First Day Teaching Practices: Tips for Fostering an Inclusive Classroom from the Start

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General:

Setting the tone on the first day of class helps establish the type of classroom culture and learning environment that you would like to cultivate throughout the remainder of the term. A student's impression from the first day of class can often determine their sense of belonging (or not) and their beliefs about their ability to succeed in the class.

You may want to take some time before the beginning of the term to reflect upon who you are as a teacher (your teaching persona and your teaching philosophy) and how you would like to foster a sense of community in the classroom. Develop an organized syllabus with encouraging language, transparent policies, and accessible design (https://accessiblesyllabus.tulane.edu/).

On the first day and throughout the term, you will want to model the type of behavior you expect from your students. Examples include the type of language you use (i.e. language that adopts a growth mindset: https://www.cardiffschools.com/cms/lib03/CA01000801/Centricity/Domain/87/boosting_achievement_dweck.pdf), how you engage with others, and admitting when you don't have an answer or when you make mistakes, etc. (https://accessiblesyllabus.tulane.edu/rhetoric/).

The following list, although not exhaustive, includes a combination of practical suggestions and considerations for establishing a positive and accessible learning experience for your students from the very start of the term. The length of your class session will determine how much of the following you will be able to include on the 1st day. Other suggestions, such as setting class ground rules, may be reserved for the 2nd class session.

Before the First Class Begins:

- If possible, arrange seating according to your desires for the class. If discussion is a big part of your curriculum, then arranging chairs in a circle or around a table is optimal.
- List the course name & course number on the board or on Power Point. This allows students to immediately identify if they are in the correct classroom before the session begins.

- Ask students (verbally or on the board/PowerPoint) to create nametags with their preferred name and preferred gender pronoun(s) – consider providing paper and pens.
- Give students the option of opting out of disclosing their gender pronoun (i.e. students can request that they be called by their name rather than a gender pronoun: https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/teaching-beyond-the-gender-binary-in-the-university-classroom/; https://groups.haas.berkeley.edu/CTE/teaching/Creating_Inclusive_Classrooms_for_Trans_and_Gender_Expansive_Students.pdf).
- Ask students to fill out "Student Information Sheet" to collect at the start or at the end of the class - see sample at the end of this checklist. This allows you to get to know your students more quickly and it allows them to share directly with you any concerns they may have about the class.

Opening Class on the First Day:

- Introduce yourself and the class:
  - "Hello, welcome to [class name + number]."
  - Introduce yourself as the name and title that you'd like to be addressed.
  - "I am Professor X" - "I am Dr. X" - "My name is X; you may call me by my first name."
  - Tell your students something about yourself: how became interested in the subject you are teaching, where you did your undergraduate studies, etc.
- You may want to open with a thought-provoking question or example that illustrates the themes of the course.
- You can use this as a rhetorical strategy for opening the class or you can use this as an immediate icebreaker that engages students at the very start of class.

Taking Attendance – Learning & Pronouncing Names:

Taking attendance on the 1st day is an excellent opportunity to learn students' preferred names and to learn the correct pronunciation of names. Refrain from assigning students a nickname in order to make it easier for you; names are an important part of one's identity and treating a student's name disrespectfully is one form of a microaggression (https://vptl.stanford.edu/faculty-instructors/diversity-inclusion/diversity-inclusion-related-topics/understanding-implicit; https://vpge.stanford.edu/resources/recognizing-and-addressing).

- Take attendance by going around the room and asking students to say their name.
- State in advance:
- "Please let me know if your preferred name is different from the one listed on the official roster."

- "Please correct me if I mispronounce your name."
- Repeat each student's name to practice and check pronunciation.
- If needed, write the name phonetically next to the student's name in the roster in order to help you remember the pronunciation (https://qz.com/775492/what-minority-students-hear-when-white-teachers-mispronounce-their-names/).

Icebreakers:

In order to cultivate familiarity among the students, allow some time toward the beginning of class (before going over the syllabus) for an icebreaker that allows students to get to know each other.

Examples:

- Have students get into pairs and interview each other – preferred name, year in school, major, extracurricular activities, and perhaps one question more directly related to the course. After the pairs have interviewed each other, have each student introduce their partner (this is helpful for students who may feel shy about introducing themselves). In a humanities course, you may use this opportunity to ask a larger question about "speaking for the other" and issues of representation.
- "Fast Friends": https://rascl.berkeley.edu/ffp.html

Course Overview:

To give students a sense of the course themes and goals, you may want to provide a 5 – 10 minute Power Point presentation on the main themes and objects of analyses the course will cover.

