# Creating Inclusive College Classrooms

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Inclusive classrooms are classrooms in which instructors and students work together to create and sustain an environment in which everyone feels safe, supported, and encouraged to express her or his views and concerns. In these classrooms, the content is explicitly viewed from the multiple perspectives and varied experiences of a range of groups. Content is presented in a manner that reduces all students' experiences of marginalization and, wherever possible, helps students understand that individuals' experiences, values, and perspectives influence how they construct knowledge in any field or discipline. Instructors in inclusive classrooms use a variety of teaching methods in order to facilitate the academic achievement of all students. Inclusive classrooms are places in which thoughtfulness, mutual respect, and academic excellence are valued and promoted. When graduate student instructors (GSIs) are successful in creating inclusive classrooms, this makes great strides towards realizing the University of Michigan's commitment to teaching and to diversity and excellence in practice.

In an inclusive classroom, instructors attempt to be responsive to students on both an individual and a cultural level. Broadly speaking, the inclusiveness of a classroom will depend upon the kinds of interactions that occur between and among you and the students in the classroom. These interactions are influenced by:

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

Each of these five aspects of teaching are addressed in this section. This information will assist you to teach in more inclusive ways. Much of the information in this section was drawn from focus group interviews conducted by CRLT in 1995-96 with female and male students from a variety of racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds and departments or units. In these interviews, students identified multicultural issues related to classroom climate, course content and materials, and teaching methods. They also made recommendations about how classrooms could be made more inclusive. The examples used to illustrate particular issues in the sections that follow were taken from comments made by students during the focus group interviews and from the experiences of CRLT staff.

## Choosing Course Content

Some GSIs have a great deal of control over the content of a course, especially the content of their section, while others do not. It is helpful for students to know the extent to which you, as a GSI, have control. If students criticize or make suggestions about course content, texts, material, etc., over which you do not have control, you should convey their comments to the faculty member in charge of the course and encourage them to do the same.

When you have some control over the content (including books, coursepacks, and other materials), the following two questions and their related suggestions should be considered:

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

- *Include multiple perspectives on each topic of the course rather than focusing solely on a single perspective*. For example, if the topic is "The Great Depression in the USA" the content should not focus solely on the experiences of European Americans. Americans of African and Asian descent, American Indians, Mexicans, etc. had experiences and views that should be acknowledged. It would also be important to include the experiences and views of people with different socio-economic statuses in this example.
- *Include, as much as possible, materials written or created by people of different backgrounds and/or perspectives*. If all the authors or creators of materials in a course are male (or female), white (or another group), liberal (or conservative), etc., instructors will be sending a message about the voices that are valued and will be devaluing the scholarship of others who have written or created materials on the topic. (This guideline should be altered appropriately in courses where the focus of the course is to better understand a particular perspective or world view. Even these courses, however, should be attentive to the range of possible voices on a given topic.) *On a related note, it is important to include works authored by members of the group that the class is discussing*. For example, if the course deals with topics related to Muslims or Islam and the syllabus does not include materials written by Muslim authors, the message sent to students may be that you devalue the contributions of and scholarship produced by Muslims.

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

- Include materials (readings, videotapes, etc.) that address underrepresented groups' experiences in ways that do not trivialize or marginalize these groups' experiences. Books that include a section on some aspect of diversity at the end of the text or books that highlight women, people of color, people with disabilities, gay men, lesbians, etc., in boxes and not in the body of the text can be seen as examples of the marginalization of these topics, groups,

and group members' contributions. When it is important to use such books for other reasons, instructors have a responsibility to make students aware of the texts' limitations at the beginning of the course and to facilitate students' ability to read critically with these issues in mind.

