



DEVELOPING INCLUSIVE COURSES

Writing course descriptions, syllabi and assignments for equity, diversity and inclusion.

“Storytelling makes a connection between a person and idea. Learning conveyed as a story transforms dry facts into human contextual and emotional connections with information.”

- Layla Croll

1 Focus on Student Learning

Shift the focus from content to the learner. Tell students how they will engage with the course content and what they need to do to master the content. Do you describe the type of learning environment you intend to cultivate? Do you provide information about resources that will support your students' learning? Do you explain what students can expect from you? Do you explicitly state the values and expectations that guide your teaching and that are important for students' success in your course?

Course descriptions should:

- Be no longer than 125 words
- Begin most sentences with a verb
- Explain how the student will benefit from the course
- Written in present tense and active voice

Course descriptions should not:

- Begin with “This course...”
- Should not contain “students will learn” but instead use “students will have the opportunity to learn...”
- Include pronouns such as “I” or “we” or gendered pronouns.

Inclusive Course description examples from Oregon State University:

- Explores the interdisciplinary field of nanomedicine, the use of nanoscale (1-100 nm) phenomena and materials in biomedical applications. Reviews the basic principles of nanotechnology relevant to areas such as diagnostic/molecular imaging, drug delivery and other novel therapeutics.
- Examines factors determining the frequency and distribution of diseases in a defined population for the purpose of establishing programs to prevent and control their development and spread.
- Explores fundamental principles relating to etiology, nature, prevention and control of communicable and non-communicable diseases in human populations. Emphasizes disease prevention and health promotion in the high risk diseases of modern, industrialized society.
- Examines violence as a major public health issue, the effects of the media on violence, drug abuse and violence, and related public health problems in contemporary American society. Emphasizes health and the efficacy of current efforts aimed at ameliorating these problems and potential for alternative public health models for prevention and intervention.

2 Ask Essential Questions

Define your course progression in terms of storytelling.

- What do you want your students to remember from your course in 5-10 years?
- How would taking your course impact your students' careers?
- What skills can students hope to gain in the course?
- How does your teaching relate to other pieces of their coursework?

3 Universal Design for Learning

Design your course to accommodate a wider variety of needs. This may eliminate potential learning barriers or unnecessary learning obstacles.

Providing students with multiple means of perceiving, comprehending and expressing their learning allows students to engage with the material in a way that most benefits them, and also encourages students to engage with material to improve in areas in which their skills are not as strong. This can include offering multiple types of submissions to fulfil an assignment (submit a video, write an essay, or develop a handout). You can read more about how UDL creates an [inclusive learning environment](#).

[UDL: A Rubric for Evaluating Your Course Syllabus](#)

4 Supportive Course Policies

Course policies and procedures reflect cultural norms and expectations. Many course policies, particularly those about attendance, punctuality, deadlines and classroom civility may convey a punitive tone.

Instead, frame your course policies and expectations in terms of students' active engagement with learning processes. What language encourages students to raise questions, to be involved and embrace active learning?

Check out all the suggestions for [writing supportive course policies](#) from UMass, CTL.

5 Inclusive Language, Images and Portrayal

Language can be used consciously or subconsciously to include or exclude. Consider the paradigm shift of putting the individual first. For many excellent examples of shifts in language visit [OHSU's inclusive language guide](#). [University of Western States has compiled a shared language guide](#) here as well.

Representation matters. [Find Creative Commons images that support diversity, equity and inclusion](#).

Considerations Checklist:

1. Course materials have been reviewed to ensure broad representation.

- Scientists/researchers and images of people in presentations, textbooks, e-books, research papers, articles, videos and other course materials represent various dimensions of diversity.
- When there are limited textbook (and other course material) options and you chose one that has stereotyped stock photo images, let the students know that you are disappointed in the options and that you know it is not representative or inclusive. Provide supplemental material if possible.
- Images that promote stereotypes or promote bias have been removed to reduce the impact of those stereotypes and bias on the students.
- Where possible, images of physical findings represent the full spectrum of skin tones and physical features.

2. Does the content include any mention of race or ethnicity? If yes, content has been reviewed for practices that might bring bias, shame or stigma. Some examples are below.

- Does not present associations between race and disease incidence without context.

