



Fostering an Inclusive and Welcoming Classroom Environment

Students need to feel safe, valued, and respected to maximize their learning potential. They need to feel a sense of belonging in the classroom and that their instructor and peers care about them as individuals. This is particularly important for new students and those with marginalized identities as they may be struggling to find their place on campus. Instructors play a primary role in creating welcoming, positive, supportive, and inclusive learning environments for students. Here, I identify strategies instructors can use to create an inclusive classroom.

1. Acknowledge how your identity, experiences, privileges, triggers, and biases may play out in the classroom and share them with your students as appropriate. This type of self-disclosure demonstrates authenticity and vulnerability, lessens the distance between instructors and students, and opens the door for authentic dialogue. It is also a valuable model for students, especially when instructors demonstrate a willingness to own and rectify their mistakes, creating space for students to do the same. Ask students to engage in the learning process with you and to hold you accountable for any behavior or language that may exclude or minimize the experiences of certain students.
2. Review the tone and language of your syllabus, as it sends strong signals to students regarding the inclusive nature of your course (Erickson, Peters, & Strommer, 2006). Does the syllabus demonstrate your commitment to creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment for all students and to engaging across difference? Ask trusted colleagues and students to review the syllabus with this goal in mind. Specific strategies for making the syllabus more inclusive include the following:
 - using second-person language (i.e., you) verses third-person (i.e., students);
 - including statements about expectations around classroom interactions and strategies for addressing and reporting incidents of hate/bias;
 - providing information about academic support resources, accommodations for students with disabilities, mental health resources; and
 - ensuring your statement on office hours is welcoming in terms of language, tone, and meeting locations.
3. Consider whether the design of your course (i.e., assignment prompts and instructional strategies) clearly communicates the importance of difference and inclusion. For example, do the readings, daily topics, and assignments address difference, diversity, and social justice issues? Are readings by authors with marginalized identities or



“Many pass through the doors of education. You have gained a knowledge and foundation to pursue a dream of worldly success, but remember life is not just in what you know, but in the truth you know and walk in.”

— Ritu Ghatourey,
Indian author

differing viewpoints on an issue included? Are the assignments accessible and engaging for all students? What opportunities are available for students to customize their responses to assignments in order to build on different learning styles and strengths and ensure they get what they want and need out of the learning experiences?

4. Examine the physical classroom environment. Can each student sit comfortably in the room, see the board, and hear you? Is the classroom conducive to positive interaction among students? If not, what accommodations can you make or request on behalf of your students?
5. Use the first class meeting to set a tone that each member of the classroom community is valued and that their voice will be heard. Demonstrate your commitment to creating an inclusive community by encouraging students to get to know their classmates through introduction activities and ice breakers. Help students learn one another's preferred names (and how to say them correctly) and gender pronouns. Addressing students by name and asking for their pronouns sends a strong message that you care about them as individuals and plan to treat them respectfully.
6. Establish mutual expectations. Ask students to write down what they need to be able to engage in authentic dialogue, contribute to classroom discussions, feel valued and heard, and how they want to see conflict and microaggressions addressed when they happen. Students can discuss their expectations in small groups and then share with the large group, but the instructor should collect each student's responses to ensure no one's voice is lost in the process. Students should also determine a class policy for how they will hold one another accountable for these expectations.
7. Focus on instructional strategies that model inclusion, such as speaking from your experiences and identity by using / statements and asking students to do the same (without asking students to speak on behalf of an identity group to which they might belong);
 - sharing varied, multicultural, and relevant examples and perspectives, when appropriate;
 - highlighting contributions of scholars with marginalized identities and noting when their voices are not available in the literature and why that might be the case;
 - creating space for students to express their experiences, perspectives, and beliefs related to course topics and apply the material to their own lives;
 - encouraging students to work together in small groups and ensuring students get to know each member of the class, and thus downplaying the influence of cliques and unconscious biases, by varying group and seating assignments throughout the term; and
 - using "multiple instructional methods to engage the various learning strengths and styles present in a diverse classroom" (Erickson et al., 2006, p. 207).
8. Pay attention to what is happening in the classroom and in the lives of your students. Specific strategies include the following:
 - choosing your words carefully, asking students to do the same, paying attention to how students react to what you and other students say, and addressing those reactions by discussing what you notice without judgment (Martinez, n.d.);
 - observing whether certain students or groups of students are overparticipating or not participating and using strategies to ensure each student feels comfortable engaging in class discussions (Martinez, n.d.);



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- checking in with students about class climate individually throughout the semester before and outside of class time or through an anonymous midterm evaluation;
- revisiting the class mutual expectations or changing instructional strategies when classroom climate seems to be getting in the way of learning;
- acknowledging major local, national, and international events that impact your students and spending time discussing those events (even when they are not directly related to class content);
- providing students support in times of challenge and communicating a desire to understand their point of view;
- believing students if they say that they do not feel included or supported in your class and helping rectify that situation; and
- refusing to ignore incidents of bias, hate, ignorance, microaggression, or exclusion by addressing them in the moment or after class as appropriate.

