

Teaching towards inclusion



Dealing with diversity in the classroom



The challenge for all instructors at Georgia Tech



To ensure that the classroom climate and curriculum is supportive of and responsive to *all* students.



A level playing field?



- The admissions process at GT is blind - race, gender, intended major are *unknown* by the decision makers.
- In terms of ability, all new GT freshmen are in a level playing field upon entry.
- However, race, gender, and other factors do create a diverse student population in the classrooms at GT



GT Undergraduates Fall 2003



While GT may not be as diverse as some other universities, it is not homogeneous by any means:

- Total undergrad enrollment 11,457
- Female 28%
 - Ethnicity:
 - Black 8%
 - Hispanic 3%
 - Asian 17%
 - Caucasian 70%
 - International 5%



Classroom Dynamics



- Both instructors and students come to the table with diverse realities and experiences.
- Unfortunately, educational research shows that female and minority students who leave their major do so not because of what their instructors do, but what the instructors fail to do.
- You, as instructor, need to prepare to encourage successful learning by ALL students, no matter how diverse they might be.



The impact for you in the teaching role?



Dealing with

- Gender differences in the classroom
- Cultural differences in communication
- Learning style differences
- Potential outcome differences for different students

Gender differences in the classroom



- **Studies of classrooms from kindergarten *through* graduate school have shown that both male and female teachers tend to:**
 - call on male students more frequently
 - wait longer for male students to respond to questions
 - give male students more eye contact following questions
 - remember the names of male students
 - use these names when calling on them
 - attribute their comments in class discussion ("as Michael said earlier")

More gender differences



- Studies by linguists show that female students are more likely to:
 - give their statements less loudly, and at less length
 - present their statements in a more hesitant, indirect, or "polite" manner
 - use "I" statements ("I guess," "I was wondering if")
 - qualify their statements ("sort of," "I guess")
 - add "tag" questions ("isn't it?" "don't you think?")
 - ask questions rather than give statements
 - accompany their statements with smiles or averted eyes rather than more assertive gestures, such as pointing
 - apologize for their statements ("I may be wrong, but")

Cultural differences in communication



Well-known cultural differences:

- Eye contact (Eastern and Latin American cultures)
- Physical spacing (Middle East vs. North America)
- Attitudes towards classroom learning (Eastern vs. Western)

Some implications of cultural communication norms



Students exhibiting certain "laid-back" or "indirect" communication characteristics have often been perceived in academic communities as less rigorous in their ability to think critically and lacking in intellectual sophistication.

Academics generally perceive verbally aggressive students as being brighter.

But some students simply have been raised in environments where they have not been encouraged to speak out or participate actively in class.

Differing learning styles



What information gets accessed and stored?

- Dependent on *learning styles*
 - Visual
 - Verbal
 - Manipulative
 - Others
- For more information, see the TAWeb module on Learning Styles.
- Students learn in different ways, and they can become frustrated when instructors don't take this into account.

Learning outcomes



- Why are the students taking this course?
 - Elective or required?
 - Professional or personal?
- What do they hope to achieve in this course?
 - What content information will they take away with them?
 - How do their grades affect their motivation?
- Do your class goals meet the goals of most or all of your students?

Strategies for Inclusive Teaching

Adapted from Teaching a Diverse Student Body, N. Loevinger, 1994, University of Virginia.

- For students who might seem quieter or less active in the classroom, don't write them off as incapable.
 - Use small group or paired discussion activities to give those students opportunities to engage their classmates in discussing class material.
 - Vary the classroom structure to include more than just competitive modes of learning. Give students the opportunity to share insights from their own experience or from other classes that relate to your class content.
 - Increase the amount of time you allow for students to formulate an answer to a question in class. Count silently to 10 before you restate the question or call on volunteers.
- Monitor classroom dynamics to ensure that discussion does not become dominated by more aggressive students.
 - "Thank you, John, but let us give others here the chance to give us their opinions/thoughts. Mary . . . ?"



Additional strategies

- Give male and female students equal attention in advising, mentoring, and giving feedback.
- Revise curricula if necessary to include examples from both male and female experiences and perspectives; include research from and information about scientists from other countries and cultures.



Further strategies

- Actively examine written materials and websites that you utilize in class to avoid sexist and racist language and stereotypical cultural biases.
- Do not ask students to perform activities you would not request of people whom you respect.



Final thoughts

- Get to know your students: their backgrounds, their goals, their study habits and needs.
 - This will allow you to ensure that the classroom climate and curriculum is supportive and responsive to *all* students.

