


# Rethinking the Course Syllabus: Considerations for Promoting Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

Teaching of Psychology  
2021, Vol. 48(1) 69-79  
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DOI: 10.1177/0098628320959979  
journals.sagepub.com/home/top  


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## Abstract

**Introduction:** Equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) are receiving considerable attention in higher education. Within psychology, the American Psychological Association has highlighted the importance of cultural diversity in both undergraduate and graduate curricula and charged educators with facilitating the development of cultural competence among learners. **Statement of the Problem:** Many resources have been developed to help promote EDI within higher education. The resources developed have mainly focused on the curricula and pedagogical approaches, yet the syllabus remains overlooked with few guidelines available to educators. **Literature Review:** We offer several considerations informed by theoretical frameworks and best practices in the discipline and suggestions for the successful implementation of EDI in the syllabus. **Teaching Implications:** This article provides a comprehensive and useful guide for developing a syllabus that assists with the integration of EDI, as the syllabus is the first opportunity for faculty to communicate their philosophy, expectations, requirements, and other course information. **Conclusion:** Infusing EDI in the syllabus is essential for promoting an inclusive learning environment and is conducive to establishing goals related to cultural competence.

## Keywords

equity, diversity, inclusion, multiculturalism, syllabus

Equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) are receiving considerable attention in higher education. For instance, the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U, 2009) has called on campuses across the country to assist students in developing intercultural competence throughout their academic training. To that end, AAC&U developed an Intercultural Knowledge and Competence VALUE Rubric that provides relevant stakeholders with the related behavioral anchors for measuring the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to successfully navigate cultural contexts (AAC&U, 2009). Additionally, Fink (2013) encouraged faculty to consider situational factors before developing a course, including the specific context of the teaching/learning situation, the general context of the learning situation, the nature of the subject, the characteristics of the learners, and the characteristics of the teacher. All of these factors have natural and obvious connections to EDI.

Within psychology, there are similar trends. Specifically, at the undergraduate level, the American Psychological Association (APA, 2013) issued the *Guidelines for the Undergraduate Psychology Major* that devote considerable attention to diversity and to the development of cultural competence. The Guidelines' authors highlight their concerted efforts to infuse diversity throughout their framework, aspiring to capture the "full range of human diversity, including race, ethnicity,

gender, sexual orientation, age, religious affiliation, disability status, social class, culture, and other identities associated with sociocultural diversity" (p. 12). Specific outcomes that appear to align with EDI ideology include the following: incorporating sociocultural factors in scientific inquiry; building and enhancing interpersonal relationships; adopting values that build community at local, national, and global levels; interacting effectively with others; exhibiting self-efficacy and self-regulation; and enhancing teamwork capacity (adapted from the guidelines).

Moreover, at the graduate level, the APA Commission on Accreditation, which is charged with accrediting clinical, counseling, and school psychology doctoral programs; predoctoral health service psychology internships; and postdoctoral residency programs in professional psychology, has infused diversity elements into all aspects of the program's self-study

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process, clearly articulating a commitment to cultural and individual differences and diversity. Specifically, the Standards of Accreditation define “cultural and individual differences and diversity as including, but not limited to, age, disability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, language, national origin, race, religion, culture, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status” (APA, Commission on Accreditation, 2015, p. 8). Standard 1 requires programs to explicitly express their commitments to diversity by creating a learning environment that is supportive of diverse students and faculty and prepares students to competently address diversity in research and practice, knowing how to navigate the value conflicts or tension that may arise in their professional endeavors. Standard 2 requires that programs engage students in training activities that promote competency in individual and cultural diversity. Additionally, in Standards 3 and 4, programs are required to articulate comprehensive and long-term plans for the recruitment and retention of diverse faculty and students, including concerted efforts to evaluate the effectiveness of their plans. Although programs are allowed to approach these endeavors in several ways, all students are required to demonstrate the pertinent training elements. For example, students are expected to engage in ongoing self-reflection, as it relates to their own sociocultural profiles and their work in several domains including research, treatment, training, supervision, consultation, and other professional activities. Training programs are also expected to help students acquire the relevant knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to work ethically and effectively with diverse constituents (APA, 2015).

Finally, the recently released *Multicultural Guidelines: An Ecological Approach to Context, Identity, and Intersectionality* (APA, 2017) provides guidance on considering these guidelines for all aspects of psychology, including teaching and training. The guidelines include five levels of analysis ranging from individuals to international contexts and consist of 10 guidelines (two per level). They emphasize three processes in their model including (1) power and privilege, (2) tensions, and (3) fluidity. They encourage the ongoing consideration of intra-personal, interpersonal, and contextual dynamics with attention to preventing trauma and promoting resilience. The guidelines call on educators to include multicultural coursework in the curriculum, model cultural competence, and engage students in community-based training activities with diverse constituents. To assist with these efforts, the guidelines offer several rich case studies in Appendix B to help faculty and students apply the key elements of the five levels.

