



Wesleyan University

## **Creating an Inclusive Classroom: Minimizing Microaggressions and Implicit Biases**

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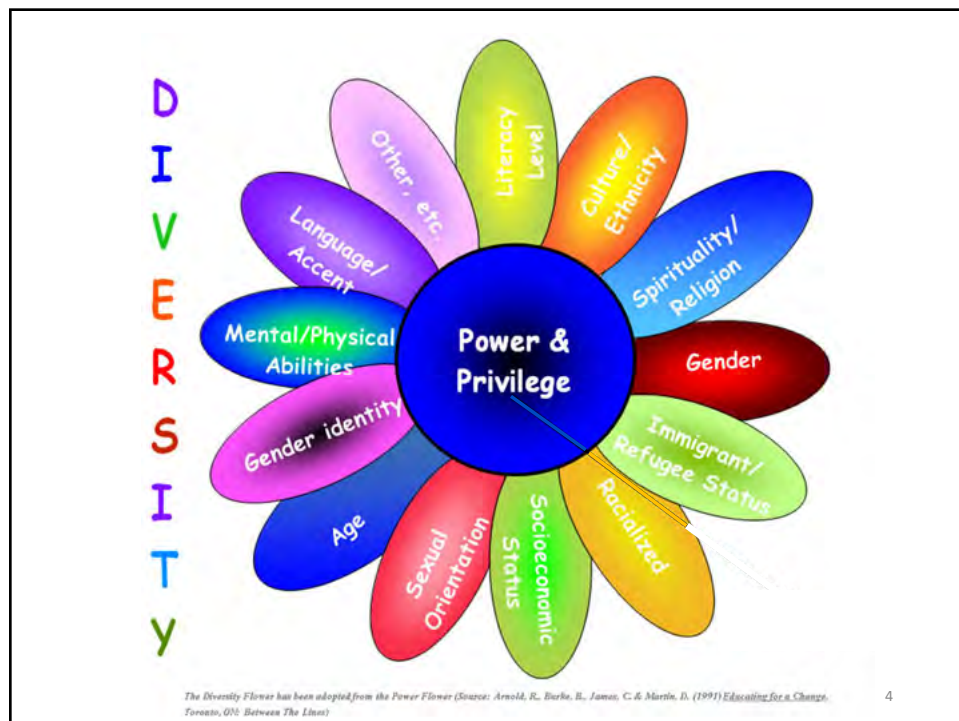
## **Outline**

- **Student Diversity at Wesleyan**  
Identities
- **A Word about Pronouns**
- **Implicit Biases**
- **Microaggressions**
- **Fostering Learning:**  
Practices for Inclusive Classrooms

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## ***Dimensions of Diversity*** *(visible and invisible)*

Age  
 Race  
 Gender  
 Ethnicity  
 Physical abilities/qualities  
 Sexual orientation  
 Educational background  
 Geographic location  
 Income  
 Marital status  
 Military experience  
 Parental status  
 Religion  
 Work experience and job classification  
 Immigration Status



## ***"Big 8" Dimensions of Diversity***

Age  
Race  
Gender  
Ethnicity  
Mental/Physical abilities/qualities  
Sexual orientation  
Class/Income  
Religion

*"Differences challenge assumptions"*

-Anne Wilson Schaef

## The Value of Diversity to a Liberal Arts Education

- Diversity challenges stereotyped preconceptions;
- Encourages critical thinking;
- Helps students learn to communicate effectively with people of varied backgrounds;
- Fosters mutual respect and teamwork;
- Engagement with and challenge from multiple, differing perspectives are incubators of critical thinking and social responsibility.
- Helps build communities whose members are judged by the quality of their character and their contributions.
- Strengthens communities and the workplace
- Enhances economic competitiveness

Through our pedagogies we set out to realize  
the transformative power of education.

