



THE OHIO STATE  
UNIVERSITY  
NEWARK

# Teaching @ Newark

Diversity



Inclusion

“We desperately want to be post-racial, post-gender, indeed, post-difference,” wrote Nancy Cantor, the chancellor of Rutgers University-Newark, in a call for action to academics two years ago. “We...hide behind the explosion of diversity [and] soothe ourselves with the hope that so much fluid demographic and social change will settle the waters of racism,” she said. The past year has proven how much that hope was premature, if not false, in our nation. As we at Ohio State Newark celebrate our own increased diversity—one-third of incoming freshmen this year are students of color--how do we more actively and effectively promote a diverse *curriculum* and an inclusive *campus*? “We fail to teach the next generation to exorcise the ghosts of what we tell ourselves is our past,” Cantor warns, then are shocked when students voice racism. We run the risk of chasing “the mantle of selectivity...over inclusivity” at the expense of ‘the fastest-growing, first-generation, low income, largely black and brown talent pool in the communities right at our gates.” As we in higher education strive to move beyond diversity of access alone and beyond an inclusion that merely invites “them” into “our” world, this issue of *Teaching @ Newark* looks at the research on best practices, the advice of our colleagues, and the resources of our institution.

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*M. Weiser*

## In the Classroom: Language Classes as Unexpected Inclusion Models

Foreign language classes—with their focus on practice and dialogue, tolerance for errors and need for trust, and expectations of diverse backgrounds, different strengths, and varied paces for learning—have a surprising amount in common with best practices for an inclusive classroom.

**Jaime Bruner** is a lecturer in American Sign Language at Ohio State Newark. In her program, she implements a strict code of conduct—no spoken language during what is a visual, gestural language course. Students, of course, struggle with this rule, but in making the effort they learn a new behavior.

Focusing on rules for actions to change behaviors—rather than attempting to force changes in beliefs and attitudes first—is one common recommendation for the inclusive classroom. “Establish guidelines, ground rules, or community agreements for class participation,” recommends the University of Michigan Center for Research on Learning and Teaching (CRLT). “On day one in my classroom,” Bruner said, “I strive to set expectations with the students on what type of environment and culture is expected.”

Language classes can be a crucible for student anxiety because error is nearly inevitable. “It can be overwhelming for a new language learner!” Bruner said. “There are ‘fears’ or common themes of concerns—will my peers support me? Will I be able to perform accurately? If not, will I be made fun of?” Such fears, while in the open in language classes, are present in many classrooms, particularly for students with divergent backgrounds or opinions. The CRLT, therefore, recommends many ways an instructor can ease the fear of failure in all students—communicate the belief that all students can succeed, for instance, and allow for productive risk and failure, acknowledging that struggle and challenge are important parts of learning.

But the CRLT also includes specific recommendations to build community in a diverse classroom, such as learning and using students’ names—what they choose to be called and how they pronounce it—and encouraging the class to also learn and use each other’s names.

“The ASL classes at Newark are unique because students often form a cohort and thus complete all three levels of ASL together. Bonds are formed,” Bruner notes. CRLT recommends the use of the small, heterogeneous groups, pairs, and triads that language classes often employ to encourage speaking practice.

More than many, language classes also expect that students learn differently, and at different paces. “Some students have strengths and other students have other strengths,” as Bruner put it. It’s expected as well that students have had varying levels of exposure to the language and a greater or lesser perceived need to learn it. The CRLT recommends asking students in all classes to fill out

a questionnaire addressing their background with the topics in the course and their professional ambitions. They may also be asked to share—or simply reflect on—how their background contributes to a particular class activity.

Finally the CRLT recommends many ways to make diverse perspectives a normalized part of the curriculum. “Teach the conflicts of the field to incorporate diverse perspectives,” it recommends. “Include authors’ full names (not initials) in citations” to emphasize gender diversity. “Speak of students’ diverse perspectives as an asset.”