Given these considerable EDI developments, faculty need resources to carry out these endeavors. Although several resources have been developed to promote EDI in the curriculum or the classroom (Fuentes & Shannon, 2016; Mena & Quina, 2019), few, if any, journal articles have focused on how to do this specifically within the course syllabus. As most faculty can attest, the syllabus is a staple in almost all psychology courses. The course syllabus allows faculty to communicate their philosophy, expectations, requirements, and other pertinent information. Bain (2004), who examined the syllabi

and teaching practices of the best teachers across the country, likened the syllabus to a series of promises that faculty make to their students. He asserted that the syllabus is the optimal moment for faculty to set a tone that promotes deeper learning, enthusiasm, and intrinsic motivation. Richmond et al. (2019), proponents of learner-centered principles in the course syllabus, asserted that a favorable tone could promote optimal student–faculty rapport, positive reception, and greater student motivation.

The Society for the Teaching of Psychology created and maintains Project Syllabus, an online portal of peer-reviewed syllabi, deemed exemplary models for best practices associated with syllabi. Although the architects of this project provide a rubric for evaluating course syllabi, they only highlighted “accessibility/universal design” in the rubric, representing EDI in a limited fashion. In the Project’s *Pointers for Developing Exemplary Syllabi*, Slattery and Carlson (n.d.) encouraged faculty to

err on the side of inclusion rather than exclusion. Syllabi that help students navigate the course (and university) are accessible to all students. This point is especially important when considering students who may not recognize or understand the implicit rules of higher education, especially those students who historically have been underrepresented in higher education. (p. 2)

Despite this sound advice, limited guidance is provided to faculty on how to design an inclusive syllabus. Although a hyperlink is provided on the online portal to showcase syllabi that have exemplary diversity content, it links viewers to three syllabi for courses in diversity, representing diversity in a siloed manner and providing no guidance for nondiversity or multicultural courses.

One popular strategy for developing a syllabus is backward design (Fink, 2013; Grose-Fifer et al., 2019). In this approach, faculty start with the end in mind, considering the main learning goals for the course. Faculty are advised to reflect on what students should learn from the course, what they should be able to do immediately following the course, and/or a few years after the course. With respect to EDI, faculty may want to consider what aspects of the course will promote or address intercultural competence, inclusion, or the nuanced aspects of diversity. As faculty move through the backward syllabus design process, they must also consider the feedback and assessment processes (e.g., course assignments) as well as the teaching and learning activities (e.g., readings, teaching practices). Finally, faculty need to conduct a thorough review of the syllabus to ensure that all the interrelated components are properly aligned and integrated (Fink, 2013).

As faculty with varied backgrounds and at different stages of our careers, we aim to provide guidance for the development of syllabi that embody EDI elements. Our purpose is to provide a comprehensive, coherent, and useful guide for developing a syllabus that assists with the integration of EDI elements. Relevant theoretical frameworks and best practices in our discipline inform the considerations enumerated in this article.

## Understanding EDI

The AAC&U (n.d.) defines equity as the “creation of opportunities for historically underrepresented populations to have equal access to and participate in educational programs that are capable of closing the achievement gaps in student success and completion.” Universities that adopt an equity-minded framework are more apt to recognize the structural inequities that exist in the larger society and consider how these inequities disenfranchise certain students. Additionally, equity-minded institutions are less likely to adopt a deficit model, where they blame students exclusively for their academic failures but rather are more likely to frame student failures as institutional ineptitude. Moreover, equity-minded campuses reflect critically on the roles and responsibilities of all the relevant stakeholders (e.g., students, faculty, administration, and professional staff) and examine how they contribute to an inequitable culture (Bensimon, 2007; as cited in Harris & Wood, 2020).

The next term, diversity, is defined as a complex and nuanced construct that represents an array of identity factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, and disability (APA, 2017). Although some scholars have argued that the terms diversity and multiculturalism are considerably different, with diversity being a simplistic recognition of differences and multiculturalism involving a more concerted effort to understand and appreciate the value of these differences (e.g., Liu & Pope-Davis, 2003), we assert that when diversity is considered within an inclusion and equity framework, the spirit of multiculturalism is embraced. Additionally, our decision to use the term diversity along with the terms inclusion and equity seems more aligned with the typical vernacular adopted in higher education. Hence, we have opted for the term diversity in this article, but advise faculty to adopt the term that is best aligned with their worldviews.

However, as noted by Fuentes and Shannon (2016), when faculty address diversity in undergraduate psychology courses, it is often presented in singular ways (e.g., the role of race or ethnicity) and fails to account for other identities and the intersection of identities. Intersectionality is a feminist concept that was developed to help understand the unique experiences regarding Black women and women of color, given the intersectional forces of systemic oppression (i.e., racism and sexism) they face (Crenshaw, 1990). Intersectionality has evolved to conceptualize and understand the relationship between broader multiple marginalized social identities (e.g., sexual and gender minorities, racial/ethnic minorities), how they intersect, and how oppression shapes an individual’s worldview (Museus & Griffin, 2011). Furthermore, intersectionality encourages scholars to critically consider how inequality (e.g., economic, political), power structures, and oppression affect diverse and marginalized populations (Duran, 2019).