As an instructor, you have a tremendous opportunity to ensure that your classroom is a space where students can be themselves and fully engage in the process of learning.

Welcome and engage with your students. Provide an inclusive place for learning.

REFERENCES

Erickson, B. L., Peters, C. B., & Strommer, D. W. (2006). *Teaching first-year college students*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Martinez, B. (n.d.). *Facilitating conversations about social justice*. Los Angeles, CA: InfinityMartinez Consulting.



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What's Happening at The National Resource Center

Publications

The National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition is pleased to announce that its books are now distributed by Stylus Publishing. We invite you to visit our new online bookstore at <https://styluspub.presswarehouse.com/nrcfye/main.aspx>

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www.sc.edu/fye/annual

Institute on Sophomore Student Success

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Columbia, South Carolina

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Online Courses

The National Resource Center offers online courses on topics of interest in higher education. The courses provide participants the same content and opportunities for interaction with peers and the instructor as traditional (i.e., classroom-based) learning environments while taking advantage of pedagogy and teaching techniques that are not possible or common in those settings. The courses use tools such as e-mail, threaded discussions or forums, listservs, and blogs. Enrollment is limited to 40 participants. Participants will earn 1.5 continuing education units for each course. Visit <http://www.sc.edu/fye/oc> for more information.

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National Resource Center Exhibits and Presentations

Like many of you, the staff of the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition is actively involved in the conference circuit. We are pleased to share the following upcoming opportunities to hear about the results of research studies conducted by the Center, learn about best practices, and meet National Resource Center staff members.

(Common) Reading is Fundamental? Exploring Outcomes of Common Reading Programs.

Concurrent session by Dallin George Young, National Resource Center Assistant Director for Research, Grants, and Assessment, and Ellen B. Stolzenberg, UCLA at the Annual Conference on The First-Year Experience; Sunday, February 12, 2017, 10:15 – 11:15 a.m.; Marriott Marquis Atlanta - A708; Atlanta, Georgia.

Going Global: International Perspectives on The First-Year Experience in Higher Education.

Featured Panel Presentation facilitated by Jennifer Keup, National Resource Center Director at the 36th Annual Conference on The First-Year Experience; Sunday, February 12, 2017, 10:15 – 11:15 a.m.; Marriott Marquis – Imperial Ballroom B; Atlanta, Georgia.

What Makes a First-Year Seminar High Impact? Exploring Conditions That Matter.

Concurrent session by Tracy L. Skipper, National Resource Center Assistant Director for Publications at the 36th Annual Conference on The First-Year Experience; Sunday, February 12, 2017, 3:30 – 4:30 p.m.; Marriott Marquis – M106-107; Atlanta, Georgia.

Canadian Peer Leader Experiences: Intersectional Concentric Circles of Solidarity.

Concurrent session by Robert Kenedy, York University; and Dallin George Young, National Resource Center Assistant Director for Research, Grants, and Assessment at the Annual Conference on The First-Year Experience; Sunday, February 12, 2017, 2:15 p.m. - 3:15 p.m.; Marriott Marquis Atlanta - M104; Atlanta, Georgia.

Using CAS Cross-Functional Frameworks to Facilitate a Collaborative FYE Approach.

Concurrent session by Jennifer Keup, National Resource Center Director; Gavin Henning, New England College; Dallin George Young, National Resource Center Assistant Director for Research, Grants, and Assessment; and Jen Wells, Kennesaw State University at the 36th Annual Conference on The First-Year Experience; Monday, February 13, 2017, 10:30 – 11:30 a.m.; Marriott Marquis Atlanta - A706; Atlanta, Georgia.

Surveying Statewide College and Career Readiness Programs in South Carolina.

Concurrent session by Dallin George Young, National Resource Center Assistant Director for Research, Grants, and Assessment; Meredith Love and Matthew Nelson, Francis Marion University; and Dory Hoffman and Jasmin Chung, Graduate Assistants for Research, Grants, and Assessment at the 36th Annual Conference on The First-Year Experience; Monday, February 13, 2017, 3:00 – 4:00 p.m.; Marriott Marquis Atlanta – A708; Atlanta, Georgia.

Turning ON Inspiration: Successful Strategies of Outstanding First-Year Student Advocates.