Here, ASL classes may have a unique opportunity to model this kind of open acknowledgement of diversity. “ASL is a *visual* language,” says Bruner, “that lends itself to appearances....When a user of ASL wants to tell you about a person, the person is described visually. This generally starts with gender, race/ethnicity, hearing/deaf status, body type, hair, eyes, and other physical features, right down to the color and style of clothing. It is not considered rude” to point out race in ASL. “It’s just a visual fact and not meant to set anyone apart.” Breaking through the hegemony Nancy Cantor warns of in a “post-racial, post-gender, indeed, post-difference” world, ASL may well provide many lessons for the inclusive classroom.

### Making the Content Diverse

The CRLT has a handy checklist for developing more diverse curricula, including:

- On your syllabus, identify collaboration & perspective-taking as skills built in the course
- Choose readings that deliberately reflect the diversity of contributors to the field
- Emphasize the range of identities/ backgrounds of experts in the field (including using full names for citations)
- Teach the conflicts to show a range of perspectives in operation
- Use visuals that don’t reinforce stereotypes
- Use diverse examples & analogies
- Use varied names and socio-cultural contexts in test questions, assignments, case studies
- Analyze even your stories & humor—do they alienate certain groups?
- Invite students to identify examples for you

# Managing Difficult Conversations

Experts agree that to help student of all backgrounds feel more at ease with differences and better able to move in a diverse world, openly addressing issues of diversity and power is an important step. But everyone who has tried to start a conversation about race, gender, sexuality, etc., and power in the classroom, only to face silent dismay or passive (or active!) resistance knows that good intentions are not enough. How to help students engage in difficult conversations? Sociologists **Peter Hennen** and **Angela Bryant** led a session on this topic at the spring 2017 faculty forum.

“One of our starting points,” Hennen said in the forum, “is that ‘point-of-view’ means a stance for seeing”—a situated perspective to analyze along with the position itself.

The Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE) at the University of Kansas offers three overarching guidelines to create a positive climate for potentially difficult conversations. It suggests that instructors:

1) **Set Guidelines.** “Provide students with a set of ground rules for class participation” (or ask them to design these with you). “Ground rules about civil behavior, acceptable evidence, and appropriate responses to offensive statements can make your expectations for civil, meaningful discourse clear.” They can also provide students with clear parameters for how to engage in discourse that they may not have learned—or at least learned overtly—before this class.

One of the guidelines Hennen emphasizes is that disagreement does not mean disrespect. This reminder is particularly helpful in those classes where students recognize a controversial topic and no one wants to be the first to speak. He also calls on students directly.

2) **Manage Contentious Interactions.** “When an offensive remark is made,” writes the CTE, we need to monitor our own reactions first, then “find the teaching opportunities to help students learn in/from the moment....Do not allow personal attacks or avoid addressing a hot moment. Instead, help students step back and think about the issue productively.” Suggestions include opening the discussion to the larger class (Hennen asks, “Is there anyone else willing to offer an alternative position?”), perhaps first turning it into a writing exercise to give students time to reflect.

Bryant suggested having students stand along a continuum between two extreme positions on a controversial topic, then discuss why they chose to stand there. This helps them recognize that most issues have more than two

sides. She has also had students form two circles, with those in the inner circle listening and paraphrasing those on the outer—then switching roles. Like the CTE, Hennen uses writing—having students write for a minute, then collect and read anonymously their responses to spur discussion.

3) **Treat Students as Individuals,** “not as representatives of or ‘experts’ for their racial/cultural/other social identity group.” An African American student at a forum held by the Multicultural Affairs office last spring described being asked to “explain” black culture to her new white friends. One of Bryant’s students added that he also felt he was often asked to defend “the white male viewpoint” in political discussions. Instead of this, the CTE recommends to “allow students to draw on their own lives and experiences when appropriate”—recognizing that these lives and experiences are unique to each student.

Hennen adds that part of modeling effective discourse is helping students separate their personal feelings and anecdotes from their intellectual inquiries. He depersonalizes the hot button topic by asking, “What do some people say about this?” and “What do other people say?” He also emphasizes the difference between fact and opinion, asking, “What data do we have” to substantiate this statement? He reminds students of Rep. Daniel Patrick Moynihan’s comment, “You’re entitled to your own opinion, but you’re not entitled to your own facts.”