As diversity continues to increase within the U.S. population, higher education is starting to provide a more accurate representation of society, and it is attempting to become more inclusive of various sociocultural identities (Blumenfeld et al., 2017). For example, the percentage of undergraduate students

of color has increased from 29.6% to 45.2% between 1996 and 2016 (Espinosa et al., 2019). Therefore, utilizing an intersectionality lens can help educators be responsive to the unique needs of diverse students (i.e., first-generation college students of color, lower socioeconomic students, and sexual and gender minority students) by decreasing issues related to stereotype threat, a phenomenon where individuals of a marginalized group are concerned about their performance due to negative messages associated with being part of the group (e.g., Casad et al., 2017), and imposter phenomenon, an internal feeling of not being intelligent, a “phony,” and attributing success to luck (e.g., Clance & Imes, 1978; Cokley et al., 2018). Additionally, there are a number of multicultural resources that can help faculty address intersectionality, such as Hays’s (2008) ADDRESSING (i.e., age/generation, developmental disabilities/disabilities acquired, ethnic and racial identity, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, Indigenous heritage, national origin, gender) model, Falicov’s (2014) multidimensional ecological comparative approach framework, or Fuentes and Adamés’ (2011) sociocultural profile activity.

Finally, the last term, inclusion, involves the

active, intentional, and ongoing engagement with diversity—in the curriculum, in the co-curriculum, and in communities (intellectual, social, cultural, geographical) with which individuals might connect—in ways that increase awareness, content knowledge, cognitive sophistication, and empathic understanding of the complex ways individuals interact within systems and institutions. (AAC&U, n.d.)

The primary aim of inclusion is to leverage the cultural capital that all students bring into the classroom. Faculty who adopt and engage in inclusive efforts ensure all students are recognized in the classroom and all sociocultural perspectives have the opportunity to be considered in the course activities (e.g., lectures and discussions).

## Pedagogy and Syllabus Development

While the scope of this article is on the syllabus, pedagogical approaches, teaching activities, and classroom dynamics are clearly informed by and interrelated to the syllabus. We would be remiss if we did not highlight this point. We encourage instructors to reflect on the ways in which the syllabus can set the tone for their classroom environment. Classrooms often operate as a microcosm of greater society, and therefore, systems of oppression may be played out in classroom dynamics. Hence, as faculty approach their EDI efforts, they need to consider pedagogical approaches that are attentive to equity and inclusion and make these efforts evident in the syllabus. A provocative article in *The New York Times* titled “Are College Lectures Unfair” highlighted the customary practices that faculty engage in that may place some students at a disadvantage (Paul, 2015). This journalist argued that the lecture approach presupposes that all students in the classroom have acquired the necessary foundational knowledge needed to

assimilate the lecture's content (Lang, 2016), and this is not the case for some students from academically impoverished backgrounds. Despite our best intentions, this teaching strategy may continue to promote exclusion and inequity in the classroom.

Freire's (1996) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* discusses the importance of moving away from traditional hierarchical forms of pedagogy (i.e., the banking education system) where the instructors have the knowledge and students are merely receptacles to deposit the knowledge. He encourages instructors to critically engage their students through active listening, discourse, and taking action. One way to move away from the banking education system is through active learning.

Active learning is described as a cooperative learning strategy where students are tasked with working together in small groups toward a specific goal and engage in discussion with one another (Johnson & Johnson, 2008). Active learning not only benefits students in general but also works disproportionately well with students who self-identify as Black or first-generation. Specifically, Eddy and Hogan (2014) found that a moderately structured, active learning approach led to students reading and studying more in the course as well as perceiving a greater sense of community. The authors recommended that instructors be clear and transparent regarding the data about active learning in efforts to help students buy into this newer form of teaching. By adding active learning strategies into the curricula, instructors move away from the traditional banking education system, create a shift in power dynamics within the classroom to a more egalitarian classroom, and help to increase students' learning.

Relatedly, feminist pedagogy can be described as one that promotes consciousness-raising and social justice and creates a safe or brave classroom environment. It addresses issues of inequality and hierarchical power structures, promotes critical self-selection, and emphasizes a joint co-construction of knowledge between the instructor and student (Johnson-Bailey & Lee, 2005). Johnson-Bailey and Lee (2005), two women of color in the academy, recommend utilizing debriefing tools to examine patterns of listening and speaking in discussions. This strategy can be used in the classroom to raise cultural consciousness and promote optimal classroom dynamics.

Essentially, we urge faculty to remain current with EDI-related scholarship. Some notable resources include *Multicultural Psychology* (Mio et al., 2019), *Culture Across the Curriculum: A Psychology Teacher's Handbook* (Keith, 2018), *Internationalizing the Teaching of Psychology* (Rich et al., 2017), and *110 Experiences for Multicultural Learning* (Pederson, 2004). We also encourage faculty to consider the training implications of the various diversity-focused guidelines developed by APA, such as the *Race and Ethnicity Guidelines in Psychology: Promoting Responsiveness and Equity* (APA Task Force on Race and Ethnicity Guidelines, 2019).

