

Taking cultural diversity into account when teaching

Cultural diversity is a fact in UCLA. Students come from all over the world and with very different backgrounds, skills and learning styles. Ignoring this diversity when teaching may create serious motivation problems because some students will feel excluded. All students need to feel welcome and treated as individuals. They must feel that they can participate fully in learning and that they are treated fairly. Here are some useful suggestions in this respect:

- Students must not encounter overt hostility, ignorance and insensitivity as well as more subtle messages that their cultural heritage is not valued. Avoid jokes regarding sexual orientation, physical disabilities or women. Well meaning statements regarding these issues can be easily misinterpreted.
- Make sure that all students display welcoming behavior towards each other. You have to intervene if somebody in the class makes a silly comment that may taken as offensive by another student.
- Call students by their names. They must not see a very impersonal attitude as a way of exclusion.
- Be careful with examples in class. Do not give examples where some social groups may feel excluded or neglected. Do not overdo the issue either by engaging in patronizing behavior.
- Avoid falling prey to stereotypes like for example sorority students are all “fluff heads”. Positive stereotypes such as Chinese students know a lot of math are also inconvenient because they may place too high expectations on them.
- Be careful not too much attention to a particular type of people in office hours.
- Never ask a student to voice an opinion as a representative of his social group. Remember to treat students as individuals.
- Give a space to people that are different by being careful not to impose your own values on them.
- Disabled students are just a special case of student diversity. The way that they are disabled to learn is usually related to their disabilities. Be aware of the problems that disabled students may have but never let them know you know. They may feel uncomfortable or that you are patronizing them.
- Be aware of different learning styles. Use varied instructional approaches to help student with different learning styles.