*Civility – A practice which extends beyond politeness to include disagreement without disrespect, seeking common ground as a starting point for dialogue about differences, listening past one’s preconceptions, and teaching others to do*

**What if things get out of hand?** Hennen cautions that “a spirited discussion can be a very good thing.” But know that you can use your judgment to call a time out and acknowledge disagreement, even turning the discussion to why the disagreement exists, and why it helps to hear various perspectives.

A recent article by international educators Orla Quinlan and Darla Deardorff notes that *intercultural competence* is required to get along with those who may not seem like us, and that universities play an important role in helping equip students to live and work in an intercultural world. “It requires doing some of the ‘hard work’ on ourselves to become open human beings who can really live a life of interconnectedness—embracing learning about others and valuing others as fellow humans, regardless of differences that may seem to divide us,” they write. “A first step in this work might be to remember that we are all in this together and that our actions affect each other.”

# Outside the Classroom: Be an Ally

Promoting diversity and inclusion goes beyond the classroom to our everyday interactions. It means celebrating diverse backgrounds and perspectives, as well as being proactive about problems and ready to act when they occur. Various resources—material and mental—are available for us to do more.

## Office of Multicultural Affairs

Many of the students who come from non-majority racial/ethnic backgrounds find a home in the activities of the Office of Multicultural Affairs, a part of Student Life. Its mission is to promote cultural awareness events and programs both on and off campus and to create an inviting and relaxed atmosphere that promotes inclusiveness for all students. It works to increase retention of minority students and improve their academic success and professional development.

The Office sponsors everything from the ongoing campus #Respect campaign to an annual awareness conference for the local business community to the Autumn Poetry event for student competitors. Many students also find an ally in Program Manager **Vorley Taylor**, who has been with Ohio State Newark since 1996 and has seen the diversity of the campus grow exponentially. “Over the past 20 years, there has been a steady increase of diverse students, racially and ethnically, matriculating to Ohio State Newark,” she notes. “This is very good for the campus community because students with diverse backgrounds bring alternative viewpoints to conversations.”

Taylor notes that while these conversations are good, increased diversity can also create challenges because we are all different, with different social experiences, values, norms, and expectations. However, students feel comfortable with the campus community and conflict resolutions, says Taylor, in part because the campus administrators are very committed to ensuring that all students feel respected, valued and safe on campus. This fall, for instance, she began a monthly series of Lunch & Chat “Crucial Conversations” for students to discuss any topic in a setting facilitated by faculty and counselors.

After the first Lunch & Chat session, **Carmen Arredondo**, MCA student worker and head of the Viva Cultura student group, commented, “I believe that this campus has done a great job at bringing about awareness for other cultures, but there is always room for improvement. I think students of color should know that there are going to be instances where they will experience some type of discrimination, especially in this town, even when a college student wants to grab groceries from the nearby supermarket. It is important to speak about it, to show that it is real.

“I think the university should host more cultural awareness events—speakers, hands on seminars, and open discussion panels. But it should be coming directly from the university, not just students and/or student organizations.

“It is not just the responsibility of minorities to expand awareness and/or speak of wrongdoings that have been cast upon them. It is everyone's responsibility.”

## Confronting Microaggressions

Microaggressions, according to a widely quoted definition, are “the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile or negative messages toward marginalized group members” (Sue et al., 2007). We have all witnessed them, and sometimes we may react well. Other times we freeze. As one letter-writer put it to Kerry Ann Rockquemore, President of the National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity, “I want to be a better ally for my colleagues [and students], but I'm not sure how to do so or whom to ask for help.” Rockquemore's response reminds her that:

1. Silence communicates tacit approval.
2. Apologizing afterwards adds insult to injury.
3. The worst response of all is asking the target to fix the problem.

But she goes on to say that freezing is a common response, and is why she suggests reframing one's role from defensively *reacting* to proactively *creating* an equitable environment. “When I understand myself as actively engaging in microresistance,” she writes, it has a different energy. It keeps me focused on the structural nature of the problem.”