## Developing an EDI Mindset in Syllabus Development

Given that faculty are a heterogeneous group and in various stages of their own cultural consciousness

(Paez & Albert, 2012), we advise educators to adopt the considerations that are most aligned with their level of proficiency. Cultural consciousness is defined as "the process of developing awareness of culture in the self, which can result in expanding understandings of culture and developing deeper cultural knowledge about other individuals and contexts" (Paez & Albert, 2012, p. 2). For more on deepening one's cultural consciousness, readers are directed to Paez and Albert (2012), Steele (2011), and Sue (2016). We also assert that employing the considerations in this guide may also facilitate one's cultural consciousness.

This guide offers suggestions for novice faculty as well as more advanced faculty. Before adopting suggestions in this article, the authors offer some guidance on the optimal implementation of these considerations. First, faculty are encouraged to adopt the basic stance promoted by Lang (2016) in his book, *Small Teaching*, where he observes—"simple changes could make a big difference" (p. 9). Essentially, rather than engaging in herculean efforts, we advise faculty to start small by adopting a few of the suggested ideas and build on their successes. Over time, hopefully, faculty will enjoy a more EDI-centered syllabus, while expanding their cultural consciousness.

Next, faculty should pursue ongoing training in EDI (Fuentes & Shannon, 2016). Some options include consulting with the campus teaching and learning center, forming faculty learning communities, reviewing the diversity resources on the Society for the Teaching of Psychology's website, or attending pertinent trainings offered at the annual APA convention and other faculty development conferences (e.g., <https://podnetwork.org/about/>).

Relatedly, we encourage faculty to engage in ongoing self-study efforts. We suggest keeping regular field notes right on the syllabus, focusing on how these considerations are playing out, so they can be adapted as needed. Keeping the notes right on the syllabus allows faculty to review their notes as they develop the next iteration of the syllabus.

Finally, educators are advised not to be complicit in thinking that they have reached cultural competence (APA, 2017), suggesting that there is an end point. Instead, APA's multicultural guidelines challenge faculty to be culturally humble, requiring a commitment to lifelong learning, self-reflection, and self-critique (APA, 2017; Gallardo, 2014; Hook et al., 2013). We encourage our teaching colleagues to constantly engage in the process of self-reflection and self-critique with regard to their syllabi and to consider how EDI can further be infused. With these suggestions in mind, the next section offers several considerations for faculty to contemplate with the major aim of promoting and integrating them into their course syllabi.

## Considerations for Promoting EDI in the Course Syllabus

### Consideration 1: Engage in Reflexivity

As encouraged by the multicultural guidelines and other diversity scholars (Cumming-Potvin, 2013; Falicov, 2014; Hays,

2008), we urge educators to consider how their own sociocultural backgrounds and positions may influence how they foster and address EDI efforts in their syllabi. In the spirit of modeling this best practice, we share our own social profiles and locations. The first author is a light-skin, Puerto Rican male and a full professor, who identifies as a first-generation college student. While there are more aspects to his identity, these are the most salient, as they inform many aspects of his teaching philosophy and approach. He emphasizes skin tone because he has come to appreciate the impact of colorism on well-being and psychological functioning and has recognized the privilege and power his light skin has afforded him. Because of his skin tone, he employs a number of strategies to monitor his implicit biases in the assessment process. Additionally, he also recognizes that his first-generation college student status makes him more aware of the challenges his first-generation students might face, as he recalls lacking role models to turn to when he faced obstacles, adversary, and uncertainty.

Next, the second author is a cisgender man, bicultural and binational, queer Nicaraguan American, early career psychologist, and assistant professor, who also identifies as a first-generation college student. This author's multiple intersecting identities, both privileged and oppressed, strongly influence his pedagogical teaching style and approach to mentoring. He draws on aspects of feminist theory, social justice, and intersectionality to attend to the full diversity of his students and lived experiences to consider all the identities students bring into the classroom. Specifically, he relies heavily on a central tenet of feminist theory—*the personal is political*—in efforts to promote critical consciousness of students' privileged and marginalized identities to create a classroom environment that minimizes power dynamics and systemic oppression and promotes learning.

Finally, the third author is a light-skin male of Mexican American and European descent and a training clinic director and instructor, who also identifies as a first-generation college student. Other background characteristics that influence his teaching philosophy—particularly with respect to issues of diversity and equity—include a rural, blue-collar upbringing on an Indian reservation in northwest Montana (nonmember settler). This author strives to cultivate safe and supportive class climates and continually aims to encourage and respect a diversity of perspectives, while trying not to impose his own, and to think critically about and challenge dominant systems in psychology. As a first-generation student, he also explores ways to support historically underrepresented students in academia, appreciating the “one-down” position of students without role models and mentors in higher education, remembering the significant logistical and emotional struggles that he experienced.

### **Consideration 2: Adopt a Diversity-Centered Approach**

As noted by APA (2002) in the original multicultural guidelines and reemphasized in the current guidelines, psychologists are advised “to use a ‘cultural lens’ as a central focus of

professional behavior” (p. 11). In other words, given the relevance and influence of culture and related diversity factors on behavior, faculty could explore their impact and influence from the outset and continuously consider their relevance. These efforts promote a “diversity-centered” approach to syllabus development.

