



# Building Strategic Approaches to Anti-Oppression in the Classroom



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*Prepared by the Office of Diversity  
& Human Rights*

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# Land Acknowledgement

*We acknowledge the University of Guelph sits on the ancestral lands of the Neutral people and the treaty lands of the Mississaugas of the Credit. We also acknowledge the significance of the Dish With One Spoon Covenant. We respect our Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, and Métis neighbours, as we strive to strengthen relationships between Indigenous peoples and settlers. Today, this gathering place is home to many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities, and we acknowledge this important connection to the land where we learn and work.*

# Our Agenda

## *Innovative Inclusion: Building Strategic Approaches to Anti-Oppression in the Classroom*

1. Supporting Diverse Learning Environments
2. Alternative Forms of Assessment & Evaluation
3. Cross-Disciplinary and Transdisciplinary Teaching and Learning
4. Managing Difficult Classroom Conversations

# Welcome and Introductions

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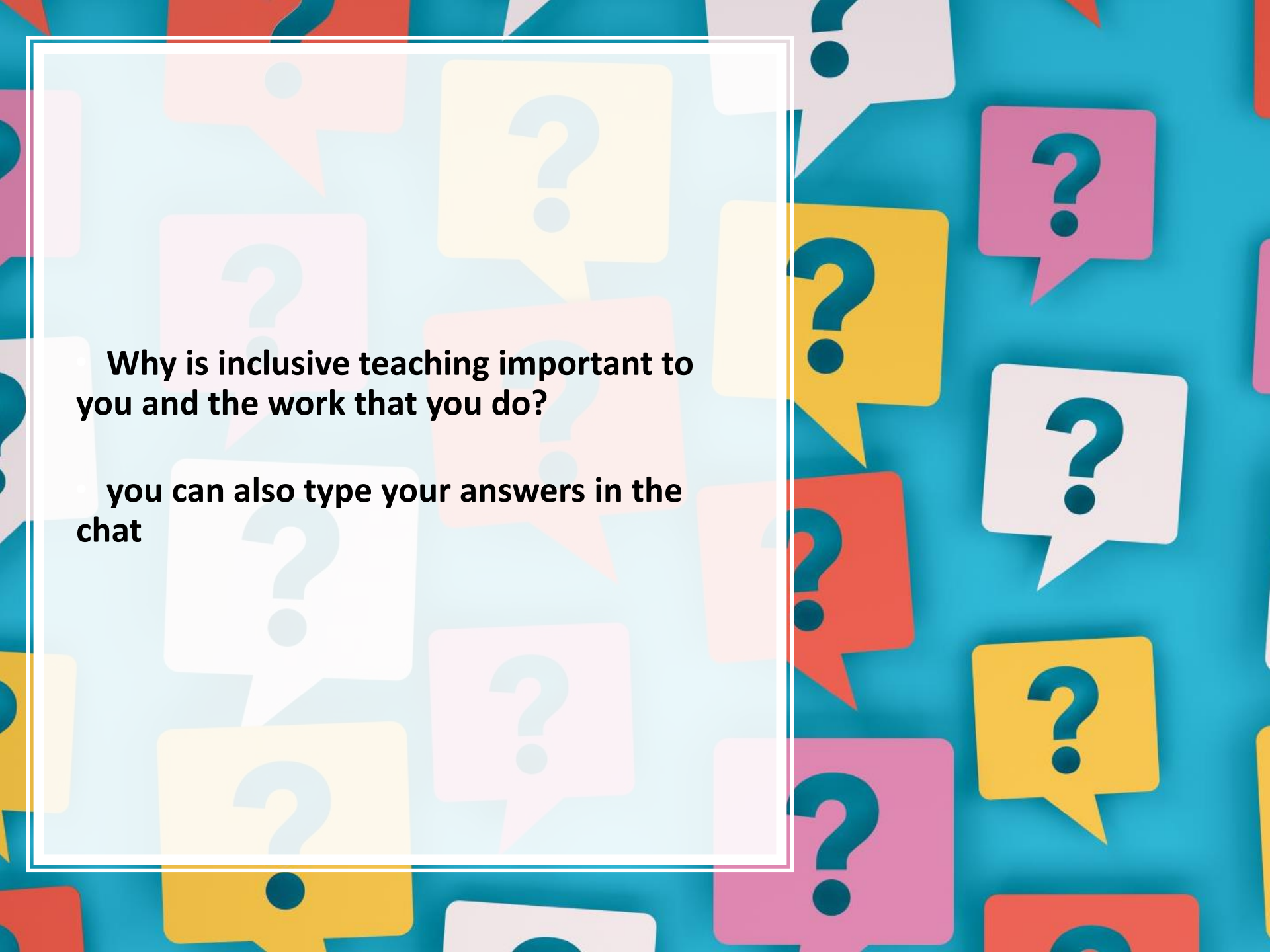
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Chat with me about equity, inclusion, and human rights workshops!