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## Wesleyan Students

- Gen Z
- From diverse socioeconomic backgrounds
- Racially diverse
- 35% identify as queer
- Represent the spectrum of gender identities

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## Average Gen Zer

- First mobile phone at age 10.3 years.
- At least 3 hours a day on mobile device.
- Conscientious
- Hard-working
- Somewhat anxious
- Mindful of the future.
- Experienced education focused on inclusive classrooms and differentiated instruction.
- Were raised in an education system that focused on mainstreaming and classroom diversity where everyone is equal at winning and losing.
- Collaborative team players
- Challenge traditional gender roles and blur gender norms.

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## Socioeconomic Status

***“BEHIND IVY WALLS: Top Colleges That Enroll Rich, Middle Class and Poor”***

By David Leonhardt New York Times, Sept. 8, 2014

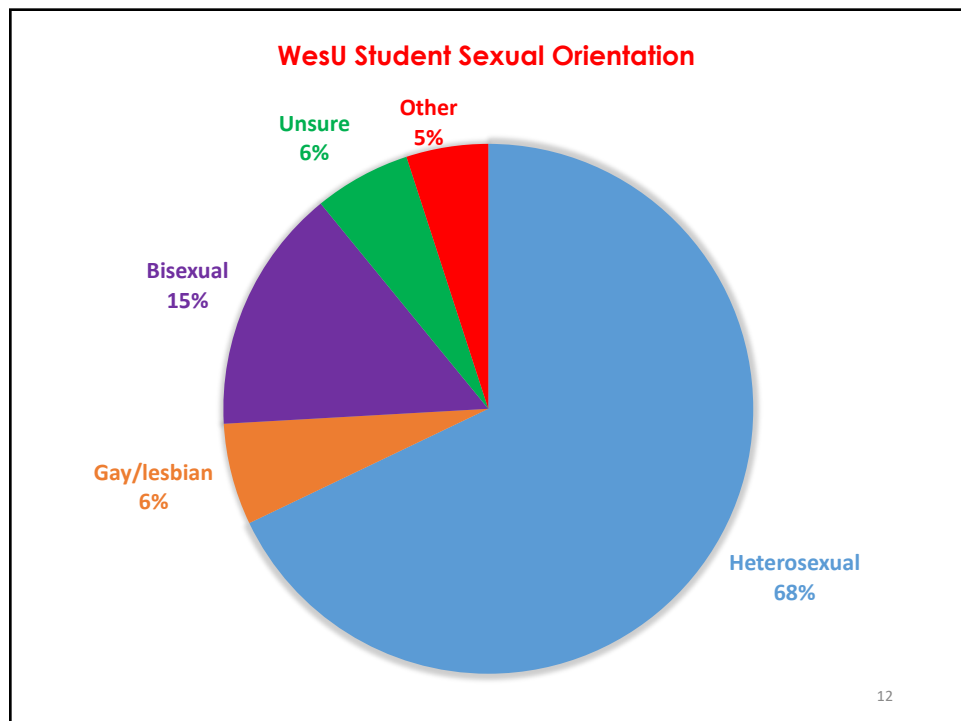
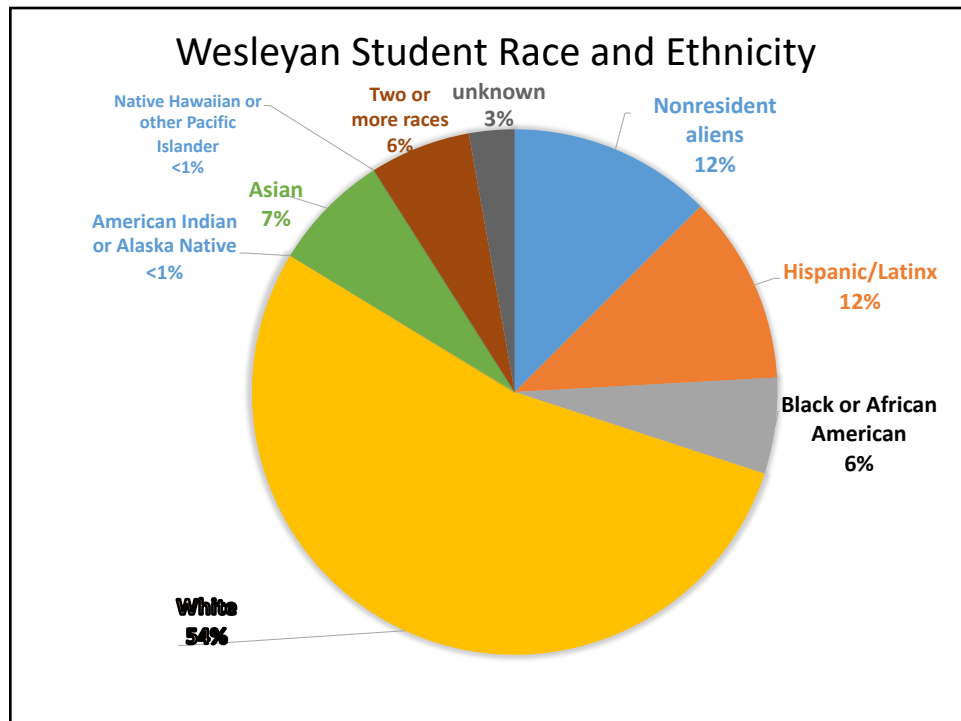
Wesleyan 13<sup>th</sup> on the most economically diverse colleges list.