The OSU Diversity, Intercultural and Community Engagement Program (D.I.C.E.) offers a Bias Ally training that recommends the following steps for microresistance:

**Empower yourself:** Tell yourself “I will speak up”

**Prepare ready responses:** Things like “I'm surprised to hear you say that” or “What do you mean by that?”  
And in the moment:

**Interrupt** (don't let the speaker continue the aggression)

**Question** (“What do you mean?”)

**Educate** (“This hasn't been my experience”)

**Echo** (If someone else speaks up, support them!)

Rockquemore recommends a speaking-up strategy called “Opening the Front Door”:

**Observe:** describe clearly & succinctly what you see

**Think:** State what you think about it

**Feel:** Express your feelings about the situation

**Desire:** Assert what you would like to happen

D.I.C.E adds that we may well find ourselves on the receiving end of someone else's challenge someday. If someone confronts you about your own unintentional microaggression, do not try to explain it away (“I didn't mean it”)—realize that whatever the intent, the impact is real. Instead, **listen**.

# Across the Campus: Help Students Hear Each Other

"I strongly believe that in a university, a place where higher thinking is encouraged, discussions of race, religion and sex should not just be in the hands of students. They should be on the agenda of all faculty and staff," says student leader Carmen Arredondo. How to help all our students reach across the differing perceptions that divide them? Research suggests one big way: help students of all backgrounds feel safe and respected.

## Confronting Information Avoidance

Fake news. We've all seen (and perhaps hurled) the accusation across the political divide. Communications professors Lauren Griffen and Annie Neimand wrote recently about each side thinking that "the other is living in an alternate reality." They blame information avoidance, the tendency to ignore "new information that makes us feel bad, obligates us to do something we don't want to do, or challenges our world view."

For instance, people taking the well-known "implicit bias" test don't want to see their results when they're told they might "subconsciously have racist views." They didn't see themselves this way—so they avoid the information.

Similarly, when people dislike proposed solutions to a problem (say, affirmative action), they tend to deny that the problem (racial injustice) exists. "No problem? No need for a solution."

This can mean our well-intended attempts to help students to new worldviews simply fail. What to do?

Griffen and Neimand say "research suggests there are three ways to combat information avoidance. First, before asking people to listen to threatening information" provide a safe, affirming classroom—make students feel supported in their exploration of a new idea. Second, "make people feel in control over what they get to do with that information"—focus on understanding the problem, not arguing over any one policy solution. "And lastly, people are more open to information if it's framed in a way that resonates with how they see the world, their values and identities." Framing new ideas in terms of existing communal values—freedom and equality, for instance—helps students integrate new ideas into their identity.

## Exploring White Privilege

"White skin privilege," notes the website *Teaching Tolerance*, "provides white people with perks that we do not earn and that people of color do not enjoy....It creates real advantages for us. White people are immune to a lot of challenges." Many resources talk about "bursting the comfort bubble" of privileged students. But when we ask our working class students to confront their "privilege," the incredulity is often palpable. If we add that this privilege generates an unconscious feeling of entitlement or is tied up in racism, the push-back can be severe.

Awareness, making the unconscious conscious, is an important step, and Peggy McIntosh's "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Backpack" (available online) has been a teaching tool since its first publication in 1989. But simply providing information isn't enough—if "new information makes us feel bad" or disrupts our sense of identity & values, we ignore it.

How then to create a classroom conducive to exploring white privilege? McIntosh herself suggests drawing "on participants' own personal experiences, not their opinions. Opinions invite argumentation. Telling about experience invites listening."

OSU D.I.C.E. trainers suggest framing privilege as experiences the mainstream group is unlikely to have to think about because they are the norm: Accessibility if you're not disabled, holding hands if you're not gay, walking home at night if you're not a woman, or grocery shopping in Newark if you're not black are all examples. It's not a plus-or-minus competition and it's not your fault, D.I.C.E. assures students—but it is systemic, and therefore it's our responsibility to consider together how and when we benefit.

## Promoting Religious Tolerance

In a survey of 52 colleges, less than half the students believe that Muslims are accepted on campus, writes higher education professor Matthew Mayhew in a 2015 article.

Muslim students at Newark report more acceptance if not full understanding, although there have also been reports of harassment in the past year. Their experience mirrors that of other marginalized groups on campus: In a series of interviews for the web article "Voices of Diversity at Ohio State Newark," students from nonmainstream religions, ethnicities, and sexual orientations reported that "people just assume" the stereotypes about their group, and "stereotypes are hurtful."