- Avoids perpetuating stereotypes. For example: showing two photos side-by-side during an obesity lecture: one depicting a family comprised of thin white individuals sitting down to a healthy dinner and one depicting a family of overweight Black individuals sitting in front of fast food.
- Content does not assume that Latina/x/o patients are undocumented immigrants/migrant workers.
- Content does not imply that all patients from a particular culture participate in certain practices or reject certain medical interventions.

3. Are biological differences between racial or ethnic groups implied?

- Consider whether this is essential information.
- Provide context so that students understand the role of social/structural determinants of health in contributing to differences.

4. Vignettes have been reviewed for bias and stereotypes:

- When patients and health care providers are identified by race or ethnicity, sex or gender, sexual orientation, educational background or socioeconomic status, identifiable disability or age, these indicators are relevant to the vignette.
- When asking questions, health care providers avoid terms that assume a pregnant person is female and married or partnered. Provider asks open ended questions about family structures.

5. Considerations related to sex and gender:

- Sex or "biological sex" is presented as a person's anatomy, physical attributes such as external sex organs, sex chromosomes and internal reproductive structures.
- Gender identity is presented as an individual's deeply held sense of being male, female or another gender. This is separate from biological sex.
- Gender expression has been defined as the way we show our gender to the world around us.
- A diversity of sexes and genders are represented in the course content.
- Gender is represented as a spectrum versus a binary concept.
- Content includes examples of gender inclusive language (nursing vs. breastfeeding, pregnant person vs. pregnant woman, siblings vs. sister/brother, parenthood vs. mother/fatherhood).

6. Is the spectrum of sexual orientation represented in the content?

- Content recognizes that sexual orientation is about one's physical, emotional and/or romantic attractions to others. It is presented on a spectrum-based model and is not conflated with gender.
- Students are taught to take a sexual history in a way that accounts for the full spectrum of sexual identities and discourages categorization.

7. Further examples of practices that avoid stigma, shame, and bias:

- **People with disabilities:** Assuming that people with disabilities' have a quality of life that is comparable to those without disabilities.
- **Mental health:** Language that does not imply that people with mental health issues are violent/dangerous.

- **Aging/elderly:** Focuses not only on declining health, but positive portrayals of aging
- **Religious groups:** Content does not assume that religious groups are monolithic or present their beliefs as such.
- **Race as a risk factor:** Does not present race as a risk factor for disease occurrence or outcome without explaining the role of social determinants of health (access to health care, access to education, access to healthy food, discrimination, etc).
- **Sexual orientation and sexual behavior:** Content avoids language that might promote shame such as, “The patient ADMITTED to having sex.”

6 Access in Design

Beyond “accessibility,” we can think about best practices in terms of providing the best access to course material for all students.

Canvas is built with accessibility features in mind. Please consider the University of Minnesota’s [seven core skills of accessibility](#) as you add material to your course. These are hallmarks good design practice for all audiences and provide many examples - dos and don’ts - for each hallmark of accessibility.

Contact student support services at studentsuccess@uws.edu for more information regarding accommodations for students.

7 DEI Syllabus Statement

UWS DEI Statement (adopted by the Faculty Senate and DEI Committee February 2022).

UWS commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion

The faculty and instructional staff of University of Western States (UWS) recognize the benefits and opportunities of a diverse community. As the university prepares students to thrive personally and professionally in an increasingly diverse society, we strive to deliver student-focused education and training experiences that emphasize our commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion. In alignment with the UWS core value of “inclusiveness,” UWS endeavors to cultivate a safe and welcoming environment that supports diversity in thought, perspective and experience, and honors individual identities. These dimensions of diversity include race/ethnicity, culture, gender, gender expression and identity, age, class, sexual orientation, nationality, religion, ability and more.

Name and pronouns

All people have the right to be addressed and referred to in alignment with their personal identity. Students are invited to clarify their name and pronouns with all members of the UWS community, including faculty and classmates.

Sensitive topics and engaging professionally

Discussion and disagreement are an expected part of a dynamic learning experience. While topics related to diversity, equity, and inclusion can be sensitive, they are critically relevant to your role as a current/future health care provider or practitioner. Students are expected to engage professionally and to practice active listening and perspective-taking. We encourage students to respectfully disagree.

More information about diversity, equity, and inclusion at UWS [can be found here](#).

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