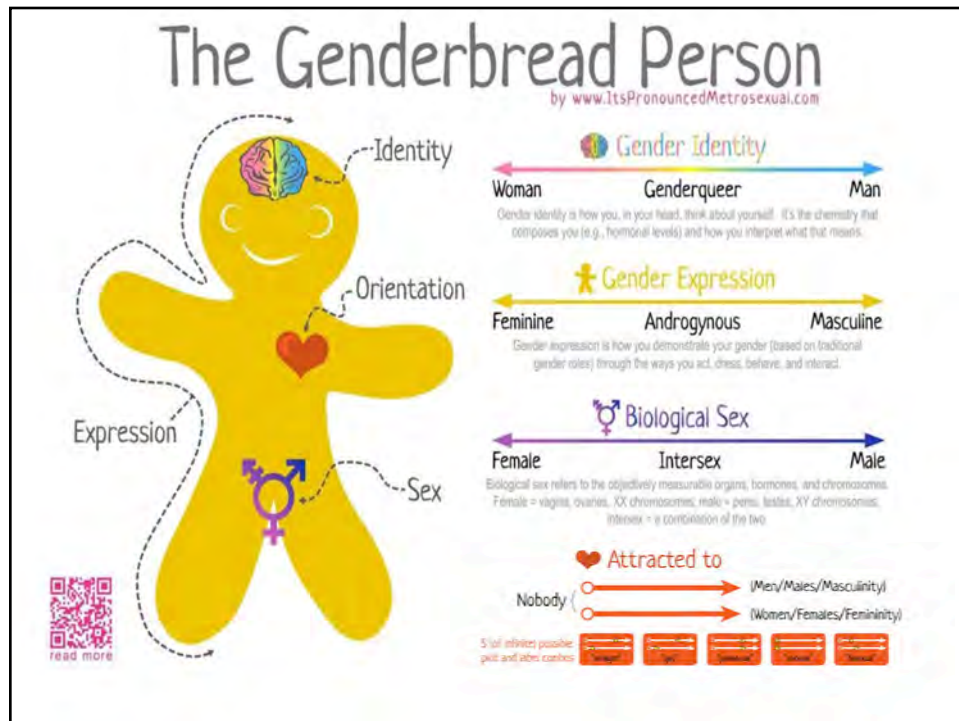
18% of Wesleyan’s frosh of 2012-2014 received Pell Grants

Class of 2022

- 50% first-year financial aid recipients received total scholarships and grants > \$55,000
- 44% first-year students receiving scholarships and grants to make Wesleyan affordable

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## Definitions

**Cisgender** A person whose gender identity is the same as or conforms to the one they were assigned at birth.

**Trans\*:** An umbrella term used to refer to people who permanently or periodically dis-identify with traditional gender roles or the sex they were assigned at birth.

