



Creating a safe and inclusive learning space

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This document aims to provide suggestions for lecturers, educators and policy makers on how to create an inclusive space for all students to feel safe, welcome, encouraged and challenged. The questions and suggestions are not exhaustive but may provide tools to reflect on and further develop what happens in the teaching practice. Keep in mind that many suggestions are not just supportive for a few students, but in essence for most students.

The suggestions are divided over 4 essential main aspects that lecturers deal with in their teaching practice: from the start of the course to individual supervision. In total 22 issues or situations are described. Some additional websites and resources can be found at the end of this document.

Keep in mind that there is a shared responsibility in creating a safe and inclusive learning space – both students and lecturers play a role, but the lecturer is a role model for the students and needs to show what is expected, first.

Prior to/ at the start of a course		
Issue	Questions	Suggestions
Course syllabus/ outline	Who is the syllabus aimed at - faculty, students and/ or the department? How welcoming, supportive and encouraging does your syllabus come across? How clear is the information on expected prerequisites and how to complement a possible gap in knowledge and skills? Does the syllabus communicate the value of students' racial/ethnic backgrounds as sources of learning and knowledge?	A course syllabus holds a lot of (hidden) information about a university, faculty and program. The way it is written, the language that is used (distant or personal) and the message it conveys to and about students may lead to students feeling more or less welcome and connected to the program. Analyse your syllabus with the questions presented here and decide for yourself if this is what you stand for as a lecturer and program.
Accessibility	Can all students enter the classroom and move around easily or do some students need to make extra effort? Is there a way you or the other students can make this easier for these students?	A small effort from the lecturer or other students can sometimes mean a great difference for students to be able to enter a building or classroom. Asking other students to re-arrange tables and chairs will save everyone time in making a room accessible.
Ground rules	Have you stated and/ or discussed what the ground rules are and what you expect from students? Have you asked what students expect from you?	Some students may have different expectations about your role than you may be aware of. By setting ground rules together you can point out to students, when they don't follow these, that these rules were their own suggestions. This increases the feeling of ownership and responsibility.
Welcoming atmosphere	Do your students know or notice that you have noticed them?	Often lecturers enter a classroom and start teaching immediately. By taking

		some time to welcome your students before class (e.g. by standing near the entrance) you show your students that you have noticed them. Especially with larger groups it is important for students to feel part of the classroom, and not as a number. It might not be possible to learn all their names, but you can still show your interest in them. Also give students the opportunity to get to know each other by giving them some time to introduce themselves to their neighbours.
Presentation of course	How do students feel about taking part in your course? Do they feel challenged and enabled or do they feel the course is too difficult?	The way you talk about your course and what students need to do to pass influences how they think about their own abilities to pass the course. If you mention 'this is a tough course, last year only 30% of <u>the students</u> passed the first exam', this might be very off-putting for students who have little confidence. If, however you say 'this is a tough course, but I know that if <u>we</u> all work hard and <u>support</u> each other, all of <u>us</u> will have <u>fun</u> and pass the course', you give a completely different message.
Teaching process (lectures and small group teaching settings)		
Issue	Questions	Suggestions
Course material	<p>How critical are you towards your own course material? Is your material mainly from Western researchers, articles and books?</p> <p>Are the examples you use context specific or known to everyone?</p> <p>Can online material be accessed by all students?</p>	<p>It can be relevant to mention the source of your course material and explain why this has been selected (and not other materials).</p> <p>Be sure that the examples you use are connected to your student's background and experience. If you use context specific examples that students from a certain background have never heard of, they will miss out.</p> <p>If possible, be sure that online materials can be changed to support students with a visual or hearing disability. Can the font size and colour be changed, can students pause video's and enable subtitles?</p>
Visibility/ audibility of course material	Are you aware of any challenges students might have with visibility or audibility?	By asking up front if you need to take this into account some students may feel more inclined to mention they have certain challenges. Are videos subtitled for example or have you checked that the text on your presentation can be read in the back of a room? Can students