- Be aware of and responsive to the portrayal of certain groups in course content. For example, if an Asian country's policies are being used to contrast American policies, the policy of the Asian country should not always be used as a negative example (e.g., social policies in China) or always used as a positive example (e.g., business in Japan). You need to address the role of culture in foreign policies and not present policies as either wholly good or bad. Such treatment ignores the complexity of other cultures' policies or practices.
- Avoid dichotomizing issues of race into black and white. It is essential to recognize and acknowledge that there are other groups for whom racial issues are relevant (Arab Americans, Asians Americans, Latinos/as, Native Americans, etc.). Whenever possible, perspectives on racial issues from other groups should be included in course materials. If you have difficulty finding such materials, you should bring other perspectives into course lectures and discussions.

##  Increasing Awareness of Problematic Assumptions

An important early step in developing competencies to address multicultural issues in the classroom is to raise your awareness of issues that are multicultural and how they might manifest themselves in classrooms. In this process, it is useful to give consideration to assumptions that you may hold about the learning behaviors and capacities of your students. You may also hold assumptions that are tied to students' social identity characteristics (gender, race, ethnicity, disability, language, sexual orientation, etc.). These assumptions may manifest themselves in your interactions with students. You may need assistance in order to become aware of your assumptions. You should consider getting to know your students to be an ongoing process related to developing a positive classroom climate that promotes excellence.

Below are examples of assumptions, how they might be dealt with, and how you might learn more about your students through the process of addressing these types of assumptions.

***Assumptions About Students' Learning Behaviors and Capacities***
*Assumption: Students will seek help when they are struggling with a class.*
For a number of reasons, students do not always feel comfortable asking for help. In order to address this issue, you can request meetings with students as problems arise or make office hour meetings part of the course requirement (e.g., each student will meet with you after receiving his or her grade on the first assignment). The latter is an ideal method because it allows you the opportunity to meet one-on-one with every student. It also removes the stigma attached to going to office hours.

*Assumption: Students from certain groups are not intellectual, are irresponsible, are satisfied with below average grades, lack ability, have high ability in particular subject areas, etc.*
It is essential that instructors have high expectations for all students. For example, if a student earns a grade of C or lower, you should inform the student of the need for a meeting to discuss his or her performance. If students are absent, you should show concern about their absence when they return by asking if things are all right with them. If there are repeated absences, you should request a meeting with the student to discuss the situation. It is important for you to make initial contact with students; however, at some point, students need to take the initiative.

*Assumption: Students from certain backgrounds (e.g., students from urban or rural areas, students who speak with an accent, students from specific racial or ethnic groups) are poor writers.*
While the degree of writing preparation varies across the public school system in the US, students' regional background or group memberships do not serve as accurate predictors of the degree of preparation they received. Furthermore, you need to be sensitive to cultural differences in writing styles, recognizing that many standards apply to the evaluation of good writing. If a specific type of writing is expected for a given class, it may be useful to assign a short, ungraded assignment early in the term to identify students who may need additional assistance in meeting that particular writing standard.

*Assumption: Poor writing suggests limited intellectual ability.*
It is misleading to equate students' writing skills with their intellectual ability. Students have varying degrees of experience with "academic" writing. You have a responsibility to be explicit about what is expected and share with students examples of good writing done by other students. You should also alert students early on of their need to improve their writing and should suggest resources to them (e.g., Writing Center consultations).

*Assumption: Older students or students with physical disabilities are slower learners and require more attention from the instructor.*
While there are many cultural assumptions about links between age or physical ability and one’s intellectual capacity, these characteristics are not typically linked. Most classes do include some students who require extra attention from the instructor but such students cannot be readily identifiable by physical characteristics.

*Assumption: Students whose cultural affiliation is tied to non-English speaking groups are not native English speakers or are bilingual.*

If you feel that it is important to know whether students speak or understand other languages, you should ask this question of all students, not just those to whom you think the question applies. If there are concerns about students' academic writing skills, it would be best to meet with the students during office hours to discuss their work. One of the questions you could ask as part of your data gathering protocol is, "What were the languages spoken in the environment in which you were raised?" Following this question with appropriate probes would give you an opportunity to find out whether students are native speakers of English and, if not, how recently they became fluent. It is important to identify the source of students' difficulty with writing (or speaking), because identification of the factors that contribute to the problem will influence the actions taken to address the problem.

