# WHAT INCLUSIVE INSTRUCTORS DO

*Principles and Practices for Excellence in College Teaching*

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# Chapter 1

## THE WHAT AND WHY OF INCLUSIVE TEACHING

*[Inclusive instruction is] [t]eaching that recognizes and affirms a student's social identity as an important influence on teaching and learning processes, and that works to create an environment in which students are able to learn from the course, their peers, and the teacher while still being their authentic selves. It works to disrupt traditional notions of who succeeds in the classroom and the systemic inequities inherent in traditional educational practices.*

—Full-time academic professional, doctorate-granting university, Education

The first two chapters of this book contain information critical to understanding what inclusive instructors do. Knowing how they define inclusive teaching, why they consider inclusive instruction to be an essential aspect of effective teaching, the instructional frameworks that undergird their teaching efforts, and the mind-sets they espouse when implementing such approaches provides insight into why they adopt particular teaching strategies. Typically this instructional information is not widely accessible given that it lives within the minds of instructors and within closed off classroom spaces. Throughout these chapters, however, we increase the visibility of inclusive instructors' ways of thinking using both their voices and the relevant literature.

### How They Define Inclusive Teaching

Like many terms within educational spaces, *inclusive teaching* is one that is seemingly elusive. However, as we start to operationalize the term through the voices of instructors participating in a national survey study although their definitions vary as illustrated in the quotes that follow, there are overarching themes that unify them (see Appendix A for study details). When reading the subsequent definitions consider what they have in common.

*Inclusive teaching uses pedagogical strategies that allow students to engage meaningfully with course content and skills no matter what they bring to the classroom, regardless of different abilities, mental or physical illnesses, or economic or social circumstances.*

–Assistant professor, doctorate-granting university, Art History

*Inclusive teaching involves practices that help learners perceive and/or increase their perception that they "belong" and that their cultural and life experiences are valued in their present learning context. It involves examining the content and language of a course or program from a stance of inclusion. It also involves drawing upon the findings of research to adopt (e.g., stereotype threat) practices that are beneficial to the well-being and success of students who are traditionally underrepresented in a given learning context.*

—Adjunct professor, doctorate-granting university, Education

*As an instructor, it is my responsibility to ensure that all students, regardless of any number of characteristics (such as gender, race, sexual orientation, ability, religion, socioeconomic status, educational background, style of dress, extracurricular interests, family situation, health situation, level of introversion, etc.—the list could be endless), have the tools and resources necessary to meet the objectives of the class. Everyone should be an important, integral member of the class community, with ample speaking and participation opportunities. As members of a diverse community, everyone should feel like any perceived "differences" will contribute to [the] learning environment, not detract from it. All students should feel that they are appreciated as unique individuals and should not feel excluded or compelled to hide any aspect of themselves that might be perceived as a "difference."*

—Full-time academic professional, doctorate-granting university, Biology

Two themes emerge from their definitions—that to the instructors inclusive teaching involves designing learning environments that are (a) equitable, where all students have the opportunity to reach their potential, and (b) welcoming, and foster a sense of belonging. Equity and belonging are interrelated given that equitable learning environments can promote a sense of belonging. In addition to defining inclusive teaching, also important is to operationalize the terms *diversity, equality*, *equity* and *inclusion* used throughout the book in the context of teaching and learning. We consider diversity to be how learners differ from one another with regard to their social identities, demographics, perspectives, prior experiences, attitudes, knowledge, skills and other attributes. Equality in teaching and learning suggests that all students should have identical learning experiences regardless of their differences, which we take the stance does not align well with inclusive approaches to instruction. Equity acknowledges the differences between learners, their diversity, and the types of learning environments that help diverse students succeed. Inclusion refers to creating a welcoming environment and intentionally not excluding any learners. In general, inclusive teaching, as described by the study respondents, dismantles the historic notion that cultural and other

differences among students make them in some way deficient as learners. Instead, inclusive teaching embraces and responds to such diversity to create effective teaching and learning environments (Guo & Jamal, 2007).

One intriguing aspect of inclusive teaching is how it can manifest within institutions that vary in their missions, strategic goals, cultures and student populations. Fundamentally, while inclusive instructors may embrace equity and a sense of belonging as core elements of inclusive teaching, their conceptualizations can be influenced to some degree by contextual factors specific to an institution department or program. As an example, historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) are pioneers for inclusion with regard to race and ethnicity, with their missions primarily focused on providing educational opportunities for Black students who have been historically excluded from higher education. Students from other racial and ethnic backgrounds also enroll at HBCUs. HBCUs can offer BIPOC students opportunities to be in community, which can lead to increased sense of belonging. Students have reported strong connections with their instructors at HBCUs, although groups of students may experience inclusion in different ways (Booker & Campbell-Whatley, 2019). One participant in the national study who worked at an HBCU noted that "faculty seem receptive once they know what [inclusive teaching] means, [and] many of them do these techniques without knowing they are engaging in inclusive pedagogy." This quote emphasizes that while some faculty may not use the language or term inclusive teaching, they are using the techniques**.**