		hear you when they are seated in the back of the room?
Including 'all' students with questions and discussions	Do you notice that often the same students reply to your questions or that in fact hardly any students reply to your questions? Do the students in the back of your classroom seem less involved?	<p>First of all be sure that you ask a 'real' question for students to think about. So don't ask 'is everything clear' but for example 'how does this example relate to the theory we discussed last week?'.</p> <p>When asking questions use some variation in how you wish students to answer: individually, in pairs after sharing their thoughts or from a certain part of the classroom.</p> <p>Pay attention to both shy and more dominant students by either asking them friendly to wait with answering or by inviting them to share their thoughts.</p> <p>For some students speaking up in class is not common or natural. Some may have been in an educational culture where the lecturer is supposed to have all the answers. Speaking up in class or debating with fellow students or the lecturer can be perceived as a sign of disrespect. Again, manage expectations beforehand by explaining what, how and why regarding your style of teaching and what you expect from the students.</p> <p>If possible, find different ways to help shy students express their opinion and voice. Alternative ways of responding could be to let students write out their opinion or first discuss it in a smaller group instead of to the entire class directly.</p>
Clarity and structure	How structured is your course (material)?	For all students it helps their learning process if they are offered well structured course materials. This means that at the start it should be clear what will happen, this should then be followed and at the end of a lesson be checked (tell what you are going to tell, tell it, tell what you have told). For students who find it difficult to stay focused and keep their attention, it is especially important to be clear and structured.
Relevance and place in the	Can you explain (to yourself) what the relevance of your course is and why students need to follow your course? Is it clear to you why your course is	Students often have the same questions about the relevance and place of a course. The assumption is that students will understand this. By discussing the

curriculum of your course	planned at a certain stage in the program? Do you know how your course connects to other courses in the program?	relevance and place of a course in the program you can increase students' motivation and engagement. In this way students will feel more part of the program.
Silent/ shy/ disengaged students (or the opposite)	Before jumping to conclusions about why a student is behaving in a certain way; do you actually know <i>why</i> a student is showing that behaviour? It is very easy to label a student as shy, lazy or unmotivated. But without knowing why a student shows certain behaviour we cannot make these judgements. Perhaps a student seems unmotivated but your course is in fact too difficult or too easy. Maybe the student has personal issues that stand in the way of learning. Maybe the student does not feel safe. Perhaps a student seems shy, but in fact the student has little (good) experience with speaking up in class.	First of all, it is key to be very explicit about which behaviour you expect in class. Furthermore, it is essential that you explain <i>how</i> and <i>why</i> you expect this behaviour. The assumption is very often that by merely mentioning that the students should be <i>active</i> and <i>critical</i> they will understand what this means and how to do this. If students do not wish to speak up or they seem disengaged try to find out what is going on, perhaps by talking separately with a student after class time. Be sure that students can speak freely and will not be interrupted by more dominant students (by asking them to let other students speak up first).
Group work	How do I enable all students to work together and contribute equally?	When students are to work in groups it is first of all important to justify why they need to work in groups. Is this because of efficiency or because you wish for students to develop their skills in working together? If the latter is the case then it is important to make explicit what these skills entail, how to develop these and how this will be supported and evaluated. Not all students will feel comfortable and safe when working in groups. Therefore, it is crucial that there are clear criteria, norms and support (feedback) so students can become more comfortable with what is expected of them.
Connecting with students	How well do you know your students? Do you take some time to get to know them better?	Even in large groups it is possible to show some personal interest in your students. By walking around while they are discussing or merely asking them how they are doing, students will see you are interested in them. Students sitting in the far back of the classroom are sometimes ignored or forgotten, by also walking to the back of the classroom they may feel included more. Of course, mention to your students that you will walk around and that sometimes they might be looking at your back.