## Preferred Gender Pronouns (PGP's)

**MALE** He, Him, His

**FEMALE** She/Her/ Hers

### GENDER NEUTRAL

They/Them/Theirs

"Xena ate their lunch because they were hungry."

Ze, irs, ir

**Ze** pronounced "zee" and can also be spelled zie or xe and replaces she/he/they

**Hir** is pronounced like "here" and replaces her/hers/him/his/they/theirs

## Wesleyan Students

**Veterans**

**Undocumented**

**Homeless**

~ 15% International Students (54 countries)

~ 12% English is not their first language

~ 21% First Generation College

~ 14% Registered As Having a Disability

**Varsity Athletes**



## Our Unconscious Networks

- What colors are the following lines of text?

- Sky
- Grass
- Dirt
- Sunshine
- Stop sign

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## Same drill

- What colors are the following lines of text?

- Green
- Blue
- Brown
- Red
- Yellow

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## Conscious Brain

- Used for new situations – rational, careful, analytical, slow, deliberate
- Understands exceptions
- Not efficient to use this every time
- Exposed to 11 million pieces of info – *can only process 40 at one time*



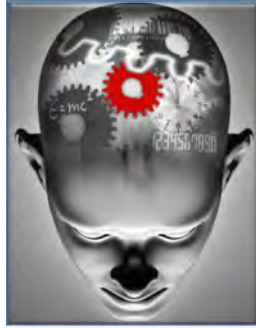
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## What is Implicit Bias?

- A host of brain functions, emotional responses, and cognitive processes that happen outside our conscious awareness but have a decisive effect on how we behave.  
– Shankar Vedantam
- A kind of prejudice you have that you aren't aware of, that affects the kinds of impressions and conclusions that you reach automatically, without thinking.  
– Malcolm Gladwell, in Blink

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## Implicit Bias



- Only 2% of emotional cognition is available to us consciously
- Biases tends to reside in the unconscious network

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## Hidden Brain (Unconscious Brain)

- Takes over after the rules have been learned
- Automatic, fast, instant adjustments
- Can apply shortcuts to situations in which the shortcuts don't work
- Sometimes applies rules to complex situations inappropriately
- Houses biases

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## Non-conscious Hypotheses

- Expectations or stereotypes influence our judgments of others (**regardless of our own group**).
- Influence group members' expectations about how they will be judged.
- Allow efficient, if sometimes inaccurate, processing of information.
- Often conflict with consciously held or "explicit" attitudes.
- Change based on experience/exposure.
- Are culturally shared

Nosek, Banaji, & Greenwald (2002). *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research and Practice*, 6, 101-115.  
 Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu (2002). *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 82(6), 878-902.  
 Fiske (2002). *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 11, 123-128.

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## IMPLICIT BIAS

- Developed as survival mechanism
- Implicit biases are pervasive
- People are often unaware of their implicit bias
- Implicit biases predict behavior
- People differ in levels of implicit bias

Source: *Project Implicit* ([www.projectimplicit.net](http://www.projectimplicit.net))

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### Awareness Test



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yqrkihlw-s>

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## **What is Implicit Bias**

- On a conscious level, most of us would say that we do not discriminate; our “hidden” brains may, though.
- Just because you may possess hidden biases, prejudices, or stereotypes does not mean that your practices are discriminatory.

