



The University of Texas at Austin Faculty Innovation Center

How to Articulate Inclusive Teaching in a Teaching Statement

How do each of the following teaching statement authors articulate their approaches for creating inclusive learning environments? What aspects resonate with you? What aspects are less effective?

Excerpt 1: “Supporting student well-being is a vital part of my teaching strategy. Flourishing mental health is essential to student success, and as instructors, we can create spaces where students feel supported and cared for. Many of the students in the US History Survey are freshmen who, in addition to taking their first college-level courses, are also navigating a new mental, emotional, and physical environment. In a class of over 300 people, SI sessions are a vital part of helping students feel connected. Before each SI session, I arrive ten minutes early to greet students by name and check-in with how they are doing. I also create interactive activities that incorporate paired, small group, and large group work so that students can talk to, connect with, and learn from each other. Additionally, I also cultivate a growth mindset by creating lesson plans that encourage intellectual risks and mistakes. For example, I created a self-assessment activity in which students reflected on their last exam and how they were doing in the course. Rather than focus on their grade, I had students reflect on what they did well, what they could improve, and what study habits and self-care strategies they could employ to support coping and learning.”

Excerpt 2: “Being a Nigerian instructor in a U.S. classroom, I am fully aware of the ways in which my cultural identity impacts the learning dynamics in the classroom. My Nigerian accent, a potential distraction to students’ learning, requires that I become more deliberate with enunciation during lectures. While it highlights my cultural *difference*, I treat my accent as an opportunity to explore the larger questions of diversity in the classroom. Starting with myself, I encourage an atmosphere where students are honest about their own subject positions and feel comfortable contributing their unique perspectives to class discussions. I hold dear the idea of honesty in my relationship with students; because, for one, a handsome number of students I have interacted with have differed from me particularly in terms of age, sexuality, race, and class, honesty about my own identity has remained crucial in earning their trust and respect. On occasions, I remind my students that they could call my attention to words I ‘mispronounce’ as a result of my accent; this strategy has proven effective in warming them to my appreciation of honesty. In other words, I always strive to create a space where my identity as a Nigerian lends strength to, rather than depletes the community of learners. With my research being Afrobeat music and performance aesthetics in postcolonial Nigeria— an art form which is steeped in egalitarianism, fairness and empowerment for the disempowered— my conception of pedagogy is that it should fuel students’ appreciation of and desire for radical empowerment. It is my belief that honesty and the willingness to deal with difference precede any notion of radical empowerment.”

Excerpt 3: “As a Black woman and a feminist, I understand teaching as a deeply political act that is both informed by and shapes our personal perspectives as differently raced, gendered, and abled people. My teaching philosophy acknowledges this diversity of thought and perspective by using drama based pedagogy, interpersonal communication techniques and intellectual skill building to center the body as a critical site of intellectual engagement and learning. By employing body centered activities such as daily ‘temperature checks’ for student mindfulness, or illustrative analysis-building strategies, I aim to encourage students’ own conceptions of extraverbal communication and meaning making overall. In this way, I aim to both harness and abate the effects of political misunderstandings or differences of opinion/perspective by using several modes of intellectual expression (physical, performative, or even introspective) to promote wonder and critical inquiry rather than social shame and silence.”

Excerpt 4: “In designing my syllabi and in leading discussions, I must ask: whose voices and interests am I including and whose am I excluding? Addressing these concerns begins with putting together a reading list that is diverse and engaging. Constructing a reading list that achieves gender parity is, I think, the bare minimum an instructor can do to ensure their course material is diverse, and a further commitment to diversity requires moving beyond including a reading by a token philosopher of color. ‘Diversity’ must be understood not only in terms of the social identities of authors, but also in terms of the methodology and style of the texts. As I have come to think of intellectual diversity in this way, I have begun to include texts on my reading lists that are not ‘traditionally’ philosophical. From a popular article on ‘food porn’ when teaching about aesthetics in an introductory course to Le Guin’s *The Left Hand of Darkness* in a unit on gender in a human nature course, ‘non-philosophical’ readings can still be directly relevant to course topics, and non-philosophy majors will find these more accessible and interesting than more traditional texts...This approach to compiling reading lists not only allows for representing a wider diversity of experiences, views, and philosophical styles, but also demonstrates for students how they can go about applying philosophical theories to issues that they encounter outside of the philosophy classroom.”

Excerpt 5: “I believe that success in college hinges on whether students learn just one thing: *how* to learn. My teaching philosophy is centered on this idea - if students don’t learn, I can’t expect them to learn anything else, including accounting. As a first generation college student, I entered college clueless as to many different things, chief among them: How to learn....I believe it is imperative for students to take an active and thoughtful role in their own learning, and this means formulating their own personal plan for success. To facilitate this, my first assignment in the course is for students to create their own detailed and specific plans for how they’ll succeed in the course. I leave my courses structured so that students with different learning styles have the ability to create the plan that is right for them (e.g., homework that is due monthly so students have the flexibility to complete the homework at their own pace).”

Excerpt 6: “As the parent of two children with exceptionalities, I seek to support universal accessibility, applying different teaching strategies and sharing different types of resources, determined by the demands of a particular course, a particular class, or a particular text...Drawing on my experiences as a special needs parent, a single parent, a mature student, and an international student, I also prioritize the maintenance of an inclusive classroom – one that operates on the principle of “different, not less,” which is an idea that Temple Grandin made popular through her advocacy, adapting to the broad variety of learning experiences students bring with them. I want every student to feel comfortable expressing their opinions, and I found it was particularly effective to state this upfront, not only in my syllabi but also at the beginning of class.”

Excerpt 7: “Another technique I have used to maintain student engagement involves structured goal-setting. Before I first meet with students as either a TA or an Assistant Instructor, I ask them to set qualitative goals for themselves in a pre-semester survey that I circulate via Canvas. Midway through the semester, I distribute individualized mid-semester self-evaluations that include the personal goals they set for themselves at the beginning of the semester; this survey asks them what they have done to achieve that goal as well as what they could do differently in the remainder of the semester. While correlation, of course, does not imply causation, I typically see an increase in the number of students who attend office hours after I distribute these self-evaluations. This increase may relate to the student receiving a reminder of their goals, but it may also result from student comments during our class discussion of the self-evaluations.”

Excerpt 8: “A common complaint about my field is that it requires too much technical knowledge of languages, history, and archaeology to be accessible to students. I seek to make the content of my courses relatable to my students, drawing in examples from popular culture, art, and even memes. In my New Testament course, I gave students the opportunity to learn a little bit of Greek alongside the course materials in English. Every class period, we covered one word, written in Greek and transliterated into English, that was a major factor in our texts for the day. We were able to cover important and culturally timely words like ‘xenophobia’ through this method and my students thanked me afterwards for the inclusion of that moment within each class.”