



**THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY**

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# **Microaggressions in the Classroom: Creating Inclusive Spaces**

**Student Life Multicultural Center | Social Justice Engagement**



# Learning Outcomes

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- Identify language and actions that may be harmful to students
- Gain valuable skills for communicating about diversity
- Understand the ways you can learn from and teach about diversity



# Guidelines

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- “I” statements
- Real examples
- Brave space
- Confidentiality



# Core Concepts

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- Intent vs. Impact
- Pile on Principle
- Explain Away
- In-Group vs. Out-Group Language



# What is a microaggression?

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Microaggressions are the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile or negative messages toward marginalized group members (Sue, 2007).



# Example

## Breaking It Down...

- **Intent**
  - Satisfy our curiosity
- **Impact**
  - Interrogation
- **Best Bet**
  - “May I ask what your ethnicity is?”
  - Believe people when they give you an answer

“What are you?” “Where are you really from?”





# Example

## Breaking It Down...

- Intent
  - Compliment
- Impact
  - Foreigner assumption
  - Racial profiling
- Best Bet
  - Be cautious of assumptions

**“Wow, you speak English really well!”**





# Example

## Breaking It Down...

- **Intent**
  - We are unprejudiced
  - It *shouldn't* matter
- **Impact**
  - Dismissal of experiences
- **Best Bet**
  - Be authentic! We all have bias in some form; it's best not to pretend

**“I don’t see race” or  
“I’m colorblind”**







# Microaggressions in class

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- Continuing to mispronounce the names of students who have previously corrected you
- Singling out students in class because of their perceived race, ethnicity, or background
- Making jokes at the expense of certain identity groups
- Assuming what language a student speaks



# Things to watch

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- Stereotyping and making assumptions
- Assuming a student's gender and pronouns
- Inserting your opinion that might favor (or oppose) certain identities



# What can you do?

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- Create inclusive environments by establishing classroom expectations
- Be aware of your class demographics and patterns (e.g. who you are calling on)
- With class speakers or videos, who is represented and who is not?
- Recognize students' behavior and microaggressions and respond



# What can you do?

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- Analyze your own biases
- Learn from others
- Don't be defensive
- Be open to discussing your attitudes and biases that might have hurt others
- Be an ally to stand against all forms of bias and discrimination



# Responding

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- When you are confronted: listen, understand, dialogue, don't "explain away"
- When you need to confront a student: educate, invite respectful dialogue, role model inclusive behavior, seek resources



# Resources

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- Microaggressions in the Classroom:  
<http://otl.du.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/MicroAggressionsInClassroom-DUCME.pdf>
- Microaggressions and Marginality: Manifestations, Dynamics, and Impact by Derald Wing Sue
- Student Life Multicultural Center
- HR Training: “That’s Not What I Meant...”
- Kirwan Institute Implicit Bias Training



# Questions

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Thank you!

**Stephen Deaderick**

Program Specialist, Social Justice Engagement

Deaderick.3@osu.edu