Ignorance—lack of experience with diverse others—is clearly an issue. But what prompts overt intolerance? Mayhew's research on religion echoes other findings: Students are more intolerant of others when they feel silenced or unsafe in expressing *their own* faith on campus, feel that *their own* worldview is being denigrated, and perceive less support for *their own* religious/ nonreligious identities.

They are more likely to be tolerant when they participate in interfaith experiences and informal activities to interact across differences. This contact enables them to better participate in uncomfortable conversations that in turn expand their understanding.

"The mere presence of diversity on campus may actually harm relations among communities," Mayhew wrote, "as diversity left unengaged and unsupported can lead to greater isolation and distrust....Students are profoundly impacted by their own experiences of inclusion and exclusion. When they themselves feel safe and respected, they more readily extend a welcoming hand to others."

## OSU Resources for Promoting Diversity

Diversity and inclusion is one of the three pillars of OSU President Michael Drake's **2020 Vision Plan**. "Ohio State strives to be a model for inclusive excellence," the plan proclaims. Its objectives include developing university-wide trainings for hiring committees to increase diversity in the faculty, a focus on providing access for and graduation of underrepresented minority students, and broad-based administrative development of a plan to address diversity issues system-wide. The goal of this vision plan is encapsulated in President Drake's featured quote on the website: "We must be a leading light along the long arc toward greater inclusion and justice."

So what resources are available? A comprehensive list of the multiple offices, centers, initiatives, events, working groups, etc., in Columbus is maintained on the **Office of Diversity and Inclusion's** webpage "Ohio State Diversity Resources" at <https://odi.osu.edu/about/ohio-state-diversity-officers/ohio-state-diversity-resources.html>.

One of those resources is the **Multicultural Center** of the Office of Student Life, which conducts the **Open Doors** training program (<https://open-doors.osu.edu>), a four-hour workshop to increase participants' ability to recognize and address bias. Participants become Open Doors partners, enabled to help students report incidents of bias to the university's **Bias Assessment and Response Team (B.A.R.T.)**. The B.A.R.T. reporting form link (<https://student-life.osu.edu/bias/>) is now also available on the Ohio State Newark website under "Current Students."

Other trainings run by the Multicultural Center include **The Diversity, Intercultural, and Community Engagement Certificate Program (DICE)**, for which students earn a certificate in diversity and justice after attending a series of workshops. DICE training has now come to the Newark Campus through the **Office of Multicultural Affairs**, and faculty will soon be able to participate in conducting workshops with DICE materials.

Faculty interested in promoting inclusion at Newark can also get involved in the **Working Group** that currently meets biweekly to brainstorm ways to enhance the campus climate. Sociology professor Angela Bryant serves as the group's contact, at [bryant.74@osu.edu](mailto:bryant.74@osu.edu).

Finally, the **University Institute for Teaching and Learning (UITL)** and the **University Center for the Advancement of Teaching (UCAT)** are partnering to provide resources and training on inclusive teaching. The UCAT website "Inclusive Teaching @ Ohio State" (<https://ucat.osu.edu/inclusive-teaching/>) aims to bring together a variety of resources to get teachers started. And the new UITL endorsement program (<http://live-uitl-osu.pantheonsite.io/teachers/teaching-endorsements>) will soon reward with a university credential faculty who pursue excellence in teaching by participating in various professional learning programs. One of its first endorsements is for **Inclusive Teaching**. Faculty will complete at least six inclusion-specific UCAT workshops (about 9-12 hours total), either as singular events, event series, online trainings, or an individual consultation with a UCAT staff person. While the program is just getting started, its specifics can be seen at <http://live-uitl-osu.pantheonsite.io/endorsement/inclusive-teaching>. As Newark's UITL liaison, I welcome email inquiries about the program at [weiser.23@osu.edu](mailto:weiser.23@osu.edu).

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*Diversity – Diversity recognizes every person's individual backgrounds and life experiences which may differ across dimensions of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, age, ability, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, physical abilities, veteran status, gender identity and expression, political beliefs or other ideologies, and individuals who express multiple minority identities. It encompasses acceptance and respect for everyone.*