Panel Presentation facilitated by Jennifer Keup, National Resource Center Director, and Sarah Seymour, Cengage, at the 36th Annual Conference on The First-Year Experience; Monday, February 13, 2017, 3:00 – 4:00 p.m.; Hyatt Regency – Embassy E; Atlanta, Georgia.

Capstone Experiences: Moving Transfer Students Through the Higher Education Pipeline.

Concurrent Session by Tracy L. Skipper, National Resource Center Assistant Director for Publications at the 15th Annual Conference of The National Institute for the Study of Transfer Students; Friday, February 17, 2017, 11:15 a.m. – 12:15 p.m.; Loews Atlanta Hotel; Atlanta, Georgia.

E-Source Submission Guidelines

For complete guidelines and issue dates, see www.sc.edu/fye/esource/guidelines.html

Audience: *E-Source* readers include academic and student affairs administrators and faculty from a variety of fields interested in student transitions. All types of institutions are represented in the readership.

Style: Articles, tables, figures, and references should adhere to APA (American Psychological Association) style.

E-Source does not publish endorsements of products for sale.

Format: Submissions should be sent via e-mail as a Microsoft Word attachment.

Length: Original feature-length articles should be 750-1,200 words. Annotations of new resources should be no more than 500 words. The editor reserves the right to edit submissions for length. Photographs are welcome.

Please address all questions and submissions to:

E-Source Editor
National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience & Students in Transition
University of South Carolina
1728 College Street
Columbia, SC 29208
E-mail: esource@mailbox.sc.edu

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Looking for new teaching strategies or fresh ideas for first-year seminars? *E-Source*, the National Resource Center's online newsletter for college transitions, offers a wealth of information. *E-Source* also is accepting submissions for the spring 2016 issue. To view the archives, review submission guidelines, and receive content alerts for new issues, please go to www.sc.edu/fye/esource.

How “HIP” are You? Assessment as the Key to First-Year Campus Activities as a High-Impact Practice. Featured address by Jennifer Keup, National Resource Center Director at the NACA National Convention; Sunday, February 19, 2017, 11:30 a.m. - 12:45 p.m. Baltimore Convention Center; Baltimore, Maryland.

Speak Up! Using First-Year Assessment as a Platform for Change. Educational session by Jennifer Keup, National Resource Center Director at the NACA National Convention; Sunday, February 19, 2017, 2:15 – 3:15 p.m. Baltimore Convention Center; Baltimore, Maryland.

Reporting Institutional Support of a Critical Transition: Senior Capstone Experiences. Program presentation by Dallin George Young, National Resource Center Assistant Director for Research, Grants, and Assessment at the ACPA Annual Convention; Tuesday, March 28, 2017, 2:00 - 3:00 p.m.; Greater Columbus Convention Center – C162a; Columbus, Ohio.

Using New CAS Cross-functional Assessment Frameworks and Multi-Standard Self-Study Processes. Program presentation by Jennifer Keup, National Resource Center Director; Gavin Henning, New England College/CAS; Marybeth Drechsler Sharp, CAS; and Dallin George Young, National Resource Center Assistant Director for Research, Grants, and Assessment at the ACPA Annual Convention; Wednesday, March 29, 2017, 8:30 - 9:30 a.m.; Greater Columbus Convention Center – A124; Columbus, Ohio.

Global Perspectives on Undergraduate Peer Leadership. Concurrent session by Jennifer Keup, National Resource Center Director, at the 2017 NASPA International Symposium; March 11-12, 2017. San Antonio, Texas.

National Data and Best Practices for Sophomore Student Success: More Than Just a Second Lap in a Relay. Concurrent session by Jennifer Keup, National Resource Center Director at the NASPA Annual Conference; Tuesday, March 14, 2017, 12:10 – 1:00 p.m. Convention Center; San Antonio, Texas.

Using New CAS Cross-functional Assessment Frameworks and Multi-Standard Self-Study Processes. Concurrent session by Gavin Henning, New England College/CAS, Jennifer Keup, National Resource Center Director, and Marybeth Drechsler Sharp, CAS at the NASPA Annual Conference; Tuesday, March 14, 2017, 1:15 – 2:05 p.m. Grand Hyatt; San Antonio, Texas.



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Call for Papers Submission Deadline
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The Toolbox

Author: Kevin C. Clarke

Assistant Director, Academic Engagement
University of Wisconsin-Madison

The Toolbox is an online professional development newsletter offering innovative, learner-centered strategies for empowering college students to achieve greater success. The newsletter is published six times a year by the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition at the University of South Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina.

The online subscription is free. To register for newsletter alerts and access back issues, please visit www.sc.edu/fye/toolbox.

Publication Staff

Founding Editor: Brad Garner

Graphic Designer: Allison Minsk

