with the opportunity to demonstrate their facility with the course material.

Please note that this document draws a distinction between *inclusive teaching* and *accommodations* made in response to student physical, cognitive or learning disabilities.

Accommodations are necessary responses to particular student needs. If students have an accommodation request, they may work with you or through a campus accessibility office to arrange an appropriate accommodation. Please visit the websites of the campus accessibility offices to learn more about these services and processes (for information about these offices, please see the document [Academic Support Services & Accessibility Offices at the UofT](#)).

While accommodations *respond* to particular student needs, inclusive teaching *anticipates* common barriers to student learning and incorporates additional flexibility and approaches from which all students, including students with disabilities, those with significant home or professional responsibilities, English language learners, and first-generation university students, can benefit.

Both accommodations and inclusive teaching help the UofT meet the standards set out in the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act. Learn more about AODA standards here: <http://www.aoda.utoronto.ca/>. Additionally, the following UofT statements and policies address the importance of providing an accessible classroom:

- <http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/policies/disabled.htm>
- <http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/policies/religious.htm>

This document provides strategies for instructors who wish to establish an inclusive classroom. Additionally, you may wish to consult the following supporting documents:

- [Inclusive Educational Technology](#)
- [Academic Support Services & Accessibility Offices at the UofT](#) (these resources can be included on your course outline or shared with students)



## PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FOR ACCESSIBLE & INCLUSIVE TEACHING

### SYLLABUS DESIGN & COURSE INFORMATION

- On or before the first day of class, distribute all course information, including required readings, assignment due dates, and schedules for tests and exams in case students need to pursue alternative arrangements.
- Highlight unfamiliar or less-common course requirements (including, for example, field trips, service learning, or group projects) to allow students to identify aspects of the course for which they may need to pursue advance arrangements or alternatives.
- Include some detail about assignments and exams in the syllabus (or in a supplemental document) so that students can determine whether they will need to seek accommodation or propose alternative arrangements. You might, for example, briefly describe the type of questions that will be included on the exam (multiple choice, essay, etc.). Similarly, you might note whether assignments will require in-class or other timed components, oral presentations, or collaborative work. Often these details are distributed later in the semester as the assignment or exam approaches, but distributing this information at the outset of the course can help students plan their semester and identify any additional resources they might require.
- Communicate your desire to establish an inclusive classroom and course. This may include an invitation for students to speak to you if they have any concerns about their ability to succeed in the course. This may also include guidelines for participation and interaction to establish an inclusive class atmosphere.

You may use or adapt either of the sample statements below on your course syllabus:

*Sample syllabus statement from Accessibility Services (St. George Campus):*

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. In particular, if you have a disability or health consideration that may require accommodations, please feel free to approach me and/or the Accessibility Services Office as soon as possible. The Accessibility Services staff are available by appointment to assess specific needs, provide referrals and arrange appropriate accommodations. The sooner you let them and me know your needs, the quicker we can assist you in achieving your learning goals in this course.

(From <http://www.accessibility.utoronto.ca/staff/accomstrat.htm>)

*Sample syllabus statement from U of T Professor Daniel Justice (Professor, department of English):*

In this course we will occasionally discuss controversial social and political issues, so be prepared. The atmosphere of the class should be as conducive as possible to positive inquiry and the free exchange of ideas—an Indigenous “harmony ethic” that gives all members of the community the opportunity to share their knowledge with others. Please be considerate of other opinions and beliefs, even if you do not agree with them, but also feel free to express your own opinions if you can do so respectfully. Respect also includes being prompt to class, finishing course work by due dates, refraining from mocking or interrupting others, and giving full attention to your fellow students and the professor. **I do not tolerate rudeness, slurs, or personal attacks.** Violation of this policy will result in a significant



lowering of your participation grade or, if necessary, more substantial penalties. See the Code of Student Conduct for more information.

- List student support resources on your campus, including accessibility services, writing centres, math aid centres, registrars, counseling services, and academic skills centres. You can use the information available on the document [Academic Support Services & Accessibility Offices at the UofT](#) for this purpose.
- Make the syllabus available in paper and electronically in an accessible format (see Inclusive Educational Technology below), and consider posting the syllabus to a class website or Blackboard site.

## COURSE DESIGN

### Readings

- Let students know the required readings as early as possible, and try to resist changing the readings during the semester. Students who require readings in alternative formats (for example, electronic versions of textbooks) sometimes require substantial advance notice to be able to acquire readings they can use.
- If you add readings during the semester, try whenever possible to distribute them in accessible formats (see [Inclusive Educational Technology](#)). For example, if you are distributing a newspaper article, add a link to the HTML version of the article from a newspaper website to the class Blackboard site in addition to or instead of distributing photocopies.
- When ordering textbooks, check with the publisher whether electronic copies are available for purchase, or whether it is possible to receive an electronic copy of the textbook that can be provided to students through the accessibility office on their campus, and note the availability of electronic texts on your syllabus. (Often, students will need to demonstrate that they have purchased a paper copy of the textbook to be able to use the electronic copy.) Electronic copies mean that students who need to use adaptive technologies do not have to wait for a paper version of their textbook to be scanned, a process that can take some time – especially at the beginning of the semester.
- Unfortunately, current copyright law does not permit copy centres to provide electronic versions of course readers without significant additional costs for the licensing of electronic documents. If some of the documents in the course reader are available in an electronic format through the library, you might consider posting links to these resources on a course Blackboard site or website, or providing students with instructions for gaining access to these resources. Students who require an electronic version of documents in course readers for which electronic versions are not available through the library will need to contact accessibility services on their campus.
- Choose materials that represent a broad range of cultural perspectives and that are accessible to students from a wide range of cultural backgrounds. Texts that presume particular background knowledge not directly related to the course, or texts that use highly-specialized or idiomatic language, may require additional contextualizing information.