Community colleges continue to be leaders in designing accessible and affordable educational environments for diverse learners. An inclusive instructor noted, "The community college I teach at offers an entire suite of late-starting classes for students who struggle through registration paperwork (due to language barriers, financial status, family status, etc.) and offers an intensive suite of language services for English Language Learning students." When conceptualizing inclusive teaching, this instructor described how they support students from a diversity of linguistic and cultural backgrounds to "craft opportunities for all students to demonstrate their individual strengths," highlighting how this instructor's definition was framed in their institutional context.

As the college populations further diversify, institutions can also experience shifts in their student demographics, which can impact how they design inclusive learning environments. One survey respondent indicated:

> *Our institution has shifted to minority serving in the last decade, and the institution is struggling to keep up with the changes. While there's a lot of controversy, the overall shared value of supporting students has helped keep it from being even more controversial. The vast majority of our faculty value inclusive pedagogy even if they're not always sure how to implement it in the classroom.*

Instructors in other institution types may also espouse definitions of inclusive teaching largely framed by their institutional characteristics and cultures. An instructor from a master's college or university noted that to them inclusive teaching involves "Making sure that every student feels like they have a voice in the classroom. . . . Ensuring that POC [people of color] are given as many opportunities to participate as White students." In teaching environments such as predominantly White institutions, instructors may espouse similar definitions of inclusive teaching.

> *Inclusive instructors adopt specific classroom practices that create learning environments*
> *that are equitable for their diverse students and foster a sense of belonging.*
>
> —Survey respondent; rank, institution type, discipline not identified

## Reflection Question

- What is (are) your institutional culture(s) around equitable and inclusive teaching practices? How would you respond if asked what inclusive teaching meant to you?

## Why Inclusive Teaching Is Critical

Inclusive instructors recognize that creating equitable and welcoming environments is critical in higher education in which exclusionary practices persist. Obtaining a college degree has been mostly afforded to those who are privileged, as those in power, with resources, built institutions but did not necessarily design such educational environments to support the success of a diverse population. Access continues to be an issue as do systemic inequities, which can impact student persistence. Inclusive instructors are aware of these challenges facing today's students and of the barriers in the educational systems in which they learn. One instructor highlighted, "Inclusive teaching creates a space that respects diversity in its many forms and structures the learning so that everyone has access to effective, comfortable learning." A desire to address systemic inequities and create accessible learning environments can motivate inclusive instructors to implement equitable practices.

Inclusive instructors teach as populations of students continue to diversify. Between the years of 1995–1996 and 2015–2016, most non-White racial and ethnic groups experienced increased enrollment at the undergraduate level, with the most growth seen with Hispanic learners (Espinosa et al., 2019). Increasingly more first-generation students, the first in their families

to seek a bachelor's degree, matriculate into colleges and universities (Center for First-Generation Student Success, 2019). Such higher enrollments suggest progress made with regard to the increasing student diversity in institutions of higher education, but systemic and structural barriers still remain for many students that impede their academic achievement and attainment of degrees once enrolled. Increased diversity gives inclusive instructors pause as they ensure courses are carefully designed, reducing the risk of greater achievement disparities between students.

Inclusive instructors are aware that while inclusive teaching is an essential aspect of effective pedagogy, it can be overlooked, ignored, or narrowly defined. They describe major barriers of colleagues who do not implement, including not being aware of the many differences that exist between students, which can impact their learning; not knowing how to implement inclusive teaching practices; fear of accidentally offending students or not wanting negative consequences on teaching evaluations because of risk-taking; not wanting to change teaching practices; not considering themselves responsible for equitable and inclusive teaching; and challenges with managing conflict in student-student interactions (Addy et al., under review). To the contrary, inclusive instructors endeavor to understand who their learners are and take ownership over designing inclusive learning environments.

### The Diversity and Systemic Barriers Facing Learners Necessitates Inclusive Teaching

> *Inclusive teaching is teaching in a way that engages student identity and experience.*
>
> —Associate professor, doctorate-granting university, Biology

> *[Inclusive teaching is] [r]ecognizing that students approach the course from many standpoints connected to race, culture, gender identity, socioeconomic status, and familiarity with college culture and expectations, and then finding ways to include them.*
>
> —Lecturer, master's college or university, Literature/Writing Studies

Inclusive instructors are aware of the specific equity challenges facing their diverse student populations. They may teach first-generation students, who are increasingly enrolled in college and university classrooms. In the years 2015 to 2016, 56% of undergraduates were first-generation students, as defined by having parents who did not hold a bachelor's degree (Center for First-Generation Student Success, 2019). First-generation students may also come from families of low socioeconomic class, and therefore have intersecting social identities. The median parental income for first-generation students was $41,000 compared to $90,000 for continuing-generation students.