*Assumption: Students who are affiliated with a particular group (gender, race, ethnic, etc.) are experts on issues related to that group and feel comfortable being seen as information sources to the rest of the class and the instructor who are not members of that group. AND/OR European American students do not have opinions about issues of race or ethnicity and members of other groups do have opinions about these issues.*
One way to effectively deal with this set of assumptions is to pose questions about particular groups to the entire class rather than presuming that members of a certain group are the only ones who can reply. For example, questions could be phrased so that students would be able to share experiences of their friends or comments that they've heard as well as their own experiences. It would be best to let the class know that if any individual has experiences or information that she or he thinks would be beneficial to the class, she or he should inform you about such experiences or information. If you would like to hear from a particular student on a specific issue that relates to group membership, you should speak with the student privately instead of calling on the student when the issue arises in class. In this way, you can find out the students' ability to comment on the issue and willingness to do so publicly. This would avoid putting the student in an awkward position, particularly if the student lacks knowledge about questions related to his or her group.

*Assumption: All students from a particular group share the same view on an issue, and their perspective will necessarily be different from the majority of the class who are not from that group.*
You can regularly encourage all students to express different perspectives on issues, and you should not express surprise when people from the same "group" share opposing views or have a view consistent with the majority of the class. It is important to understand, however, that some students who are part of a "group" will feel hesitant to share views publicly that differ from the "anticipated group position" for fear of being admonished by members of their "group" or isolated from the "group" (e.g., an African American student expressing an anti-affirmative action view).

*Assumption: In their reading, students will relate only to characters who resemble them.*
This would most frequently occur in courses in which students read literature. Instructors should be careful not to treat with suspicion comments that suggest affiliation with a character that does not resemble the student in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, etc. For example, if a Caucasian student claims to feel her or his experiences resonate with an African American character, you should not dismiss her or his response, but probe for further explication about why she or he feels the connection.

*Assumption: Students from certain groups are more likely to: be argumentative or conflictual during class discussions OR not participate in class discussions OR bring a more radical agenda to class discussions.*
Participation levels vary across all students, with some students more comfortable in listening roles and others more comfortable taking the lead in class discussions. While these discussion styles may be influenced by students' past experiences, families of origin, and cultural reference points, a priori assumptions about student participation may hinder class discussion. It is important that you encourage participation among all students while also respecting the differences among students that will emerge. More equitable discussions can often be created by prefacing the discussion with a writing exercise that provides all students with the opportunity to clarify their thoughts on the discussion topic. It is also useful to remember that students' participation levels evolve over the course of a term as they become more comfortable with the course, their classmates, and the instructor.

## Planning Considerations

There are a number of multicultural issues that should be taken into account during the planning process for any class. You need to become comfortable with your lack of knowledge about certain groups and seek ways to inform yourself (e.g., through experiences, readings, and/or conversations with faculty, peers, and students who are knowledgeable about the particular groups). Below you will find examples of the sorts of issues that might be considered in order to increase your awareness of multicultural issues during the planning process.

*Accommodations*
Students may have religious holidays and practices that require accommodations at certain times during the academic calendar year. Students with disabilities may also require special accommodations. To be sensitive to the religious needs of students, it is important to read the "Religious Holidays and the Academic Calendar" handout provided each year by the Provost's Office so that you are aware of the holidays that occur during the semester you are teaching. Contact Services for Students with Disabilities (763-3000) for information on ways that you can accommodate the needs of those students. At the beginning of the semester, ask your students to let you know if their attendance, their participation in class, or their ability to complete an assignment on time will be affected by their observance of religious holidays or practices, or because of a disability. Give advance consideration to requests for

reasonable and fair accommodations. Some instructors ask for this information on data sheets that students complete on the first day of class.

