

Diversity in the Classroom

The University of Texas at Dallas enjoys a diverse population among its faculty and students. People have come to UT Dallas from all part of the USA and from the majority of countries across the globe. As a result, you will likely encounter students who challenge your very notion of what it means to be the instructor in a classroom. Different linguistic expressions and cultural customs can easily turn an innocent remark into an “incident” that requires your patience.

Barbara Gross Davis posted an article that, despite its having been written in the early 1990s, continues to provide sound advice for dealing with cultural, ethnic, and gender differences within your classroom.

<http://teaching.berkeley.edu/bgd/diversity.html>

Among the key points you should glean from the article are:

- Recognizing any biases or stereotypes you may hold and attempt to put them away, at least during class
- Treating each student with respect
- Recognizing the very complex nature of diversity
- Being sensitive to students whose primary language is different from your own
- Encouraging all students to visit you during office hours

Students' Names

Because of the large international student population at UT Dallas, it is likely you will have in your class students whose names are difficult for you to pronounce. Recognize that it is perfectly acceptable to ask students to pronounce their names – and to ask for forgiveness if/when you don't get the name right. Try as you might, you will inevitably mispronounce a name. Also recognize that in some cultures the notion of a first- and last-name have different meanings.

While experience is clearly the best teacher, Wikipedia provides useful resources for dealing with people's names from various cultures.

Arabic Names: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arabic_name

Chinese Names: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_name

Hawaiian Names: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hawaiian_name

Hebrew Names: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hebrew_name

Indian Family Names: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_family_name

Indian Names: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_name

Persian Names: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persian_names

Portuguese Names: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portuguese_names

Russian Names:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Names_in_Russian_Empire%2C_Soviet_Union_and_CIS_countries

Spanish Names: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spanish_naming_customs

Students with Disabilities

Another kind of classroom diversity occurs when you have students who have a disability, whether the disability is obvious or masked.

Early in the term, ask that students speak to you about any special needs and encourage them to speak with someone in the Office of Disability Services about accommodations that may be needed for the student to take full advantage of your expertise as the instructor of the class.

Disability Services is located in the basement of the Student Union, Room 1.610, 972.883.2098.

You should also be sensitive to any potential disabilities that are not immediately visible and remember that students with disabilities are first and foremost students; any disabilities should be a secondary matter as you want to deal with the person, but not the disability.

Ensure that all students can access your classroom and pay attention to needs for special seating. Always face the class when you are speaking and make reading lists available in advance, when possible, to ensure that students who need additional preparation for a lecture have access to that information.