Well-meaning instructors often attempt to incorporate diversity-related topics into their courses by including one or a handful of readings, assignments, and so on. However, devoting little attention to diversity, multiculturalism, and related constructs, and/or introducing them in a siloed fashion (e.g., allotting a single-class session to these topics) can have the unintended effect of conveying that such concepts are unimportant (Vaccaro, 2019). At worst, this practice can appear to be tokenism, missing the point that issues of diversity pervade all aspects of the science and practice of psychology. Rather, as Vaccaro (2019) stated, “. . . effective infusion incorporates multicultural psychology into textbooks, lectures, videos, activities, and assignments throughout the academic term . . .” (p. 29).

Accordingly, an infusion of issues related to EDI should be evident in the topics and schedule outlined in a course syllabus. For example, rather than a single lecture being devoted to diversity in a psychotherapy course—such as cultural adaptations of evidence-based practices—an instructor may emphasize that issues in applying particular treatment approaches with various ethnic/cultural groups will be considered throughout the course. Alternatively, or additionally, the instructor may include readings highlighting the lack of representation in relevant outcome research related to the models under consideration and explicitly note the consequences of this state of affairs in the syllabus.

### **Consideration 3: Highlight Diversity in the Course Description and Acknowledge Intersectionality**

Faculty are often advised to include the course description from the course catalog in their syllabi (Grose-Fifer et al., 2019). Faculty are encouraged to examine the course description for aspects of EDI. Specifically, does the course description suggest that aspects of diversity will be discussed in the course? If that is the case, faculty can ensure that course assignments, readings, and activities in the syllabus address diversity in a nuanced, intersectional, and inclusive manner. If the course description does not include references to diversity, as has been observed by Fuentes and Shannon (2016), faculty can employ a short-term fix and engage in long-term efforts. The short-term fix involves faculty adding “My Course Description, Overview, or Scope” to their syllabi, allowing faculty to highlight topics that will be discussed in the course, including diversity or multiculturalism. On the long-term front, faculty are urged to engage their curriculum review committees in adopting the “diversity-centered” approach discussed earlier in their curricular processes. These efforts require departments to conduct their business in a different manner, possibly reviewing their mission statements, strategic plans, and other key

departmental processes. Adames et al. (2013) provide psychology departments with guidance on developing and engaging with a diversity-centered approach.

With respect to intersectionality, we encourage instructors to define intersectionality in the syllabus for their students, explain the role of institutionalized oppression within society, and enter in agreement with their students to do their best to not recreate systemic oppression within the classroom. As an example, faculty can adapt the following statement to suit their course needs:

#### Commitment to intersectionality

"I would like to acknowledge that we are all individuals with multiple sociocultural identities that intersect and shape our worldview through the lens of privilege and oppression. My commitment to you as your instructor is to minimize systemic forces of oppression within the classroom such as ableism, classism, racism, sexism, transphobia, and heterosexism in efforts to create a safe learning environment for all of us. I ask that you also join me in this commitment to foster respect for one another, enhance solidarity, and build community."

### Consideration 4: Develop Diversity-Centered Learning Objectives

Learning objectives make up another common section of the course syllabus. In developing these objectives, faculty have an opportunity to describe what they expect students to take away from the course (Fink, 2013). In undergraduate psychology courses, Grose-Fifer et al. (2019) advise faculty to work from the APA Undergraduate Learning Goals (2013), which as noted earlier have several EDI connections. Again, we encourage faculty to either adopt a culture-centered approach, which requires an infusion of EDI into all the learning objectives, or add a specific learning objective that ensures EDI aspects are addressed in the course. For example, in the latter suggestion, faculty, in addition to the typical learning objectives, can include an objective such as "In this course, students will consider multicultural and diversity aspects as they relate to the major concepts of this course . . ."

### Consideration 5: Include a Diversity Statement

A straightforward strategy for making a syllabus more EDI-centered and highlighting it as a core value guiding the class is the inclusion of a diversity statement. Diversity statements are common in academia, and calls for their inclusion in course syllabi are increasing (Armstrong, 2011; Branch et al., 2018). For many of us, developing and sharing a diversity statement is an exercise in making our implicit intentions and values explicit. Diversity statements often include elements related to EDI and social justice, and an alternative title may be chosen to best capture the scope of a statement (e.g., Diversity and Inclusion Statement).

Additionally, students may arrive in classrooms having already received a number of messages about EDI and as such have assumptions about what they can expect in a given

environment. Unsurprisingly, undergraduate students perceive a class climate as "warmer" if the course syllabus includes a diversity statement (Branch et al., 2018). In *How Learning Works*, Ambrose et al. (2010) remind us that "students are not only intellectual but also social and emotional beings" (p. 156), and hence, the syllabus and the classroom climate it promotes are determinants of learning and performance.