*Attendance*
Students who are different in a highly visible way (women who wear Islamic clothing, African Americans or Asian Americans in a predominantly white class, students who use wheelchairs, etc.) can be penalized because of their visibility. In particular, absences of such students may be noticed more easily. For this reason, it is important to record all students' attendance at every class session (whether or not you use the information) rather than collecting a mental record of absences of highly visible students that may inadvertently and unfairly affect how you evaluate them.

*Grading*
When you use different criteria to evaluate the performance of students from certain groups, this can create tensions in the class because students tend to share their grades. Furthermore, if these criteria are applied based on assumptions you have made rather than on accurate information regarding the students, some students may be unfairly penalized. For example, having higher expectations for Asian American students in Asian language classes than for other students may unfairly penalize Asian American students who have never had any experience with the Asian language they are learning. With this in mind, you should ask all students about their prior experiences with the course content and should inform students of the criteria by which their performance will be assessed along with the rationale for differential evaluations if such a practice will be used.

*Cultural Reference Points*
Instructors who use examples drawn only from their own experience may fail to reach all students in the class. Given that examples are designed to clarify key points, you should collect examples from a variety of cultural reference points. For example, in 1995/1996 "Friends" was a sitcom that received high ratings. However, this show was less popular among many African American people than shows like "Living Single" and "Martin." Similarly, when using sports examples it is important for instructors to include sports in which women participate (e.g., track & field, figure skating, gymnastics, tennis, softball) as well as those in which male participants predominate (e.g., hockey, football, baseball). This concern can also be offset by asking about students' familiarity with an example before discussing it or asking students to produce examples of their own. You can also explain examples fully in order to reach a diverse classroom.

*Instructional Strategies*
Students bring an array of learning styles to a class. If you rely on a small repertoire of instructional strategies, you may provide effective instruction for only a small subset of your class. You should become aware of your preferred instructional strategies. For example, are sessions with small groups of students doing problem sets always conducted by asking questions? Are whole-group discussions preferred and the only method used? Once you have a sense of your strategy preferences, you should consider alternative techniques that will help your students learn more effectively. If you typically give mini-lectures to students, you might consider using visual materials (e.g., charts, diagrams, video), demonstrations, hands-on activities, cooperative group work, etc.

*Controversial Topics*
Class sessions that address controversial topics may result in any of the following unintended outcomes: (a) altercations between individual students or groups of students, (b) silence from students who feel intimidated or fear conflict, (c) the assertion and perpetuation of false stereotypes or problematic assumptions, or (d) the expression of offensive speech. There are no easy answers for dealing with these situations when they occur. It is best to work toward the prevention of these occurrences by investing time in the planning process. When working with a particular controversial topic, anticipate possible responses and how you might deal with differing yet passionate views on that topic. You should plan strategies that provide structure for these discussions and that foster students' ability to express their own ideas well while also increasing their ability to listen to and learn from others. In the interest of free speech, students should be encouraged to honestly share their views during discussions. Be prepared, however, to correct stereotypes and challenge students' assumptions when comments are shared. It can be a difficult task to reconcile the tension between challenging offensive speech and not suppressing free speech. You should also consider your own response to emotion in the classroom and use this awareness to inform the planning process.

Establishing agreed upon guidelines early in the class can be an important aspect of productive class discussions. If guidelines are established early, students will need to be reminded periodically of the rules throughout the semester, especially if their behavior suggests that they are ignoring them. If such rules were not established at the beginning of the semester, it is necessary to establish them when a problem becomes apparent. (Sample guidelines can be found here.)

It is also helpful, at the beginning of the semester, to focus on group processes. Activities and assignments during the first weeks of the course should include opportunities for instructors to get to know each student and for students to get to know one another. Establishing rules for classroom dialogues, building a trusting and open environment, modeling appropriate behavior during dialogues, and giving students the opportunity to practice these behaviors with topics that are not explosive or fearful are important for positive dialogue experiences. If you and your students engage in these behaviors early on, when problems arise, you will be able to address the problem by discussing the rules and appropriate behaviors.