The percentages of first-generation students in different sectors show their prevalence in higher education: public, 4-year (47%); public, 2-year (64%); private nonprofit, 4-year (43%); private nonprofit, 2-year (69%); private for-profit, 4-year (72%); private for-profit, 2-year (70%). Of minority-serving institutions, percentages of first-generation students were American Indian/Alaska Native–serving (67%), Hispanic/Latinx/a/o-serving (65%), Black/African American–serving, non-HBCU (65%), historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) (60%), non-minority-serving (49%), and Asian/Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander–serving (48%). Additionally, first-generation students are more likely to have dependents compared to continuing-generation students.

Knowledge of whether students are first-generation helps inclusive instructors better design learning environments that support their success. Much of the focus in the literature has been on first-generation students assimilating into the culture of higher education (Ives & Castillo-Montoyo, 2020). In this regard, avoiding assumptions of what students should know about the college experience is implicit in how inclusive instructors support first-generation students' achievement. First-generation students may not have family and friends to help them navigate their college experience and therefore face more challenges in their transition from their first to their second year of college (Pratt et al., 2019). Low GPA is a significant predictor of lack of persistence of first-generation students (Dika & D'Amico, 2015). Other factors can contribute to the attrition of first-generation students. For example, in a study of first-generation students at a large urban university, a predictor of success for those majoring in STEM disciplines was prior preparation in math, while for non-STEM first-generation students it was their social fit at the institution (Dika & D'Amico, 2015). First-generation students can also experience tension with establishing their identities in college when they fall outside of their family expectations and norms (Covarrubias et al., 2018). College transition or bridge experiences and mentorship programs are needed to support these learners as they increase in number in academic institutions. To the classroom, first-generation students can bring resilience, an eagerness to learn and appreciate the opportunity to matriculate into institutions of higher education.

## Reflection Question

- What are the percentages of first-generation students at the institution(s) in which you teach? Regardless of whether this information is readily available, consider inviting your students in a safe way to share whether they are first-generation students.

The general conception of who the traditional college student is continues to evolve, as many adult learners return to school to switch careers or further their education. Adult learners are distinct from what those traditionally perceived as college students, between the ages of 18 and 21. Adult learners can enliven the classroom environment by bringing their life experiences and a determination to learn. They simultaneously may have obligations outside of school such as employment and family obligations that can impact their learning experience. Lacking awareness of the constraints of adult learners without providing strategies and structures to support their learning can impact their academic success. Similarly, veterans returning to school can be a large asset in the classroom and necessitate a reevaluation of who college students are and how we support learning in the adult learner population.

## Reflection Question

- Are adult learners enrolled at the institution(s) in which you teach? In your classes? Why are they in school? What life experiences and factors can impact their success?

Socioeconomic class is another factor implicated in the exclusion of many talented college students. With regard to access, even today college is not affordable to everyone, which is corroborated by public opinion. In a recent poll only about 60% of the public believed college is available to those who need it (Marken, 2020). In the same poll only 27% of adults believed that higher education is affordable (Marken, 2020). Many colleges and universities have become need blind to address this disparity, opening their doors to more students regardless of their financial means. Such students can be very appreciative of their college experience and provide valuable perspectives in their college classrooms. They may not have had opportunities and prior experiences to build foundational knowledge and skills, unlike some of their peers, which can impact their transition into college. Some may need to work many hours during college to support themselves and their families, which lessens the time they can commit to study and engage in cocurricular and other social activities. Instructor awareness of course affordability and understanding of which types of technologies students can bring to class can make a difference for students from lower socioeconomic classes. Further, using research-supported strategies in the science of learning are all the more essential to help students attain their educational goals, amidst other obligations and constraints on their time.

## Reflection Question

- What course-related factors are important for you to consider if students in your course have limited financial means or time to study?

Another aspect of inclusive instruction is carefully taking into account the specific needs of students with accommodations to support their learning in the course. Typically, most institutions have an office for accessibility services that provide services to students with accommodations. Generally, students with documented accommodations are provided with a letter they can give to their instructor to describe their course needs. There are many students with documented accommodations in institutions of higher education and a number who are undocumented. Nineteen percent of undergraduate students in 2015–2016 reported having a disability (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.). The students responding in this report had visual, hearing, orthopedic or mobility, speech or language, learning, mental, emotional, psychiatric, or other health conditions classified as disabilities. A major consideration in supporting students with accommodations is not changing the content of the course but rather making it more accessible for all learners. Examples of student accommodations include extended time on assessments, a distraction-reduced environment, the capacity to take breaks, having a reader or a scribe to take notes, and using a computer to type rather than handwriting.