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### EXAMPLES OF IMPLICIT BIAS

- Managers are less likely to call back or hire members of a different ethnic group.
- NBA referees are more likely to subtly favor players with whom they share a racial identity.
- A white male with a felony conviction is more likely to be brought back for a second interview than a black male high school graduate.

Source: <http://writers.unconsciousbias.org/unconsciousbias/>

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### Non-conscious Bias Impacts:

- the way people interact with you
- the way *you* interact with others
- the accumulation of advantage/disadvantage

*Unconscious bias is NOT discrimination*

*People are often not aware of it.*

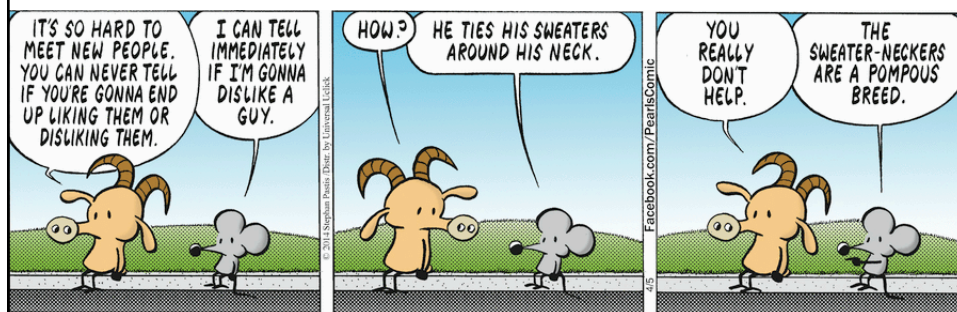
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## Bias Every Day

- **We all have implicit biases.**
- Implicit biases are measurable.
- Implicit biases change over time.
- We face unconscious bias every day.
- We must be proactive to combat bias, both within ourselves and others.

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## EXAMPLES OF IMPLICIT BIAS



<https://www.gocomics.com/pearlsbeforeswine/2014/04/05>

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### Overcoming Hidden Biases

- Take note of your first thought when encountering people – “all” or “every” may indicate a bias (even if the thought is positive)
- Explore how you may have learned biases.
- Be aware of your own privilege.
- Take personal actions to actively minimize your unconscious biases and not take them into the classroom.

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### Challenges: Microaggressions

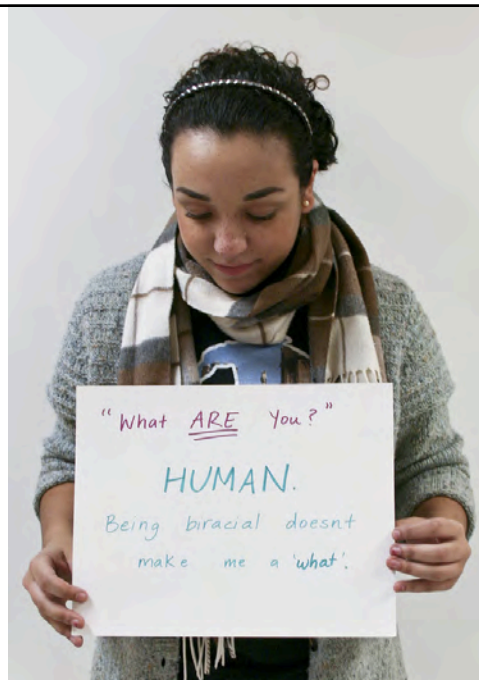
The following six slides are taken from  
<https://www.buzzfeed.com/hnigatu/racial-microaggressions-you-hear-on-a-daily-basis>.