***Grouping Students for Learning***
There are a variety of reasons for using cooperative groups (to facilitate student learning, to improve interpersonal relationships among students, to foster responsibility for students' own learning and the learning of others, etc.). You might create in-class and/or out-of-class groups (lab groups, homework groups, problem-solving groups, study groups, etc.). Because group composition can have a significant impact on group functioning, you should use a variety of methods to create groups. Such methods include: assigning students to groups (e.g., make heterogeneous groups across certain characteristics such as gender, race, and/or level of achievement in a particular discipline, or by where students live), randomly assigning students (e.g., ask students to draw a piece of paper with a group number from a bag), or allowing students to form their own groups. This latter method should be used sparingly, if possible, as it can consciously or unconsciously be used to create or reinforce social group differences within the class.

In addition to group formation issues, pay attention to the length of time students remain in the same group, particularly if the group is not working together well. It is essential that you address process issues when students work in groups, and some class time should be allocated in the planning of the course to discuss group process issues throughout the semester. It is often helpful for each person in a group to have a specific role (e.g., observer, encourager, summarizer) and everyone should have an opportunity to participate in every role during the semester. You should help students determine a way to provide feedback to one another about group process and dynamics and a way to keep you aware of within-group functioning. Feedback is particularly important for identifying social identity characteristics that might be a source of problems in groups and for figuring out how to address problems satisfactorily. The following guidelines may be useful for addressing group process.

- When groups are used, make sure that the same individuals do not always put themselves in the position of leadership. Assigning students to roles (e.g., recorder/notetaker, reporter, moderator) or asking students to rotate roles should reduce the occurrence of this problem.
- Be ready to challenge assumptions that groups will either be aided or hindered by having certain kinds of students in their group (e.g., men in math or science classes feeling they have to help the women along; white students working on a project on “rap music” who are eager to have an African American student as part of their group). One way to reduce the likelihood of such assumptions manifesting themselves in group work would be to spend some time informing the class that each individual brings a different combination of strengths and weaknesses into the group work context and that students should not make assumptions about what these might be prior to any interaction with an individual. Group exercises that identify the specific resources that each group member brings can be useful in the early stages of group formation. It is also important to inform students of your availability to discuss group process problems that the groups themselves have been unable to successfully address.
- You may need to make an extra effort to reduce the chances that a student who is different from the majority of the class will feel isolated (an African American student in a predominantly white class; a male in a predominantly female class; an openly gay, lesbian, or bisexual student in a class composed predominantly of heterosexuals, etc.). For example, if students are shunning a classmate during small group activities because their classmate is gay and they are homophobic, you (irrespective of your personal perspective on homosexuality) have a responsibility to intervene on behalf of the excluded student. Even when guidelines have been established for participation and responsibilities within groups, problems may arise. It is essential to act quickly when they do. You could begin by reviewing the guidelines for group work. An initial change (if students are forming their own groups) would be to assign individuals to groups and make sure each individual within the group has a role. Another option would be to put students in pairs. It is more difficult to exclude an individual when there are only two participants. If all else fails, it would be important to set up a meeting with the excluded student and together you could generate a variety of actions that could be taken to improve the classroom climate. This would be a show of support to the student. While it is important to solicit student input, you cannot expect the student to have the time or experience to solve the problem. If efforts are made to improve the situation and little change occurs, you might speak with a consultant from CRLT.

## Getting to Know the Students

Part of good teaching involves spending some time focusing on building relationships with your students. It is important to some students that you demonstrate caring and genuine concern about them. You may have more positive experiences with students if you invest some time and energy into becoming informed and more aware of issues affecting students of various backgrounds.