## Reflection Question

- What are some accommodations that your learners have needed in the past or with which you have personal experience?

As a result of systemic discrimination, including racism, sexism, and classism, many students have been excluded from pursuing and completing degrees in specific disciplines in higher education. These include students of color, first-generation students, adult learners, students from lower socio-economic classes, LGBTQ+ students, students with disabilities and specific learning needs, as well as learners of other social identities. For example, in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) disciplines, structural inequities and the underrepresentation of people of color in these respective fields are thought to go hand in hand. Disciplines such as economics have faced underrepresentation challenges with regard to gender. Evidence suggests that students who see positive female role models in the

field are more likely to choose economics as a major, which is promising for inclusive instructors in this discipline seeking to create inclusive experiences for their learners (Porter & Serra, 2020). Chapter 2 describes how inclusive instructors are aware of the marginalization of students from various demographic backgrounds, the impacts such marginalization can have on learning, and the steps they as instructors can take to provide equitable and welcoming experiences for these students in their courses.

## Reflection Question

- What are equity issues in your discipline? How are they being addressed?

International students are also integral community members at many institutions of higher education and can be excited to experience learning in a different culture to further their educational goals. Domestic students can learn from their international peers. International students can also face inclusion challenges distinct from domestic learners. Language mastery and differing cultural norms can impact how they experience the classroom (Sherry et al., 2009). Socially, finding ways to build community is important for international students who are away from home. Specifically in the classroom, challenges around grading the writing of international students for whom English is not their native language continues to be an area of importance for instructors. Further, such norms such as speaking in class, directly to the professor and in groups, may have different cultural implications. Learning a new culture can be an adjustment for our international students. There are more supports available for international students at colleges and universities, such as offices that focus on students who speak multiple languages, and in the classroom, such as strategies and behaviors that can promote their learning.

## Reflection Question

- What are the relative numbers of international students at your institution(s)? From which countries do they originate? Regardless of whether this information is readily available, consider inviting your students in a safe way to share whether they are international students and developing an understanding of cultural norms that may implicate their classroom success.

One area of increasing concern is the mental health of our students, especially in light of the impacts of COVID-19 and racial inequities facing Black Americans. In a 2011 survey the National Alliance for Mental Health (NAMI) surveyed college students who were diagnosed with a mental health condition in the 5 years prior. Their sample of 765 college students was diverse with regard to geographic origin arising from 48 states, race/ethnicity as well as gender (Gruttadaro & Crudo, 2012). The majority of respondents felt that the services their schools provided were good and considered mental health training for faculty and staff extremely important. Twenty two percent of the respondents heard about on-campus mental health services from their instructors, highlighting an important role that instructors can play in referring students to the appropriate supports. Alarmingly, 64% of the students who withdrew from their school did so because of mental health conditions, and half of that group never sought out on-campus resources. In a 2018 report from the American College Health Association summarizing survey data from 88,178 students at 140 schools, 25% of females and 11.7% of males had been diagnosed or treated by a professional for anxiety, while 20.1% of females and 11% of males had been diagnosed or treated for depression.

A study examining 10 years of data from 2007 to 2017 revealed increases in the number of college students treated for mental health disorders, as well as increases in depression and suicidality prevalence among undergraduates (Lipson et al., 2019). A promising finding from this study is that mental health stigmas have appeared to decrease with time. Generally, efforts to reduce the stigma of mental health disorders and encourage help-seeking behaviors continue to improve, as do the services provided to these students on college campuses through counseling centers and accessibility services, but many of these resources are being overwhelmed, as a 2017 report indicates that on average students were waiting 7 business days to see a counselor (LeViness et al., 2017). While students should be encouraged to seek out the proper resources to support their mental health, there are direct implications for the classroom. Many instructors may have students with performance anxieties, such as those around testing, or may have tried to support the academic success of a depressed student, aware or unaware of the condition. There are actions that can hinder the success and belonging of students with mental health disorders and those that can support them. Similarly, a number of students have conditions for which accommodations are necessary to support their success, such as other mental disabilities or physical disabilities. Ensuring an environment inclusive of students with mental health disorders is important for student success. Trauma-informed pedagogies that acknowledge the challenges students face, foster trust, support relationship building,

and empower students to help them thrive are critical to supporting students' mental health (Imad, 2020).

## Reflection Question

- Identify any services provided on your campus(es) to support students with mental health concerns. Consider working with counseling services to determine how to identify and support such students.