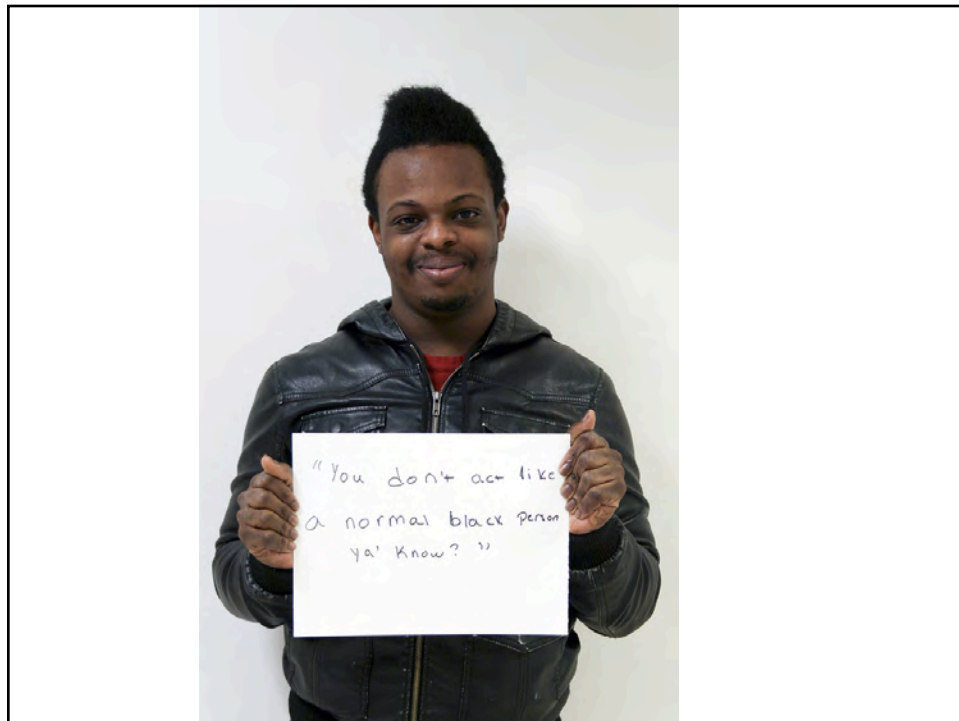
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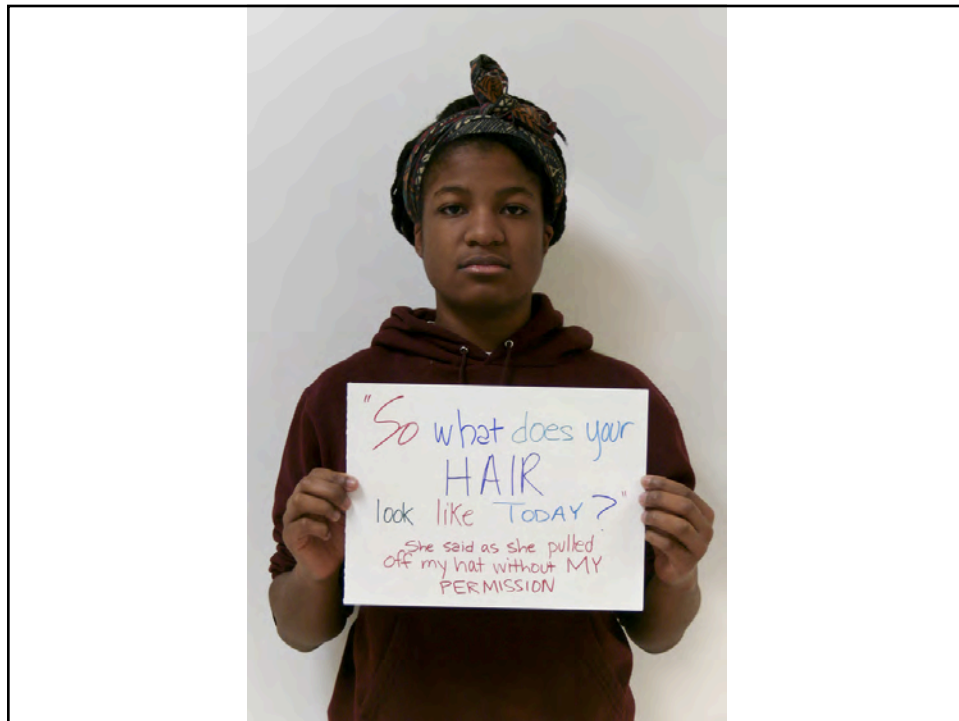