- 
- **Why is inclusive teaching important to you and the work that you do?**
  - **you can also type your answers in the chat**





# *I. Supporting Diverse Learning Environments*

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# Diversity & Inclusion in Teaching

- Diversity
  - Diversity in learners
    - Can applicants to the program see themselves in the program?
  - Diversity in teaching
    - Are there elements of the course that speak to different lived experiences, different learning styles, different lived experiences, and different pathways?
  - Diversity in content
    - Do we have diverse voices in the curriculum, in the readings, in the lectures? Has the syllabus grown and evolved with emerging scholars, or has it stayed stagnant?

# Barriers to Outreach – Equity-Deserving Groups

- Students from equity-deserving groups:
  - May be deterred by application promotions, webpages, and program requirements
  - Less likely to picture themselves in the program
  - Less likely to have mentors (especially mentors from their in-groups)
  - May not access traditional outreach programs that dominant group members access (graduate student fairs)
  - Less likely to self-identify



# Example – Unconscious Bias in Mentoring Students

- 6,548 professors in 89 disciplines at 259 universities
- 87 percent of white males received responses, in contrast to 62 percent of women and racialized minority students.
- Students with Chinese and Indian names, particularly women, received the fewest responses.
- Female and male professors of all racial and ethnic backgrounds were more likely to be biased in favour of white male students, rather than white females, or Hispanic, Chinese, and Indian male and female students.

# The Case for Belonging

## ***Belonging Motivates Better Classroom Interaction***

- Students with diverse interactions report greater awareness of social problems and increased independent skill and knowledge acquisition
- Students who feel they “fit” with their academic program experience greater willingness to accept intellectual challenges
- Inclusive classrooms promote increased confidence in problem-solving, a greater understanding of their field of study, and increased comprehension (particularly in STEM fields)

# Example: Belonging and Classroom “Debate”

- Academic debate is at the centre of critical discourse
- But we need to recognize that these “debates” are not experienced equally and not all opinions are informed
- In a discussion about boil water advisories in Indigenous communities, an Indigenous student will be significantly affected by a “viewpoint” that it’s not necessary or advisable for governments to invest in ending boil water advisories
- While another student is free to have such an opinion, it does **not** cultivate an environment where an Indigenous student will be able to achieve their full potential

# Diversity & Inclusion in Teaching

- Inclusion
  - Are we doing all these things well?
  - Are we critically engaging with students from equity-deserving groups? Are we listening to them and adjusting as we go?
  - Are we paying lip service to a reading from an underrepresented scholar or are we leading in-depth discussions with the class about why these ideas matter?
  - Are we questioning what we're missing? What perspectives are we not capturing?
  - Does every student authentically and sincerely believe that they belong in the classroom?

# Pedagogical Strategies and Tools

- Include an EDI statement in your first lecture or group meeting – tell students they belong
- Assign readings from emerging scholars, scholars from equity-deserving groups, and community scholars from equity-deserving groups
- Encourage an anti-oppression/equity lens, perspective taking, and drop the bread crumbs for them to get there
- Assume the best of students and accommodate to the highest extent possible



# Pedagogical Strategies and Tools

- Recognize that the professor/instructor is viewed as an arbiter, a decision-maker, and a person of power and authority
- Think about the systemic effect of a class policy and gather input from those who were affected
- Actively listen to what students are saying but be careful not to passively agree.
- Remind students they have all the tools they need to be successful. Careful with words like “challenging, rigour” – but *do* use those when the course is over! Remind students how many challenges they’ve conquered.



## ***II. Alternative Forms of Assessment & Evaluation***

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# Inclusion Climate and Assessment

- The inclusion climate/classroom environment is directly tied to a student's capacity and ability to succeed
- It is essential to understand the barriers caused by a lack of inclusion for equity-deserving students
- A lack of inclusion results in reduced knowledge acquisition and reduced knowledge retention

When we design a system for the average, what does that mean? Who do these metrics *not* work for?