Religious affiliation is another prominent social identity espoused by our students. Colleges and universities may have students from a variety of faith backgrounds, enriching our understanding of each other's belief systems. In teaching and learning, a student's faith may be implicated in religious holidays they observe and traditions they practice that can impact their classroom participation and attendance. For example, major religious observances may fall during the semester and impact student attendance in their course. Students, in effect, can put themselves at a crossroads where they must choose between their religious observances and their coursework. Additionally, students from some religious groups have historically experienced discrimination in college and university settings. Muslim students who veil and wear a hijab have been subject to negative social reinforcement and isolation in academic settings, with many misinformed about the veil as an important aspect of their religion (Cole & Ahmadi, 2003). These occurred during their interactions with fellow students, staff, and their instructors. Jewish students have also experienced discrimination on various levels (Kosmin & Keysar, 2015). In a 2014 survey of 1,157 Jewish students from 55 university and 4-year college campuses, 54% indicated that they were victims or witnessed acts of anti-Semitism on their campus during one academic year. Of those surveyed, 29% reported that they encountered such discrimination from an individual student, 10% in clubs/societies, 10% in other contexts, 6% in lecture or class, 4% in the student union, and 3% by their university administrative system. There are other considerations for inclusion regarding religion, including students who may need to engage in rituals such as prayer during the day or not perform work during certain hours of the day.

## Reflection Question

- What are the religious affiliations of students at your institution(s)? Which major observances or traditions may need to be considered when designing learning experiences?

Many other attributes make our learners unique, such as their different personalities, temperaments, political viewpoints, and preferences. In this chapter we set the stage to bring up some important student inclusion concerns. In no way is this content meant to be a comprehensive listing. As you digest the content of this chapter, consider the following reflection question.

## Reflection Question

- Who are your learners? What diversity assets do they bring to the classroom? What challenges can they face with inclusion?

### Research Supports Inclusion as Critical for Effective Learning

We can define inclusive teaching, and describe why the diversity of our students necessitates excellence in inclusive teaching, but the golden question is, "Does it actually work?" In other words, what is the evidence that inclusion can help our students achieve the objectives of their college education? There are a number of confirmations in the literature of which we sample key studies, focusing on the two essential aspects of inclusion that we presented previously, social belonging and equitable learning experiences.

#### The Importance of Social Belonging

Strayhorn (2019) defines belonging for college students as "[a] student's perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, and the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the campus community or others on campus such as faculty, staff, and peers" (p. 4). Social belonging is a very human need; many individuals seek to be a part of groups in which they feel as if they can identify with its members. College students can face a variety of educational challenges when they feel as if they don't belong (Strayhorn, 2012). Inclusive teaching practices support social belonging as articulated by respondents in our national study.

> *Inclusive teaching involves practices that help learners perceive and/or increase their perception that they "belong" and that their cultural and life experiences are valued in their present learning context. It involves examining the content and language of a course or program from a stance of inclusion. It also involves drawing upon the findings of research to adopt (e.g., stereotype threat) practices that are beneficial to the well-being and success of students who are traditionally underrepresented in a given learning context.*
>
> —Adjunct professor, doctorate-granting university, Education

*I think [inclusive teaching means] to make sure that students
do not feel left out or alone. That they belong.*

—Full professor, doctorate-granting university, Engineering and Technology

Social belonging can have a particularly profound impact on students from marginalized groups as they may feel a sense of being excluded from the campus or classroom community (Walton & Cohen, 2007). Studies in the field of social psychology addressing social belonging can greatly inform inclusive instruction. There is evidence that social belonging is associated with higher achievement, particularly for students from marginalized groups. A randomized control study involving a brief psychological intervention suggested a linkage between social belonging and academic achievement for students from a minoritized group (Walton & Cohen, 2011). In the investigation, a group of African American students was told during their freshman year that although they may experience adversity on campus, it would pass. A group of European American students was also given the same intervention, and a group of African American students and a group of European American students did not participate in the psychological intervention. The researchers tracked the GPAs and health outcomes of all four groups across their 4 years at the university and found that African American students who participated in the social belonging psychological intervention had significantly higher GPAs than African American students who did not, reducing the achievement gap by half. These students also had better health outcomes. From these findings the authors suggest that social belonging can act as a psychological lever for student achievement and health, particularly for students from marginalized groups.

In addition to better health outcomes, peer-level social capital has also been shown to predict satisfaction with university life (Bye et al., 2019). Similar findings were found in a study of women pursuing engineering majors (Walton et al., 2015). In addition to a social belonging intervention, female students underwent affirmation training to help them address the social issues that arose in their educational experiences. Women participating in the intervention and training ended up with higher grade point averages compared to control groups.

There are also very specific and subtle ways in which classroom environments can have an influence on social belonging to a particular discipline. In a study of women in mathematics, when female students perceived that mathematical ability was fixed and that women were not as good in mathematics as men, they no longer felt social belonging to mathematics (Good et al., 2012). Other situational cues, or aspects of the environment, have been found to implicate social belonging for groups historically marginalized. In

an investigation where women viewed a video of a math, science, and engineering conference where there was an unequal distribution of men compared to women they reported less social belonging and desire to attend the conference (Murphy et al., 2007).

