

**CAMPUS-WIDE EQUAL OPPORTUNITY/SEXUAL HARASSMENT COMMITTEE
FACULTY ASSEMBLY PRESENTATION
OCTOBER 26, 2004**

**Practical Suggestions For Maintaining An Academic Climate
Hospitable To Every Student Who Comes To William And Mary¹**

AVOID ASSUMPTIONS AND STEREOTYPING OF STUDENTS

- Avoid assumptions about a student, or group of students, based on their apparent age, gender, ethnicity, national origin, or race. A student may appear to be of a member of a particular group, but in fact identify with an entirely different segment of the population.
- Avoid assuming that you know a student's perspective, background, politics, or interests, just because the student looks or sounds to you as though she comes from a certain segment of the population.
- Ask yourself before teaching: Can I assume everyone in the classroom brings the same background to this material?
- Getting to know the students as individuals helps avoid reliance on stereotypes. When possible:
 - Have students fill out a "get to know me" questionnaire.
 - Have a class get together, perhaps a lunch.
 - If it is a large class, have students use name placards.
 - Learn your students' names and how to pronounce them.

¹ We borrowed a number of the items in this list from *Tips For Teachers Teaching In Racially Diverse College Classrooms* (Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning—online document), copyright © 2002-2004 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College, and from *A Berkeley Compendium of Suggestions for Teaching With Excellence* (by Barbara Gross Davis, Lynn Wood, Robert C. Wilson), copyright 1983 by the Regents of the University of California.

CREATE A CLASSROOM DYNAMIC THAT TAKES ADVANTAGE OF DIVERSITY

- Encourage students to connect their own lives and backgrounds to the course material. This will bring multiple perspectives into the classroom.
- Avoid creating situations where students are placed in the position of being representatives of their race.
- If a classroom discussion becomes heated and discriminatory or insulting remarks are being made, intervene, or else your silence will be viewed as approval.
- Protect the student who goes out on a limb, regardless of your personal viewpoint. Students will express themselves freely in class if they feel they will not be outright attacked and left to fend for themselves.
- Challenge students' opinions and make them explain why they hold a position. Then, allow for an opposing viewpoint to be heard, or play devil's advocate yourself.
- Have students work in small discussion or project groups to foster greater classroom interaction.
- Ask students to share personal backgrounds that are relevant to the course material.
- Encourage students to voice opinions; point out that differing opinions reflect life outside the classroom.

EXPAND THE NUMBER OF PERSPECTIVES REPRESENTED IN THE CLASSROOM SO THAT STUDENTS WHO DO NOT SHARE THE PROFESSOR'S BACKGROUND WILL NEVERTHELESS FEEL AT HOME

- Develop a multicultural approach to your syllabus.
 - Assign authors from different backgrounds, and encourage students to work on paper topics from multiple perspectives.
 - Assign a text opposing your personal viewpoint.
 - Invite guest speakers to the class to present another perspective you may not be able to voice as well.

BE MINDFUL OF POWER DIFFERENTIAL BETWEEN FACULTY AND STUDENTS-

- The power differential between faculty and students is inevitably imbalanced. It is easy for faculty to forget this fact, but very unlikely that students ever will.
- The power differential between faculty and students inhibits students' freedom to express their concerns, preferences, or dissatisfaction with their academic relationships and environment. Because of the power imbalance, faculty members should not assume that students will voice objections to faculty conduct or faculty-student interactions to which they object. Students may be very unhappy with something that is said in class or in an advising session, but raise no objection...because they perceive faculty to have so much power over them.
- As long as you have the power to grade students, they are not truly your 'friends,' and they do not have the freedom to be completely candid with you. Until you conclude the student-teacher relationship, show them the courtesy and respect of keeping the relationship professional. If a teacher or advisor wants to be "friends," the student does not really have a choice to reject the friendship...so it is not a friendship. Be careful to retain a clear line between the personal and professional. Again, don't think that the absence of a voiced objection means that the student approves of what is happening.
- Faculty often ask their students to baby-sit, house sit, etc. Be mindful that this creates problems for two reasons: (1) the student feels he cannot decline; and (2) other students suppose that you have a special relationship with the selected student, and may become concerned about fairness. Some faculty suggest that it is safest to use students not enrolled in one's classes for such employment.

NEXT STEPS

Suggestions For How Faculties Can Invigorate Efforts To Create A Hospitable Learning Climate.

Faculty are in the best position to identify and respond to areas for improvement within their departments and programs. Because the quality of their unique academic programs is at issue, faculty have the most to gain and the most to lose by responding or not responding to climate issues in their areas. The Equal Opportunity/Sexual Harassment Committee is eager to support such faculty efforts.

Actions faculty may elect:

Charge a committee (within the Faculty Assembly, within a given school or department, within a program, or other unit) with identifying areas for improvement and devising strategies to improve.

Invite a diversity trainer to lunch (or a faculty meeting). In conjunction with, or in lieu of, faculty initiated improvements, a faculty unit might request a diversity-training program, which could be conducted by the Equal Opportunity Office or other available trainers. Such a program would focus on the issues of particular interest to the requesting faculty and would be designed to enhance awareness of and skills for responding to particular situations. We can also make these training sessions part of the Teaching Project.

Create a definite protocol for faculty in your area to respond to students who voice complaints about the climate in the unit as a whole, or about individuals within it. Do faculty perceive themselves as professionally obligated to assist a student who feels he is being treated unfairly within the department? How do faculty in your area balance their interest in helping such a student against the interest in avoiding conflict or a sense of disloyalty among faculty? If a student in your area were to raise an objection about the climate, what would be done with that objection? Try to reach an agreement among your colleagues about this.

Whatever protocol is decided upon, if you actually witness an instance of racial, gender, sexual orientation, religious, etc., hostility, report it to the chair or dean and to the EO Director.

Consider whether a faculty member's contributions to the learning climate for diverse groups should play a role in faculty evaluation. Should chairs/deans/tenure-promotion review committees—pay heed to student course evaluation comments about the classroom climate (whether good practices or problems)? Should a faculty member's contributions to or detractors from, the climate be taken into account in salary reviews, promotion decisions?