One way to get to know your students better early in the semester is to have students write a brief autobiography; it can be as short as two pages. The autobiography can be framed in ways that are relevant to the course content. For example, if you are responsible for math or science courses, you can ask students to share their early experiences (formal and informal) with math and science. They could also be asked to reflect on what their previous experiences with math or science suggest about how they learn best. From this brief paper, you would receive some valuable information about students' attitudes about the content and some of their instructional needs. This kind of assignment could help you to explore, early on, some of the assumptions you might hold about your students and their experiences. It may also help students feel that real interest is being taken in them.

Throughout the term, you can make use of office hours, written assignments, and class discussion to further develop your knowledge about and connections to students. Specific suggestions have already been made in previous sections of this chapter.

***Decisions, Comments, & Behaviors During the Teaching Process***

If you are responsible for teaching sections of a course, it is essential to understand that even when you have limited input into course content, you have much control over how that content gets taught. Teaching is a complex activity in which there are multiple levels of interaction among students and between GSIs and students. Students all bring very different backgrounds, knowledge, and learning styles to a particular course. There are multiple interpretations of content constructed by individual students during the learning process. Also, some students construct different images of their instructors that are counter to how you might see yourself. Because of the complexity and unpredictability of teaching, you should carefully plan your course sessions and always be prepared for the unexpected to occur. The following points address many of the issues that may arise during the teaching process.

***Working with Course Content***

- *Examine course content for inaccurate information and the absence of relevant perspectives.* Prepare for each class session by reading upcoming assignments in order to identify omissions, misleading interpretations, and intentional or inadvertent expressions of personal opinion by the author. You may then alert students to problems with the text and encourage students to read critically themselves. For example, a section on employment discrimination in an Economics text states that blatant racial or gender discrimination is vanishing today. Since this is a statement about which there is current disagreement, students might be prompted to consider and discuss their own degree of agreement with this statement.
- *Be careful about the comments made during class lectures, discussions, recitation sessions, etc.* Be aware of the fact that comments that are not fully explained may inadvertently invoke stereotypes or promote inaccurate conclusions. Similarly, skewed examples of religious, historical, or other events have the potential to lead students to believe that inaccuracies are truths

***Student Critiques of Course Content***

- *Create a classroom climate that encourages and expects questions about and critiques of course content.* Such a climate will help to create a norm of critical thinking that will facilitate the learning process for all students. As students share their critiques with the class, other students will benefit by being exposed to different interpretations, perspectives, and concerns regarding course material. This climate can also provide an opportunity for students to add to the course content by correcting inaccuracies or misrepresentations related to the history or experience of their own groups.
- *Make decisions about when to devote unanticipated time to class discussions to deal with issues raised by students that pertain to content or process.* These issues, which may deal with the history or culture of a group with which you are unfamiliar, are an equally important part of the course content. It is best to be honest about your lack of knowledge, acknowledge the students' point, and make efforts to secure information about the students' point to share with the class in a future session. It is also important to emphasize that everyone can be a teacher and that instructors and students can learn from one another. You can also ask students to send you e-mail messages, chat with you during office hours, or drop notes in you mailbox as concerns about course content arise. You should make every effort to address these issues or explain to students why they will not be addressed.
- *Be open to students' reactions to course material, even when you feel uncomfortable with the manner in which they are expressed.* Be prepared for students to publicly challenge inaccurate information about particular groups that appears in class readings, films, etc. Students may react strongly upon hearing what they perceive to be inaccurate and negative information about their group. You may find yourself teaching courses that have the reputation (from the students' perspective) of being full of inaccurate or misleading content. Students can often feel unduly burdened when they are in a position as teacher rather than learner. Students may resent having to "pick up the slack" in classes where instructors and their peers lack knowledge about the group with which the particular students are affiliated. When students are of the opinion that the information being given in the course is biased against their group, they may feel that they are also missing valuable learning opportunities. Creating a positive learning experience for these students can be challenging. In this situation, it is most important to be open to the perspectives these students share. Giving serious consideration to students' views that are in the "minority" will encourage students to respond honestly about issues while also encouraging students to think more broadly about issues. This does not, however, mean that you have to agree with the students' views or feel that the students' views are above critique.
- *Give serious consideration to students' requests for alternative materials when materials currently used inaccurately represent aspects of students' social identity groups or cultures.* Changes should be made when justified. If you receive criticisms about materials, you should make clear to students that the criticism can be accompanied by specific recommendations of alternative materials.