A study involving a national sample of first-year college students revealed some of the nuances of belonging for first-year students (Gopalan & Brady, 2019). Both first-generation and students from racial/ethnic groups historically minorities reported lower belonging at 4-year schools. However, researchers discovered the opposite at 2-year schools. Other predictors of belonging at 4-year institutions were mental health, persistence, and engagement.

## Reflection Question

- Based on these studies, what actions taken by instructors might help promote inclusion in the classroom setting with regard to social belonging?

### The Necessity of Equitable Teaching Practices

Another key component of inclusive teaching is equity, creating a classroom environment where all students have an opportunity to succeed regardless of their backgrounds. Designing equitable learning experiences is essential for inclusive instructors. In their own words, instructors said the following:

> *Inclusive teaching means to me equity not equality. It means seek[ing] strategies that help all students.*
>
> —Lecturer, doctorate-granting university, Biology

> *Every student who walks into my classroom, regardless of background and identity, has an equal feeling.*
>
> —Associate professor, baccalaureate college, Biology

Historically, equity in education was largely attributed to providing access to students with disabilities, particularly in K–12 education. This pattern can easily be observed by a general search revealing the topics of articles published on inclusive teaching over the last 20 to 30 years. Such focus has led to more resources and attention devoted to students with disabilities, including in higher education. There are offices devoted to supporting students with disabilities. As we continue to learn of the needs of different learners

in higher education, we expand the populations to which inclusive teaching applies, acknowledging inequities can occur even more broadly across student populations and encompassing a broader definition about what an equitable college experience looks like given the inequities that still persist among students of various social identities.

Equity starts with having access to attending an institution of higher education. In a 2019 Gallup poll consisting of more than 1,000 American adults, only 60% believed that a college education is available to those who need it (Marken, 2020). Of those 60%, just 46% in the age range of 18 to 29 thought that education beyond high school was available. Also of concern, only 27% believed that higher education was affordable. The public perception that many feel college is not accessible to all is an equity concern. Beyond access, inequities persist once students reach college. For example, racial-ethnic achievement gaps continue in higher education, and investigations seek to uncover why such gaps exist. In a longitudinal study of the Black-White achievement gap, Spenner et al. (2005) found that even when they controlled for family background, parental involvement, prior educational attainment, and entering cultural capital, in addition to other factors, only half of the achievement gap was accounted for. A later investigation (Martin et al., 2017) examining the Black-White and Latino-White achievement gap for GPA found that campus climate around inclusivity in addition to choice of major explained half of the achievement gap, while the other was explained by family characteristics and prior academic preparation. This study highlights the importance of inclusivity in various aspects of the campus, including the classroom.

Some studies have looked at prematriculation interventions that can support the achievement of first-generation students to reduce disparities. In one study, researchers performed a distance education intervention for first-generation students where they listened to stories of students indicating how they shared their social identity and how they achieved success in college (Stephens et al., 2014). This intervention closed the achievement gap between first-generation students and other learners by increasing their help-seeking behaviors. As an example, in response to the question "Can you provide an example of an obstacle that you faced when you came to [university name] and how you resolved it," a student indicated, "Because my parents didn't go through college, they weren't always able to provide me with the advice I needed. So it was sometimes hard to figure out which classes to take and what I wanted to do in the future. But there are other people who can provide that advice, and I learned that I need to rely on my adviser more than other students" (p. 945). Instructors can support the academic success of

first-generation students whether or not they were first-generation students themselves by sharing how they navigated college or providing their learners access to other resources.

Achievement gaps continue to persist among students of low and high socioeconomic classes, and psychological interventions have reduced such gaps (Jury et al., 2017). The experiences of low SES with regard to emotion, identity management, self-perception, and motivation regulation can be quite different than students of higher socioeconomic status. A student's social class background has also been found to play a role in whether they feel a sense of belonging and also whether they can adjust to college, with a sense of belonging being a mediator of class background and academic and social adjustment (Ostrove & Long, 2007). Three strategies that decrease achievement gaps include self-affirmation exercises where students write down what they value prior to assessments, difference education where students listen to others of similar backgrounds describe how they coped during college, and goal reframing where exams are framed as learning tools rather than tools for selection (Stephens et al., 2014). Inclusive instructors can carry out each of these actions in their courses. Self-affirmation exercises have been found to close racial achievement gaps (Cohen et al., 2006, 2009).

These are just a few of the vast array of inequities occurring among students with diverse social identities in college; this list could be expanded. The main takeaway is that such inequities call for more inclusive practices in our classrooms so that all students have the opportunity to succeed when in college.

