Lab Discussion (02/24/2021)

“Guide for Inclusive Teaching at Columbia” (2020)

* Lacking actionable microscale ways to diffuse a situation (ie HOW to implement these principles on a specific scale/situation)
* Lots of quantitative courses require full course redesign
* Student interest may also be a problem, making sure that students feel valued and fostering student interest - see whether students are interested or not
  + Feedback students give at the end of the semester - does it account for whether students are required to take a course
  + Motivation and engagement is very important, student engagement is very important
* How to get students to come to office hours - how to cross the marginalized student barrier and get them to feel comfortable to ask for/seek support
  + Lots of experience with quantitative professors that seem to make everyone feel stupid and incompetent
  + Need to value student perspective and hide the fact that sometimes students might ask dumb questions (this is okay!)
* Lots of DEI resources on the lab website now - Wheaton College has a good (more specific, nitty gritty)
* Showing your process! Teach people HOW you solve the problem and not only the answer
  + Jeff videotaping himself solving the R exercises without the answers!
  + Super helpful to his students
* Facilitate group discussion and group learning (people who talk the most will learn the most)
  + Keep in mind that those who talk the most are those with the most social capital (ie white, male etc)
  + An open ended task may be a good way to mitigate this problem, there are multiple ways to solve a problem
* Walk around the classroom as an instructor, makes people more aware of themselves and whether or not they should or shouldn’t be talking
  + May result in self-correcting group dynamics
  + Do not be afraid to restructure groups
  + Think before you come in about how you will restructure a specific class period/ group, help to solve confrontation issues with prevention
* Group dynamics is something TAs struggle with, and it is something you have the largest influence on as a TA
  + Lots of group work in recitations and labs, especially in quantitative courses
  + Assign groups with low, mid, and high performance individuals and assign group roles (high performance student is not always the leader)
* What are you worried about in teaching?
  + Worried about multiple levels of expertise in a course, varying ability across students, how to deal with this and cater to all students
  + How to deal with varying levels of engagement across students in a required class
    - How to deal with the range of abilities AND range of interest in course material
    - Incorporate different examples, switch up activities, switch up groups
    - Foster gravity? Ask students what they would be interested in
    - Erin (Best action that could help, best tip): tried to be aware of her own biases in the wildlife field (not teach just what she found interesting)
      * It is hard to foster engagement across the board, some students are just trying to graduate
      * Sometimes you can’t help this fully - don’t have to change every students life
      * Include participation grades, discussion credit
* Elevator pitches? Good way to include multiple points of engagement (speaking, writing, discussion)
* Self assessment and reflection, really great for engagement, how do you value yourself (process letter)
  + Another good way to build an instructor student relationship
  + Students build trust and vulnerability over time
  + Reflections:
    - Students could be too hard on themselves
    - You can see the student learning arcs over the course of the semester, able to see the level of specificity and honest increase in the process letters
      * Give feedback on process letters themselves, helps students realize where they are doing well (don’t have to be as hard on themselves)
    - This may be difficult with a very large class
* Teaching College Science:
  + Very good course, learning how to design labs, lesson plans - recommended by Sam
  + Learning about student-centered learning
  + Learning about learning theories
  + How to engage students and HOW to implement teaching tactics is difficult

Round robin/wrap up discussion:

* Continuity in TAships (teaching a cohort of juniors to seniors through both years), reflection letters are good for making sure students are understanding the material beyond completion (when students get a bad mark because they don’t get the right answer may mean that they never get the right answer - harsh grading does not necessarily foster learning), teaching students HOW to learn, not just the material
* Taking the opportunity to give prompt and helpful feedback to students about performance and also about their learning process is extremely helpful and good for building a rapport with students
* Sense of urgency and a large workload as a TA, focusing on TAing/teaching at a high level is put at a lower priority than your research as a grad student
* Sense of workload that prevents TAs from adding in these inclusive tactics
* More emphasis on giving the students the content that they need to know, rather than fostering a good learning environment
  + A struggle with courses getting bigger, an institutional problem
  + No reward or no incentive to do well at teaching (especially as a TA)
  + It will have absolutely no effect on your career path/your success as a grad student
* Focus less on equality and more on equitability
  + Allows you to use limited time and attention on students that really need it
  + Reflections and process letters are helpful to let you know which students need more of your time
  + You don’t have to give ALL students equal time and attention (EQUITABILITY not EQUALITY)
  + This translates to mentoring as well, not all mentee students need the same amount of attention/time form your mentor
* Process letter and Reflection is very important
  + Necessary to build report and identify students
  + Good way to build trust
  + This is something that is worth your time as a TA
* Broadening your course readings: Good opportunity to do this in Ecology
  + Lots of expanding horizons and broadening the inclusivity of authors
  + Traditional Ecological Knowledge
* Make sure problematic pasts or views of classical scientists are acknowledged
  + IE high-held academics in stats had eugenicist views
* Feedback questions for students can be really important in addressing inclusivity directly
  + “Did I ever say anything to offend you”
  + “Did I ever do anything problematic”
  + “Did you feel this was an inclusive course”
* Remember: You are going to make mistakes, it will feel bad
  + Sometimes feedback hurts
  + To be open and humble in accepting feedback or criticism
  + Don’t take criticism personally
  + This is part of improving yourself and your teaching, something you have to deal with when your care about your teaching
  + Give yourself grace when you make mistakes and move on in a better direction
  + **This work is hard and uncomfortable, fail with grace, learn and more forward**

Anti racism work/Guide for inclusive teaching notes:

Principle one: Establish and support a class climate that fosters belonging for all students

* Fostering an environment where students feel as though their peers and themselves are credible sources of knowledge, expertise, and value (this facilitates group work as well)
* Do not assume anyones experience
* The example questions for feedback were awesome! Nothing I’ve ever seen
  + How to foster trusting feedback - should be anonymous

Principle two: Set explicit student expectations

* Helps establish trust
* Communicate beyond your syllabus
* Agreed upon community guidelines

Principle three: Select course content that recognizes diversity and acknowledges barriers to inclusion

* Broaden your readings and topics around inclusivity
* Examples that do not marginalize students - potentially ask for feedback from faculty or professionals who would know (ie DEI professionals)

Principle four: Design all course elements for accessibility

* Multiple means of representation, multiple means of action, multiple means of engagement

Principle five: Reflect on one’s beliefs about teaching to maximize self-awareness and commitment to inclusion

* Consider you own identity, how students will perceive you, your level of social capital and status as a professor or TA
  + Demographics, societal identity, personality
  + Strengths and weaknesses as an instructor (from your own perception and previous feedback)
* Implicit or explicit biases, consider potential stereotype threats
  + What have you been guilty of in the past? What have others assumed about you?
* How to actively structure an inclusive classroom
  + TALK to your students about being inclusive themselves and mention that you are working on it and open to feedback