### Assignments and required activities

- Consider whether your goals for the course or assignment could be met by allowing students to complete class activities or submit assignments in multiple ways. For example, you might allow students



to participate in class discussions by raising a question in class, by submitting a question by email to you before the class session, or by posting a question on the class discussion board. Alternatively, you might allow students to communicate their findings from a research project by writing an essay, by developing an interactive website, or by creating a poster presentation.

- If students come to you with a request for accommodation or propose alternative arrangements for completing course requirements, consider whether this alternative arrangement can be extended to other members of the class. For example, if a student requests to record your lectures as a study aid, consider whether you might want to use a lecture capture system to make lecture recordings available to all students.

### **Writing**

- Timed writing assignments (such as in-class essays or one minute papers) can challenge students for a variety of reasons. If you develop timed writing assignments, you might consider:
  - Allowing students to bring a laptop to class and email you their work.
  - Allowing students to complete the writing assignment at home if they have not had time to complete their work in class.

### **Discussion and Participation**

- Not all students are equally able to interact, or are equally comfortable interacting, in particular environments (for example, posing questions of the instructor during a lecture, or participating in an unstructured tutorial discussion). To ensure accessible and inclusive discussions and interactive activities, you might consider employing a mix of strategies that include:
  - Opportunities for students to reflect and prepare their contributions before participating. This can include one minute papers (ask students to produce a short, informal, in-class piece of writing in response to a question or reading) or think-pair-share activities (students are given a short amount of time to think about or write down their answer to a question, then compare their responses with another student. They may then report back to the class as a whole).
  - Opportunities for each student to contribute a question or comment. In addition to in-class discussions, you might consider running an online discussion board or soliciting questions or comments about the day's material by email, and responding to some or all of these questions or comments in class.
- At the beginning of the course, outline the interactive activities that you will be using throughout the semester or year, and ask students to speak to you if they have any concerns about participating in those activities. You may wish to identify alternative opportunities or responsibilities for students uncomfortable with their ability to successfully complete particular kinds of interactive work.

### **Group Projects**

- If students must complete group work outside of class, this may present challenges to students with dependents, with inflexible work environments, and who commute long distances to school. Consider developing group work assignments that can be completed online, or providing students time during class or tutorial sessions for group meetings.



## ASSESSMENT & EXAMS

- Work with the accessibility services office on your campus to address the needs of students who have requested accommodations.

## IN-CLASS TEACHING

### Lectures

- Before the first class, review the accessibility of your classroom (see this link from the University of Guelph outlining the characteristics of an accessible classroom: <http://www.tss.uoguelph.ca/uid/guides/physospaceUIDprinc.html>).
- Avoid making assumptions about what knowledge and vocabulary students possess (with the exception of knowledge identified as pre-requisite for the course), especially if that knowledge is popular, cultural, or geographical in origin or if it derives from academic preparation prior to university. Explain any culturally-specific references or idioms that you use, and clarify the background knowledge needed to understand a current topic or to complete a learning activity. For example, some instructors develop and distribute a glossary of terms at the beginning of each semester to introduce students to important vocabulary or ideas.
- Consider providing students with an electronic or paper copy of the outline of the lecture that they can use as an organizing tool for notes or for review.
- Whenever possible, post materials distributed or referred to in lectures (for example, handouts or diagrams) on the course website or on Blackboard.

### Small Groups/Laboratories

- Group activities and labs require special attention to potential physical barriers (as they often require students to move or change position), cognitive barriers (as they normally consist of spontaneous, timed, and verbal interaction), and attitudinal barriers (students may be more or less accustomed to negotiating disagreement and debate in a group). To run inclusive group activities, you might consider:
  - Assigning groups systematically, rather than asking students to choose their own groups.
  - Identifying smaller tasks that comprise larger assignments so that work can be distributed among students.
  - Making sure that accessible spaces for group work are available (see <http://www.tss.uoguelph.ca/uid/guides/physospaceUIDprinc.html>).

### Teaching in diverse and multicultural environments

- Students with different backgrounds and experiences will respond differently to particular pedagogical approaches and instructor-student relationships. Some students may be more comfortable with an authoritative instructor; others may respond better to an instructor who interacts informally with students. While inevitably you will never be able to meet the expectations of all students all the time, you can mitigate student frustration or confusion by explaining your approach and pedagogical strategies to them, and how you believe this approach will facilitate their learning.