As illustrated throughout this chapter, inclusive teaching is critical for advancing learning for all students. A number of calls have also been made to advance inclusive teaching efforts. In her article "Small World: Crafting an Inclusive Classroom (No Matter What you Teach)," Mary A. Armstrong (2011) states,

> While many courses do not (and many cannot) include content that directly addresses diversity, and many classes and institutions (regrettably) do not reflect a powerfully diverse student demographic, I contend that all classrooms can contribute to an inclusive climate. Classrooms are social environments, and all social environments are places where inclusivity happens—or fails to happen. In short, there is no getting off the hook: if you have students sitting in front of you, you are interacting with a social group. And if you are interacting 'My courses have nothing to do with diversity' is probably a sentence we have all heard and it is often used as a free pass to discharge us from responsibility with a social group, you have a job to do regarding the practice of inclusivity. (pp. 53–54)

In "A Case for Inclusive Teaching," Kevin Gannon (2018) indicates,

> We can design all the summer-bridge and first-year programs we want, but if we neglect pedagogy, then we're building a really nice house only to furnish it with stuff we found on the curb. Likewise, if the student-life and the academic-affairs folks aren't talking about how they can complement each other's efforts, then how can the institution hope for comprehensive improvement? Piecemeal planning produces piecemeal outcomes.
>
> But student success—especially for African-American and Latino/a students—is a systemic question that demands systemic efforts to answer. It's never been more important for us to make that effort. If we mean what we say about the intrinsic value of higher education, then we must ensure not just access, but success. Inclusive teaching promotes the effective and meaningful learning that's the vital foundation for student success.
>
> Beyond even that benefit, though, by focusing on inclusive teaching, we benefit our own institutions by keeping more students on our campuses and enabling them to graduate. Given the climate in which most of us are operating, there's simply too much to lose by not committing to inclusive teaching. Conversely, we have everything to gain. (pp. **XX–XX**).

## Reflection Question

- What factors should an instructor keep in mind when designing an equitable course?

## Frameworks Supporting Inclusive Excellence

Instructors in higher education may find it useful to learn various frameworks that align with inclusive excellence in teaching. We describe three here: multicultural education, culturally relevant education, and universal design for learning.

### *Multicultural Education*

> *[Inclusive teaching is] involving all differences of students (culture, gender, gender identity, age, etc.) in the classroom.*
>
> —Associate professor, baccalaureate college, Nursing

Guo and Jamal (2007) categorize three major models of cultural diversity in higher education, aimed at different levels: individual diversity

development (self), multicultural education model (classroom teaching) and anti-racist education model (institution and community). Given the focus of this book on inclusive teaching at the level of the classroom, we describe here the individual development of the instructor with regard to cultural diversity in addition to the classroom teaching levels.

How instructors grapple with their own understanding of diversity is at the fundamental level (Chávez et al., 2003). Such development can pass through a variety of levels, each having cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects from "lack of awareness of the other, awareness of the other, questions perceptions of self and others, confronts own perceptions of the other, and makes complex choices about validating others" (adapted from Chávez et al., 2003, cited in Guo & Jamal, 2007, p. 35). In the realm of teaching in higher education, this process is indicative of when an instructor personally becomes aware of differences between their students and adopts a framework where they validate such differences through their actions.

Multiculturalism acknowledges differences between learners and looks at such differences as assets to be celebrated (Guo & Jamal, 2007). Embracing multiculturalism in the classroom can help set the stage for building an inclusive classroom community. Colorblindness, to the contrary, is based on the belief in the importance of treating all students the same regardless of their differences, whether visible or invisible. By not acknowledging the diversity of learners, colorblindness can fall short of fostering social belonging and equity. Multiculturalism removes the blinders. There is evidence that instructors espousing multiculturalism versus colorblindness are more likely to implement inclusive teaching approaches (Aragón et al., 2017).

## Reflection Question

- Reflect on your beliefs about equity and inclusion. What motivates you to read this book to learn more about inclusive teaching practices?

### Culturally Relevant and Culturally Responsive Education Frameworks

> *[C]ulturally responsive pedagogies that take into account students' needs and goals and preparedness, involves creating thoughtful learning [experiences that] take place in a way that promotes equity, leading to student success for all.*
>
> —Full professor, master's college, History