Because a diversity statement will relate to the specific educator and the specific context of the course and discipline, faculty are encouraged to develop or adapt a statement for their specific class (Carnegie Mellon University, 2019) rather than simply adopting an existing one. At a minimum, most statements include a (1) proclamation for the respect for diversity, (2) an inclusive list of relevant dimensions of diversity, (3) an explicit valuing of diverse perspectives, and (4) expectations with respect to the classroom climate and behavior. We encourage a fifth step, noting that micro- and macroaggressions will be addressed and used as teaching moments. Other elements of the diversity statement may include an acknowledgment of inequities in society, education, or one's field specifically, relevant student resources, an indication of ways that diversity enhances learning, and acknowledgment of how a diversity statement aligns with one's teaching philosophy.

Excellent reflection questions that may be helpful to flesh out a diversity statement with respect to these factors are offered by Brown University's Harriet W. Sheridan Center for Teaching and Learning (<https://www.brown.edu/sheridan/teaching-learning-resources/inclusive-teaching/statements>) and the Eberly Center at Carnegie Mellon University (<https://www.cmu.edu/teaching/design/teach/syllabus/checklist/diversitystatement.html>). Sample key questions from these websites that may guide the development of one's diversity statement include the following "What role does your respect for and engagement with diversity in the classroom play in your personal teaching philosophy? and How do you, concretely, recognize and value diversity in your classroom?"

We close this section with two final observations. First, the placement of the diversity statement within the syllabus is important. What is the inadvertent message if the statement is lost in the back with miscellaneous course information or relegated to an appendix? Diversity statements that appear earlier in the syllabus are more likely to be recalled by students, and, as noted earlier, can lead to greater perceptions of the warmth of the class climate (Branch et al., 2018). Parenthetically, to ensure that diversity does not get lost in the content of the syllabus and to clearly communicate to students that this aspect of the course is important to him, the first author shares his statement as an announcement through the university's learning platform at the beginning of the semester.

Second, including a diversity statement in the syllabus may have unintended effects if faculty do not translate their statements into consistent and meaningful action throughout their courses. For example, such mixed messages about commitment to diversity are related to lower perceived behavioral integrity of organizations (Windscheid et al., 2016). The Yale Poorvu Center for Teaching and Learning's website (<https://poorvucen>

ter.yale.edu/DiversityStatements) provides examples of instructor practices that can be enacted throughout a course that embody the diversity statement. For example, instructors are encouraged to (1) provide explanations about why scholars from marginalized backgrounds or identities are included or not included among the course reading list, (2) acknowledge the historical exclusion of such individuals in one's field, (3) develop and enforce ground rules for discussion of sensitive topics, and (4) explain how the pedagogical strategies of a course aim to address diverse students' learning needs. Instructors may also share stories about how they were or are impacted by their field's lack of diversity as well as self-disclose challenges with course material when they were students due to issues related to background and/or identity.

### **Consideration 6: Decolonize the Syllabus**

Another strategy we recommend for ensuring an EDI-centered syllabus is to consider the role of colonization in higher education and reflect on ways to decolonize the syllabus. Throughout history, colonization began with global control over robbed indigenous land, and it has been used to reinforce Western forms of reasoning and thinking and exploited people of color, to name a few (Stein & de Oliveira Andreotti, 2016). Contemporary forms of colonization can be described as hierarchical dominant power structures that reinforce superiority, exclusion, and normative forms of thinking (e.g., White, Western, Eurocentric, Christian, patriarchal), across various domains such as economics, politics, and education. Decolonization, or anti-colonialism, can be defined as resisting, transforming, and eradicating the oppressive hegemonic power structures that influence our ways of acquiring and transmitting knowledge (Stein & de Oliveira Andreotti, 2016). Additionally, it involves critical consciousness and awareness, accountability, and reclaiming power that has been usurped from marginalized communities (Dei, 2006). It is also important to note the roots and origins of the construct of decolonization and credit these efforts to Indigenous communities (Dei, 2006) and Black enslavement liberation efforts (Stein & de Oliveira Andreotti, 2016). de Oliveira Andreotti and colleagues (2015) write, "institutions of higher education have played a central role in perpetuating oppressive forces of colonization" (p. 30). Campuses have been complicit and benefited from colonization in various ways such as using slave labor in the development and construction of the institution, being built on robbed indigenous lands, and a history of supporting racist scientific research (e.g., eugenics, Stein & de Oliveira Andreotti, 2016; Tuskegee syphilis study, Brandt, 1978). Multicultural scholars have a duty to dismantle the colonial legacy, and one possible avenue to engage in decolonization is through our course syllabi. What follows are a few recommendations for syllabus decolonization.

**Center authors of marginalized backgrounds.** The first recommendation involves dismantling the legacy of colonization through "the supplementation of existing curricula with non-Western perspectives" (Stein & de Oliveira Andreotti, 2016, p. 4).

Specifically, we recommend centering and focusing on readings of historically underrepresented and marginalized scholars in the field and discuss the intentionality behind the purpose of assigning such readings. We encourage instructors to reflect on the readings that they have selected for their course and examine whether the authors hold prototypical identities (e.g., White, male, heterosexual; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). We recommend that instructors be transparent behind the intentionality around choosing specific texts. This recommendation could be as simple as adding "The following text/articles for the course have been chosen in efforts to highlight the important work of historically underrepresented and marginalized scholars in the field" to the Required Readings section of the syllabus.