“Traditional or established research methods have always **privileged the norm or the majority**. Individuals at the margins are frequently eliminated or discounted as ‘noise’ in large data sets . . . **‘Marginalized’ [people] are also least served by the status quo**. Evidence-based governance, on the other hand is most likely to support the status quo – the ‘tried and true’ or ‘proven’ measures for which it is easier to amass data.”

- Jutta Treviranus, Professor and Director, Inclusive Design Research Centre, OCAD University

# A Spotlight on Accommodation

A student with OCD participates in a 4th year seminar course in the Department of Political Science. Early in the semester, the student requests an alternative means of participating in the seminar. They identify that their OCD prevents them from contributing spontaneously during seminar discussions. The professor indicates that they aren't sure if there *is* an alternative in a 4<sup>th</sup> year seminar class. Reluctantly, the professor indicates they can submit weekly journal reflections instead. His reflections are, by any standard, very well done. The student's other written work is exemplary – often in the top 2% of the class. The professor notices, however, that there are frequent requests for extensions (sometimes to the end of term) caused by fixations on perfectionism and occasional crises of confidence. The professor grants such extensions but does have personal concerns about doing so.

At the end of the semester, the student asks for a recommendation to an MA program. The professor refuses, telling the student: “I really don't think you've demonstrated you could handle the rigours of a grad program.”



# A Spotlight on Accommodation

- A. Are there biases here that you think influenced the professor's thinking?
- B. Assuming the student seeks admission to a grad program despite the professor's refusal to write a recommendation letter, do you think this will have any effects on the student's performance in the program if they're admitted?

# Bias ex: Students with Accommodations

- Students with disabilities often meet peers who have little familiarity with disabilities, hold stigmas about people with disabilities, or even consider accommodations to be an unfair advantage
- Nearly 2/3 of students with disabilities are unable to complete their degrees within 6 years, showing that the “university is a sorting gate but also a holding pen”
- Just 41% of students with learning disabilities complete their postsecondary education
- 1 in 7 Canadians has a disability but 2% of Canadian students seek accommodations
- ~100,000-200,000 Canadian students who need accommodations but don’t seek them
- Systemic oppression in education leads to systemic oppression elsewhere
  - Students with disabilities are more likely to delay post-secondary education
  - Likely to have up to 60% more student debt by the time they graduate
  - Debt is particularly onerous for students

# Students with Accommodations

- Socialize the classroom to the importance of accommodation
- Create an environment where students feel comfortable coming forward
- Think about accommodation beyond “required” accommodation

# Racial Bias ex: Grades

- Grading of written assignments
  - Studies suggest that when the grader knows the race of the writer, papers from racialized students are coded with more spelling/grammar, analytical, and technical errors even when overall quality is the same as papers from white students
- The inclusion climate is directly correlated with students' academic success
  - Consider whether your classroom environment is inclusive and if racialized students feel comfortable participating, coming for assistance, etc.

# Bias ex: Grades

- Equity-deserving groups are often to asked to take on additional service obligations within social circles, extracurricular groups, residence, etc.
- Equity-deserving groups are often most likely to be doing additional community service work as part of their research (e.g., work with Indigenous communities, community-engaged scholarship)



# Grading May Also Perpetuate Discourses of Dominance and Subordination

- Students may also interpret feedback differently
- For racialized students, comments from instructors – especially instructors from dominant groups – can be read or interpreted as a discourse of power and dominance
- The ways feedback is offered may shift that to a collaborative form of learning and continuous improvement

E.g.,

Control narrative (worse) = “I’m giving you these comments so you’ll have feedback on your paper.”

Intervention narrative (better) = “I’m giving you these comments, because I have high expectations and I know that you can reach them.”

# Questions: how do we apply an anti-oppressive lens to grading?

- How have we designed grading for the norm or the majority?
- What barriers do you think exist to equitable, inclusive, and anti-oppressive grading?
- What does equitable, inclusive, and anti-oppressive grading mean to you?

# Anti-Oppressive Grading

- Less reliance on grading that reflect subjective interpretations of effort or contribution (e.g., participation)
- Less reliance on mechanics (e.g., spelling/grammar) that are subject to cultural biases
- Nameless submissions on written work
- Allowing students to count the best of a certain number of assignments
- Allow students to contextualize their performance at the end of the semester
- Assigning a portion of the grade to their “best” component
- Using low-stakes assignments early in the semester with opportunity for growth
- Use assignments like critical reflections that emphasize hope and growth mindsets – reward learning
- Don’t hide the ball – what are you looking for, and how do I succeed? Use detailed descriptions of what constitutes demonstration of content mastery through rubrics or proficiency scales.



