



Some steps to create a more inclusive classroom environment

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Many of our faculty and TAs in Duke Biology have expressed an interest in inclusivity, so here are a few very easy steps to foster an inclusive classroom environment. None of these are enforced by the department or administration, but they are things to consider.

- 1) **Introduce yourself to the class via e-mail before the first lecture, and ask for input on learning.** Give an example of how your background affects your teaching or learning style (especially any challenges), and explicitly invite students to let you know if there are any circumstances shaping their learning experience of which you need to be aware. This is preferable to waiting for them to give you their SDAO disability forms. You can even invite students to let you know about their learning styles.
- 2) **Select a diversity of names and photos to use in your fictional examples.** If every hypothetical example or quiz question refers to names like Biff and Muffy, and there are never examples using Juan, María, Malquon, Lakeisha, Quan, or Chenqi, then it's easy to see why some students may feel like they don't quite belong. Photos/drawings of people should also represent diversity and avoid stereotypes (e.g. examples of poor/sick consistently being from traditionally underrepresented races).
- 3) **Communicate clearly about gender pronouns³.** In cases where someone's gender is not specified (e.g. a class example) use the third person singular-pronoun "they". Sharing your pronouns at the start of the class or in the syllabus is one way to open this dialogue with your students, and you can even explicitly invite them to share their pronouns with you. If they choose to do so, use their pronouns.
- 4) **Identify at least a few examples over the semester of outstanding scientists who are not white, cis-gendered heterosexual men.** One can, for example, highlight contributions from and struggles faced by Rosalind Franklin, or mention that Doug Futuyma dedicated an older version of his *Evolution* textbook to his partner Bruce, or assign students to watch Scott Edwards' YouTube video on gene trees. Also address the biases that certain scientists exhibited, like how R.A. Fisher was a renowned eugenicist.
- 5) **Reach out to students, expressing a positive stance on diversity, equity, and inclusion, and repeat after any hate-related incidents on campus or nationally.** Place a statement on diversity in the materials you distribute at the beginning of class (e.g. in the syllabus), and refer back to it if any incidents occur both in class and via e-mail, also offering to chat.
- 6) **Remember that some of your students may not lean liberal.** Avoid stereotyping conservatives as intolerant or uneducated, and remember some conservative- (as well as liberal-) leaning students may have had challenging backgrounds.
- 7) **Listen more carefully, respond more carefully, and engage more with students.** Your experience may not be the same as some of your students. Recognize that your view of the world is not the only view of the world, and only by listening can you gain an understanding of their perspective.

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³ <https://studentaffairs.duke.edu/csgd/training-resources/gender-pronouns>

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