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### Challenges for First-Gen, Low Income and Traditionally Underrepresented Students

- Academic and Cultural Isolation
- (Lack of) Self Esteem
- Family Issues
- Lack of Understanding of Academia
- Discrimination (Whether Perceived or Real)
- Insecurity about Background
- Stereotype Threat
- Shame in Asking for Help

C. Gita Bosch

### Challenges: Stereotype Threat

Stereotype Threat: *“the pervasive fear of being viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype or the fear of inadvertently doing something that would confirm that stereotype”*

Awareness of stereotypes about one’s group can suppress acting upon one’s intelligence, motivation, curiosity, and ultimately one’s achievement

Based on work by social psychologists Claude M. Steele and Joshua Aronson

### **Stereotype Threat Anecdotal Evidence**

Stanford and NYU Freshman:

- “When I talk in class, I feel as though I’m totally on stage, like everyone’s thinking, ‘oh what’s the Black girl going to say?’ But I don’t speak up in class much anymore, so I guess it’s not a big deal.”
- “Group work was a nightmare. I could tell that no one thought my ideas were any good because I’m Latina.”
- “Everyone expects me to be good at math because I’m Asian, so I feel extra stupid because I’m not so good at math.”

### **Stereotype Threat in “Real Life”**

“In the perception of society my athletic talents are genetic; I am a likely mugger- rapist; my academic failures are expected; and my academic successes are attributed to others. To spend most of my life fighting these attitudes levies an emotional tax that is a form of intellectual emasculation”

--Neil de Grasse Tyson

**Fostering Learning:  
Creating an Inclusive Learning  
Environment**

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**“We Teach Who We Are . . .”**

**-Parker Palmer,  
Author of *The Courage to Teach***

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## Inclusive Classrooms Foster the Best Learning Outcomes

You have influence:

- the course content;
- prior assumptions and awareness of potential multicultural issues in classroom situations;
- planning of class sessions, including the ways students are grouped for learning;
- knowledge about the diverse backgrounds of your students; and
- your decisions, comments, and behaviors during the process of teaching.

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- Examine syllabi.

*Whose voices, perspectives, and scholarship are being represented?\**

*How are the perspectives and experiences of various groups being represented?*

*What to do about the canon? Put it in context and point out problematic assumptions.*

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## Inclusive Policies: Statement of Inclusion

Include non-discrimination statement in syllabus:

Example: "Slurs or insults directed at one's race, class, ability, sexual orientation, gender or gender identity...will not be tolerated and may result in...."

Faculty do have control over their own classrooms and can create spaces where all peoples' identities are honored and protected.



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## Self-Awareness

- Professors have power.
- Be self-aware of your own problematic assumptions.
- Shape group discussions with ground rules.
- "ism's" occur among students, often unintentionally.
- Faculty can be proactive and create an environment conducive to productive discussions. Set clear guidelines for classroom conduct.
- Don't ignore hurtful comments.
- You play an important role as a facilitator and supporter in your students' efforts to achieve respectful ways of communicating in the classroom.

see "CREATING INCLUSIVE COLLEGE CLASSROOMS" on drive.

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## Creating a Safe and Engaging Classroom Climate

From <http://www.uww.edu/learn/diversity/safeclassroom.php>

- Encourage but don't compel participation in whole class discussions.
- Do not expect students from under-represented groups to educate their peers or to speak for their race or group.
- Be clear about expectations of students and class norms.
- Before discussing a potentially sensitive topic, introduce the concept of triggers.
- Actively intervene in class if necessary.
- Model learning about diversity.