### **Acknowledge different holidays and privileges of holidays celebrated.**

Another recommendation is related to holidays in the academic course schedule or the class outline section of the syllabus. We advise educators to consider the historical context and meanings of holidays (e.g., Columbus Day). When discussing the schedule and outline of the syllabus, it is important that educators effectively communicate to their students the privilege associated with certain holidays within higher education (e.g., honoring Christian holidays and time off for Christmas) in order to increase the students' awareness around issues of EDI. By increasing students' awareness of oppression, instructors begin to dismantle the colonial and oppressive history of higher education. Additionally, providing flexibility, explicitly honoring other religious holidays, and stating that students are not penalized for missing class for other religious holidays can further foster an inclusive syllabus.

**Office hours.** Office hours are often included in the syllabus, but some students may not fully understand their purpose. Research suggests that first-generation college students have problems with the transition from high school to college compared to students with college-educated parents (Pascarella et al., 2004). For example, first-generation college students are more likely to avoid interacting with faculty members, less likely to ask questions of faculty members, and have lower confidence in their academic abilities and in turn may miss opportunities for mentoring that may affect their academic career and likelihood of seeking advanced degrees (Soria & Stebleton, 2012). Therefore, we recommend that instructors outline, explain, and reiterate the importance of office hours in their syllabus. When instructors provide their office hours, they can provide further guidance on how they can be used (e.g., *My office hours are an opportunity for you to connect with me, a chance to ask clarifying questions about content, explore what you many want to do after you graduate, and find support*). Additionally, the instructor can assign homework that students attend an office hour during the first or second week of class for students to familiarize themselves with the location of the office and have a brief interaction in an effort to increase the likelihood that they return and utilize office hours effectively.

*Grading policy, class participation, and attendance.* Instructors may use class participation as a percentage of the overall grade for the course. Therefore, when instructors are describing their grading policies in the syllabus, they may include a statement to highlight how classroom participation, discussions, and dynamics will be framed and processed to ensure feminist ideals of equity and egalitarianism are centered. A sample statement could be—“We will be sensitive to how we interact and engage with one another, therefore, we will have periodic check-ins to examine our own dynamics within the classroom”). Additionally, instructors need to consider identity threat (Steele, 2011) and how it may affect class participation and the related grade, as certain students may participate less due to this threat. Steele (2011) provides guidance on how to minimize this threat. Finally, we encourage instructors to be flexible, whenever possible, with their attendance policy and reconsider requiring a medical note to deem an absence as “excused.” These types of policies may reinforce classism and assume that all students have access and transportation to health care. Additionally, a more flexible attendance policy will further increase inclusivity of students with chronic physical and mental health conditions. A strict attendance policy may unintentionally affect the grades of students from marginalized backgrounds.

*Rethink assignments and tests.* Instructors are encouraged to reconsider the use of standardized exams and individual assignments prior to developing their syllabus and their grading rubric for the course. Specifically, standardized testing and individual assignments promote competitive behaviors for higher grades as prestige and monetary prizes are argued to be colonial and capitalistic forces driving higher education (Gupta, 2012). Furthermore, research indicates that standardized testing has historically been biased against students of color, low-income students, and other students from marginalized backgrounds (e.g., Croizet, 2013). Therefore, instructors should consider the diversity of learning abilities of their students and incorporate creative assignments (e.g., flipped classroom models, interactive activities, technology, Bishop & Verleger, 2013; and group-based projects) as other markers of intelligence to determine the grade in the course and promote group cohesion within the classroom. To that end, instructors should note these efforts in the grading rubric portion of the syllabus.

*Territorial acknowledgment.* A final recommendation for decolonizing a syllabus is to include a territorial acknowledgment. Territorial acknowledgments are becoming more common in the opening remarks of public events and gatherings in the United States and Canada to acknowledge the Indigenous inhabitants of the land. The intention of territorial acknowledgments of this nature is, ideally, “recognition as a form of reconciliation” (Vowel, 2016). For example, Fossil Free U of T, a University of Toronto environmentalist group, opened their weekly meetings with a territorial acknowledgment “in order to recognize the settler colonial history of Canada and

support a commitment to solidarity with Indigenous peoples as part of environmentalist work” (Asher et al., 2018, p. 316). Ultimately, it is important to recognize that “territorial acknowledgments flow from the work of Indigenous peoples themselves, who are resisting invisibilization” (Vowel, 2016).

Territorial acknowledgments are also becoming increasingly common in written form, including in course syllabi. For example, a territorial acknowledgment has been adopted for use in psychology syllabi at the University of Calgary. The following statement is incorporated into a broader “Respect for Diversity” statement: “The Department of Psychology would also like to acknowledge the traditional territories of the people of the Treaty 7 region in southern Alberta. The City of Calgary is also home to Métis Nation of Alberta, Region III.” The University of Calgary Office of Indigenous Engagement’s website (<https://www.ucalgary.ca/indigenous/cultural-protocol>) provides other examples varying in specificity. As with these examples, territorial acknowledgments are usually created by consulting with local Indigenous peoples (Vowel, 2016). The examples alone, while potentially useful, belie the complexity of the nature and functions of territorial acknowledgments—the term “acknowledgment” in this context is itself complicated and may convey a variety of meanings (Wilkes et al., 2017).