Inclusive instructors may also utilize culturally relevant and culturally responsive frameworks (Aronson & Laughter, 2016). What unites both of

these frameworks is the importance of integrating culture in teaching and learning. Culturally relevant pedagogy involves helping all students succeed academically, understand their own culture and build cultural competence, and gain an understanding of social inequities (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Culturally responsive teaching has been described as having six dimensions: social and academic empowerment of students; a multidimensional approach to instruction; validation of differing student cultures; a holistic approach to educating the student, building on student strengths; and freedom from oppressive structures in education (Gay, 2010). Wlodkowski and Ginsberg (1995) propose a framework for culturally responsive teaching that acknowledges that designing learning opportunities that tie into students' cultures can increase their intrinsic motivation and engagement with the material. Their framework includes four aspects. The first is establishing inclusion where both students and teachers feel a sense of connection and belonging. The second is helping students develop positive attitudes through culturally relevant teaching given that the learning experience is relevant to their personal lives and allows them to make choices. A third aspect is enhancing meaning by having students engage in relevant, thoughtful learning activities, and the last is engendering competence, which enables students to be aware that they can actually learn the items they value. An example of a culturally relevant or culturally responsive approach could be in an interdisciplinary course that is focused on environmental sustainability and that involves a project where students perform research on their hometown communities into practices around sustainability. The students interview members of their community, integrate their own perspectives, and propose possible solutions to creating a more sustainable community.

After becoming aware of the cultural identities that their students bring to the course, inclusive instructors can embrace principles of culturally relevant and culturally responsive teaching in order to design meaningful learning experiences for their students. There are a variety of resources that instructors can access to support their understanding and implementation of culturally relevant and culturally responsive teaching, including *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice* by Geneva Gay (2010) and *Diversity and Motivation: Culturally Responsive Teaching in College* by Margery Ginsberg and Raymond J. Wlodkowski (2009).

### Universal Design for Learning

> *Inclusive teaching incorporate[s] but is not limited to Universal Design for Learning (UDL). It also includes culturally responsive teaching wherein the instructor works to be conscious of bias and self-critiques and reflects upon biases. It includes the classroom (virtual or on-line) space, the course content, and the methodology.*
>
> —Associate professor, master's college, Rhetoric and Composition

*[Inclusive teaching is] [d]eliberately implementing inclusive teaching strategies [where] I take steps to create a class structure and atmosphere in which all students not only develop a sense of belonging but also are truly an integral part of the class, with accommodations made proactively (rather than on request, aka universal design). Students are valued for their differences in backgrounds, experiences, abilities, perspectives, internal and external pressures, and can share these freely or may choose not to do so. The goal is success for all students, not ranking students on a normal distribution.*

—Lecturer, doctorate-granting university, Psychology

Another instructional framework that is inclusive of diverse learners is the universal design for learning (UDL) (CAST, n.d.a.; Tobin & Behling, 2018). Inclusive instructors can use this framework to design instruction from an equity-minded perspective in that the learning experience is designed with the diversity of the student population in mind. UDL focuses on learning across affective, recognition, and strategic networks, providing multiple means of engagement, representation of information, and action and expression. To attend to students' affective networks, the "why" of learning, instructors design experiences that engage and motivate students in their learning (CAST, n.d.c.). They do this by recruiting interest and sustaining effort and persistence, as well as providing options for self-regulation. For example, an instructor can allow student groups to choose topics that interest them for a course project, provide regular feedback, and provide avenues where they can reflect on their learning. Recognition networks acknowledge that learners may perceive of and understand information in different ways, necessitating the importance of instruction that engages multiple senses, relies on language and different forms of media, and helps students construct their own knowledge. To provide various recognition networks, the "what of learning," an instructor may offer various ways for students to view or hear information and ways to process this information. For example, this may involve providing a visual diagram as well as a simulation explaining the same concept. Lastly, to attend to strategic networks, the "how" of learning, involves instruction that incorporates multiple methods to help students achieve their learning outcomes by ensuring access, providing various options for communication and practice, managing information, and monitoring progress.

There are a number of UDL resources online available through CAST (n.d.b.) that can help instructors who would like to apply UDL to their courses. Another resource for those more interested in learning more about UDL is Tobin and Behling's (2018) *Reach Everyone, Teach Everyone: Universal Design for Learning in Higher Education.* They advocate the "plus one" approach for implementing UDL, recommending that instructors design instruction and think of one additional element to add to support student learning.

## Reflection Question

- How can each of these frameworks support an inclusive classroom experience for diverse learners?

Now that we have defined inclusive teaching and provided evidence for its importance in higher education the next chapter highlights what inclusive instructors know about creating learning environments that are equitable and welcoming.

## Key Points

- Inclusive instructors foster classroom environments where diverse learners feel a sense of belonging and the teaching approaches utilized are equitable.
- Inclusive instructors value inclusive teaching given that both feeling a sense of belonging and equitable teaching practices can significantly reduce achievement gaps between students of diverse demographic backgrounds and also enhance general well-being. The literature validates the importance of inclusive teaching.
- Various frameworks such as multicultural education, culturally relevant and culturally responsive pedagogy, and universal design for learning can be particularly useful for inclusive instructors as they seek to be equitable in their teaching.