***Responding to Student Identities***

- *Invite all students to contribute to class discussion, even if you assume that the discussion is more relevant to some students than others.* Students (irrespective of background) do not like being forced to serve as the

spokesperson for their group. Students also do not appreciate being expected to know everything about issues relating to their group or the assumption that all students from their group feel the same way about an issue.

- *Be sensitive to the experiences of visibly underrepresented students in your class.* Students with identities that are underrepresented and visible or known may face certain challenges that unfairly compromise their learning environment. For example, students may not be allowed to do assignments on certain topics because of the instructor's assumption about the students' biases. In one course, women wearing Islamic head scarves were readily identified as Muslim and not allowed to write a paper on Islam; it was more difficult to readily identify students as Christian from their appearance, so they were not prevented from writing papers on Christianity. Students from underrepresented groups may also feel a self-imposed pressure always to portray themselves in a good light so they do not reinforce stereotypes about their group. Whereas "majority students" can slack off from time to time when working within groups, occasionally show up late to class, or be absent without peers attributing their behavior to membership in a particular group, students from underrepresented groups often sense that their behavior is interpreted as a reflection on their group. Although there may be little you can do to relieve this self-imposed pressure on the part of some students, you can be thoughtful about your interactions with these students and make an effort not to publicly discuss students' performance or behavior.

***Inequities in the Classroom***

- *Be aware of gender dynamics in classroom discussions.* Even when women are in the majority, men may sometimes consciously or unconsciously dominate class discussions or interrupt women. Monitor the occurrence of this behavior and encourage women to speak up at the same time they discourage men from dominating the discussion.
- *Be careful not to respond to comments in ways that students might interpret as dismissals.* You should give sufficient attention to (a) students' comments that differ from the majority of students' views or your own views, (b) students' views that are based on experiential knowledge, and (c) women's views in predominately male classes or traditionally male fields. Be aware of differential feedback given to students who differ on some aspect of their social identity (gender, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, etc.). For example, you should attend to whether you speak down to women or "brush off" their questions, yet give men responses that are informative and detailed.

***Conflict in the Classroom***

- *Respond to classroom conflict in a manner that helps students become aware of the "learning moment" this conflict provides.* Heated discussions need to be facilitated in a manner that does not result in hostility among class members and a sustained sense of bad feeling in the room. You can avoid these outcomes by encouraging students to tie their feelings and conflicts to the course material and by looking for underlying meanings and principles that might get buried in the process of class conflict. Students appreciate tensions between groups in the class being recognized and effectively addressed.
- *Recognize student fears and concerns about conflict. Students enter a class with different levels of experience and comfort with conflict.* It is important to normalize the experience of conflict in the classroom, particularly in classes that focus on controversial topics. This can be accomplished through explicit discussion of student experiences with conflict and the use of structured discussion exercises.
- *Maintain the role of facilitator.* One of the challenges of teaching is maintaining the role of instructor under a variety of conditions. For example, you can get caught up in expressing your own perspective in heated discussions or can become overly silent in discussions that go beyond your own knowledge base or experience. While these responses are understandable, such role abdication can create chaos in the classroom or force students to fill in the abdicated facilitator role. In order to avoid this outcome, you should examine your typical responses to conflict. It can also be useful to find ways that you may admit your limits with respect to content areas while maintaining responsibility for the group process.

**Source:** Center for Research on Learning & Teaching (CRLT), University of Michigan: *http://www.crlt.umich.edu/gsis/p3_1*