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## Guidelines for Class Participation (Ground Rules)

Consider crafting a contract with your students. Refer to it throughout the semester.

1. **Respect others' right to hold opinions** and beliefs that differ from your own. Challenge or criticize the idea, not the person.
2. **Listen carefully to what others** are saying even when you disagree with what is being said. Comments that you make (asking for clarification, sharing critiques, expanding on a point, etc.) should reflect that you have paid attention to the speaker's comments.
3. **Be courteous. Don't interrupt** or engage in private conversations while others are speaking.
4. **Support your statements.** Use evidence and provide a rationale for your points.
5. **Allow everyone the chance to talk.** If you have much to say, try to hold back a bit; if you are hesitant to speak, look for opportunities to contribute to the discussion.
6. **If you are offended** by something or think someone else might be, **speak up** and don't leave it for someone else to have to respond to it.

[http://www.crlt.umich.edu/gsis/P4\\_1.php](http://www.crlt.umich.edu/gsis/P4_1.php)

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## Know Your Students

Note: I like to get to know all of my students as well as possible. Please take a few moments to fill out the following Personal Response form. You may fill in as much or as little detail as you like. You may also feel free to skip a question you do not wish to answer. All information on this form is between you and me. No other students, instructors, or administrators will read what you write. Thank You!

### Personal Response Form

The name the University knows me by is:

The name I prefer to be called is:

The gender pronouns I prefer are:

I am taking this course because:

I have taken these other relevant courses:

Other things I would like you to know about me are:

Modeled After Form Developed by Dr. Susan Harper, 2012

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## Use Gender Neutral Language

Avoid making assumptions about how a person identifies based on the name or image.

If unsure, use gender neutral language

- “Humankind” rather than “mankind”
- “The person...”/ “The author...”/ “The original poster”
- “They/them/theirs”
- Avoid “he/him/his” or “she/her/hers”
- Use names

## General Etiquette

- Do not “out” a student (of any identity).
- Discuss issues privately at first. Trans\* and undocumented students especially should retain control of their information / histories.
- Use the name, gender identity, and/or pronouns the student prefers.
- Be open to future changes and fluidity.
- Acknowledge that there may be a difference between how a student identifies and how the college legally recognizes them.
- If you make a mistake, move on and attempt to be better in the future.

- Don't Assume
- State & Ask PGPs Always
- Be Aware of Your Own Positionality
- Continue Educating Yourself About Identities Different than Your Own
- It's OK to Make Mistakes!

## In The Classroom

a) *Professors have power*

- seemingly innocent comments may be perceived in a negative way.
- small gestures or comments of support go a long way to build trust in a student

b) "ism's" occur among students and can cause the person who is receiving the comments to withdraw and not participate.

c) Faculty can be proactive in limiting the damage from such incidents. Let students know your expectations for the way they communicate

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**“Differences challenge assumptions”**

-Anne Wilson Schaef

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### **POC Student Comments on Classroom Experiences**

- The faculty have low expectations for us.
- The faculty do not understand that we are different from the white students that they are used to.
- We are not all alike!!
- Some faculty single us out as “experts” or “spokespersons” for our racial or ethnic group.
- The curriculum, and classroom interaction, often exclude us.
- The faculty sometime seem uncomfortable or cautious with us.
- The faculty sometime take overt stances in class against diversity issues and initiatives.

<http://www.crlt.umich.edu>

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### **Effective Solutions for Inclusion (according to students)**

- Faculty introduced inclusive curricular material.
- Faculty used more effective pedagogical techniques.
- Faculty encouraged us and had confidence in us.
- Faculty often led and guided discussions of racial issues, and evidently did so in ways that avoided the assignment of “expert” status.

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The only thing we have in  
common is diversity . . .

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# Thank You!



<https://newsletter.blogs.wesleyan.edu/2015/09/04/classof2019stats/>