### ***III. Cross- Disciplinary and Transdisciplinary Teaching and Learning***

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# EDI Across Disciplines

- EDI is important from a cross- and multi-disciplinary perspective for two main reasons:
  - It's important to create a shared culture of anti-oppressive action. Every student – regardless of discipline – should recognize the equity implications of their work and be empowered to call in/out oppressive behaviour in their peers.
  - Anti-oppression is effective only when we integrate a discipline-specific focus to anti-oppression. Every discipline can bring an anti-oppression lens to their studies.



# Shared Culture of Anti-Oppression

## *Example: LGBTQ2IA+ Inclusion*

- In a recent study of LGBTQ+ performance in the classroom, LGBTQ+ students in Engineering reported:
  - Feeling less accepted and more ignored by their classmates
  - Feeling less comfortable joining social events with peers
  - Feeling that their work as engineering students isn't valued
- LGBTQ+ students were more likely to:
  - Avoid participating in group projects
  - Report hearing or reading derogatory comments
  - Report emotional, sleep, stress and anxiety difficulties
  - Feel exhausted by efforts to compartmentalize their lives



## ***IV. Managing Difficult Classroom Conversations***

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# Microaggressions and Unintentional Prejudice

Microaggressions are **the brief everyday slights, insults, indignities, and denigrating messages** sent to people of colour [Indigenous peoples, 2SLGBTQIA+ folks, persons with disabilities, immigrants, women] by **well-intentioned folks\*\*\*** who are unaware of the hidden messages being communicated. (Wing Su)

\*\*\* or folks who don't *acknowledge* the messages they are plainly communicating to those who consume them

# Microaggressions

Type	Definition	Example
Microinsult	A form of microaggression that demeans a person's identity	"Oh, I wouldn't have known you were gay just by listening to you talk."
Microinvalidation	A form of microaggression that excludes or negates a person's thoughts or feelings.	In a meeting: Racialized person offers idea, no one responds White person offers same idea, everyone says they agree

How should we respond to  
microaggressions?

# Bias and Microaggressions

## Case Study 1

You are leading a small group discussion for an International Development class. The discussion turns to a conversation of current events, in particular a development in the country of South Sudan. You notice that one student is prompting another student to participate, saying things like “I’d like to hear more from Celina on this issue.” This student is, in fact, from a Caribbean country and not South Sudan. You notice this student shifting uncomfortably in their seat and looking at you with a grimace.

How should you respond?

# Suggested Strategies

**Suggested strategy:** Don't ask one person to speak for many. Don't assume identity.

Be aware if person targeted appears to be seeking support.

Interrupt if needed, identify potential impacts of the behaviour and reiterate goals of activity.



# Calling in vs. Calling Out

CALLING SOMEONE IN	CALLING SOMEONE OUT
<p>Done privately, after the fact</p> <p>Invites a conversation and creates understanding</p> <p>A chance to explain why the behaviour/language was inappropriate and what changes can be made</p> <p>Can be difficult but, ultimately, enlightening</p> <p>Helps someone shift their perspective</p> <p>Depends on your social influence and relationship</p> <p>Takes energy and patience</p>	<p>Done publicly, in the moment</p> <p>Stops problem behaviour immediately</p> <p>Demonstrates that certain behaviour/language is never acceptable</p> <p>Can be shaming, isolating and punishing</p> <p>Might push someone into an insincere apology</p> <p>Depends on your position / authority</p> <p>Takes energy</p>

# Interventions to Interrupt Oppressive Behaviours

## Low Level Interventions

- Clarify – what do you mean by? Or, “I heard you say x... is that what you meant to say?”
- Neutralize – Instead of “x’s comment, say let’s talk about the idea that.”
- Validate and Create Balance
- Follow-up after the moment

## Medium Interventions

- When I heard you say x, it made me hear, feel, etc.
- Directly highlight the problem – this is rooted in \_\_\_ism/phobia
- Highlight broader context – We’ve made a commitment to anti-racism... this has to be part of that
- Return to group guidelines – this isn’t what we agreed to

## High Level Interventions

- Non-negotiable: What you said/did was inappropriate, and it can’t happen again.
- Escalate: There are potential violations of the Human Rights/Sexual Violence policy here... I need to escalate this further
- Recreating Safe Space: This has become an unsafe environment. We need to take a break.

## Take Aways

What is one thing from today that stayed with you?

# Contact Information

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