Evaluation	Do you know if your students are satisfied with how your course is going, during the course?	<p>Often courses are only evaluated at the end of the course. Students sometimes feel tired of filling in evaluations because they rarely see the result is used to improve the course. As a lecturer you can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mention at the start of your course what you have changed based on last years' evaluations - Ask your students halfway during the course to write down anonymously 2 things they like and 2 things that can be improved - During the next lesson discuss your findings and explain what you can change and what not
Testing and assessment		
Issue	Questions	Suggestions
Terminology	Do all students (and lecturers) have the same understanding of what is meant with a paper, essay or policy paper?	<p>For students coming from different disciplines or educational cultures, the terminology used might not always be interpreted as we expect. Discuss together with your students what the expectations are for both lecturers and students. Merely directing students to the instructions is sometimes not enough. Discuss with the students what they think is expected of them.</p> <p>It is also useful to share examples of papers from previous years, either with a low or high mark. Let students read and judge the papers based on the same criteria you are going to use.</p>
Preparation	Do students get to practice and improve what they will be graded on to pass the course?	Make sure students get sufficient time and opportunity to practice with the skills and demonstrate the knowledge they need to pass the course. Students will be better prepared if during the course they get practice exams or build up their writing skills and get feedback during the process.
Instructions	Are your instructions for an assignment or the assessment open for interpretation or straight forward and clear?	Sometimes when students fail an assignment or assessment it turns out the instructions were not as clear as expected. Be sure to double check your instructions and let someone else also read and check them for clarity.
Offensive questions or examples	Are your questions unintentionally offensive to your students?	If students coming from a different background (ethnicity, religion, gender, disability, etc.) are described as 'the other' or victimized in some way, these students may feel excluded or put to

		shame. Be sure that examples of people who differ from the 'norm' (whatever that may be!) are relevant and necessary.
Grading	Is it clear to you and the students what the grades are based on (criteria) and what a particular grade means?	<p>Having and sharing clear criteria will help your students to better understand what is expected of them. Quite often grading criteria are open to interpretation and it will depend on the level of experience of the lecturer how the criteria are then applied.</p> <p>Not all students (or lecturers) are used to the same type of grading system. Be sure you understand what a 7 or 8 means and that you explain this to your students. This may prevent students feeling unhappy about their grade and themselves if they are used to getting higher or different grades from previous experiences.</p>
Individual supervision		
Giving feedback	Is your message/ feedback understood by the student? When you guide or supervise students individually you will often give feedback. Some lecturers have the feeling that students don't always understand their feedback or don't act upon it as expected.	When giving feedback (either written or verbally) check if students know what to do. This means asking an open and clear question – instead of asking 'is everything clear' ask the student to explain what, when and how they will improve their work. If you have given the same feedback multiple times but students don't seem to act on it sufficiently, it might mean that your feedback is actually not clear to them.
Roles and responsibility	Who is responsible for what and how far does my role go?	<p>It is important to decide for yourself how far your role goes and how far you will go to support a student. Be aware of the fact that there are many supporting departments for students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Study advisors: your first point of contact for students with study problems or additional support - Fenestra: for students with disabilities - PITStop: offers all kinds of courses at a fair price for students to help them study better <p>Discuss with students what their and your responsibility is. Explain what you mean with terms like responsibility, critical attitude and working independently.</p>

Assumptions and expectations	Have you checked your assumptions about your student and are your expectations clear and explicit?	Especially when supervising students individually (and in teaching in general) it is crucial to check your assumptions and manage expectations. Lecturers and students easily make assumptions about each other but don't check if these are actually true. This may lead to misunderstanding or dissatisfaction.
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Additional websites and resources

- ICLON Course "Inclusive Education – Reaching all your students":
<https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/cursussen/iclon/inclusive-education>
- Leiden University Diversity Office: <https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/en/dossiers/diversity>
- Booklet - Teacher's Tales: On the road to Inclusive Teaching:
<https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/binaries/content/assets/algemeen/diversiteit/boekje-teachers-tales-webversie.pdf>