As with all recommendations that we put forth, the inclusion of a territorial acknowledgment should be done in the right spirit and intention and not merely “‘box-ticking’ inclusion without commitment to any sort of real change” (Vowel, 2016). Although a territorial acknowledgment is meant as an act of reconciliation and its inclusion in a syllabus an intention to decolonize education, it can function in exactly the opposite manner. As Asher et al. (2018) pointed out, “. . . by taking what has been, in some nations, a diplomatic protocol, gutting it of its ontological and relational context, and repurposing it to legitimate settlers’ continued presence on stolen land, we effectively colonize territorial acknowledgments . . .” (p. 318). Although more comprehensive consideration of critiques and potential pitfalls is beyond the scope of this article, it is recommended that critical examinations of territorial acknowledgments are reviewed and reflected upon prior to incorporating one into a syllabus (e.g., see Asher et al., 2018; Vowel, 2016). Finally, an informative guide to acknowledgment by the U.S. Department of Arts and Culture is available at <https://usdac.us/nativeland>. Among other topics, this resource addresses consultation and collaboration with local Indigenous peoples and communities.

### *Consideration 7: Foster a Family-Friendly Syllabus*

The pressure of balancing educational and family pursuits disproportionately limits opportunities for women in academia. According to research conducted by the Institute for Women’s Policy Research, 22% of undergraduate students are parents, of which 70% are mothers; further, mothers in college are more likely to be single than married, which is often not the case for fathers in college (Cruse et al., 2019). Various policies or



statements may be added to a syllabus to make it more family-friendly. As these will be related to diversity (e.g., gender, single parenthood) and equity (i.e., removing barriers), this material may be incorporated into a diversity statement or considered an extension of it. Reflecting on one's own local context, instructors may ask themselves a number of questions: Is it usual for people to bring children to class on occasion or to other academic events? Are these actions frowned upon? If not, are they explicitly supported? Are women encouraged to breastfeed as an alternative to missing parts of class? In what other ways may conventions in my discipline or at my institution act as assets or liabilities to greater inclusion of parents? What possibilities are there to create more family-friendly classrooms?

Oregon State University offers an excellent example of a family-friendly syllabus at <https://studentlife.oregonstate.edu/childcare/family-friendly-syllabi-examples>. A review of this example illustrates how the various recommendations for diversity statements apply. For instance, the motivation for the policy—tied to the instructor's personal philosophies in academia—is clearly stated, and there is an explicit valuing of diversity, an invitation to cocreate an inclusive environment, expectations for classroom behavior (for parents and nonparents), and pointing to sources of support. A family-friendly syllabus is likely to address inequities beyond those associated with gender, as women of color are more likely to be student parents. The percentage of Black women who are raising children as college students (40%), for example, is more than women from other racial/ethnic backgrounds (Cruse et al., 2019).

### **Consideration 8: Establish Ground Rules for Communication**

Including ground rules for communication in a syllabus is another strategy to promote EDI efforts. The aim of these guidelines is to promote civil discourse and foster an optimal learning environment (Ambrose et al., 2010; Warner, 2019), a requisite condition for encouraging a diversity of perspectives. It is important to note that some have deemed the term civility to be problematic and controversial, arguing that it privileges some over others by imposing majority values and communication parameters, which ensures the comfort level of some, but not all; this point is highlighted in Gellerson's (2019) piece on National Public Radio, "Hear Me by Any Means Necessary." Although we advocate including guidelines in the syllabus, it can be helpful to generate more comprehensive communication guidelines in collaboration with students as an extension of reviewing the syllabus and course expectations. For assistance with this endeavor, readers can review Sue (2016), Vaccaro (2019), and Warner (2019). For sample guidelines, readers can also see Ambrose et al. (2010) and Salazar et al. (2010).

### **Conclusion**

In closing, we underscore that by no means are these considerations an exhaustive list of EDI strategies. Our main aim is to

provide a coherent, concise, and useful framework for our colleagues to consider as they engage in these critical EDI efforts with their syllabi and related teaching endeavors. There are many ways to promote EDI in higher education, and starting with the course syllabus allows faculty to raise their cultural consciousness, help students from marginalized backgrounds feel welcomed, and assist students with more privilege to increase their own awareness and intercultural competence. We trust that these considerations are a good starting point with the aim of fostering further discussion, reflections, and anchors for educators, as they continue to evolve and meet the demands of an ever-growing diverse student body and society.

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### **Acknowledgments**

The authors wish to acknowledge Mr. DeVante Cunningham and Ms. Petty Tineo for their thoughtful reviews of this article.

### **Declaration of Conflicting Interests**

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

### **Funding**

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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