- Include images and/or short videos of objects of analysis so that students can vividly see the course's "big picture."
- This is particularly helpful if students are "shopping" the course.

Going Over the Syllabus:

Discuss course goals and provide transparent course policies and assignments

- These should be written into syllabus.
- Take time to verbally point out key points from syllabus.
- As you are explaining key points, ask students to read along in printed syllabus and/or in a Power Point presentation.
- You may ask students to read aloud certain sections in order for students to practice speaking in class.

Important sections of the syllabus to highlight on the 1st day:

Required texts

Address the costs of course materials. To make course materials available to all students, consider posting them in PDF form onto a class website rather than having them purchase costly books.

- If you are asking students to print materials, invite students to discuss accessibility concerns with you in office hours or encourage students to pair up on printing materials.
- Sample text: "Please notify me if printing readings poses a problem for you and I will be more than happy to work with you on a solution. An acceptable option is to arrange an agreement with one other student in class to collaboratively print and bring readings for sharing in class (no more than 2 students with one printed reading)."
- Clarify for your students if:
- Previous editions of books are acceptable
- There are copies on reserve at the library
- There are there desk copies available

Course assignments, deadlines, and grade breakdowns

Provide a list of course assignments with their exact due dates. Doing so helps all students with time management, but it is especially helpful for students who have disabilities (documented and undocumented) and other circumstances that require careful management of time and school work (for working students, student parents, etc.).

Your office hours and how to contact you

In order to allow students the greatest access to office hours, consider providing two different office hour times on different days, and to allow students to schedule alternative appointment times with you via email. Providing an option for having office hours over Skype may also allow students greater accessibility to attending office hours.

- Sample text: "My office hours are Mondays 2:30pm – 3:30pm and Wednesdays 11:00am – 12:00pm. If these times consistently do not work for you, please e-mail me with your availability in order to schedule an appointment. Please discuss with me if holding office hours over Skype would provide you better access to attending office hours."

A note on names and gender pronouns

In the syllabus and on the 1st day of class, establish and model your expectations regarding respect for preferred names and gender pronouns.

- Sample text: "Students are expected to respectfully refer to each other by their preferred names and gender pronouns in class."

Content advisory/trigger warnings (if applicable)

Depending on your course content and your beliefs surrounding the use of trigger warnings, you may want to include a section on content advisory/trigger warnings.

★ Resources about trigger warnings:

- https://entropymag.org/on-trigger-warnings-part-iii-disability-and-accommodation/

Plagiarism/Academic Honesty

Address the consequences of plagiarism and offer support/resources for student writing:

Stanford's Honor Code:
http://www.stanford.edu/dept/vpsa/judicialaffairs/guiding/honorcode.htm.

Sample text: "You are responsible for understanding the University rules regarding academic integrity and should familiarize yourself with the code if you have not already done so. Please come talk to me in office hours if you are experiencing challenges with your writing and/or if you have any questions about adequately citing sources."

Technology Restrictions (if applicable)

State your expectations and/or restrictions on the use of technology in class.

For instructors who would prefer that students not use laptops in class, you may need to navigate how to accommodate a student's approved accommodation for a laptop without drawing attention to their accommodation. From the Office of Accessibility at Stanford states website: "If a laptop is an approved accommodation, a policy modification for the student with a disability is reasonable. In order not to publicly identify the student with a disability the instructor is encouraged to state on the syllabus something like the following: 'Exceptions for the use of a laptop may be granted for compelling reasons at the discretion of the instructor.'" https://oae.stanford.edu/faculty-teaching-staff/faculty-faqs

Accommodations for Students with a Documented Disability

Include in your syllabus and discuss on the 1st day a statement about accommodations for students with a documented disability, such as:

Sample text: "Students who may need an academic accommodation based on the impact of a disability must initiate the request with the Student Disability Resource Center (SDRC) located within the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). SDRC staff will evaluate the request with required documentation, recommend reasonable accommodations, and prepare an

Accommodation Letter for faculty dated in the current quarter in which the request is being made. Students should contact the SDRC as soon as possible since timely notice is needed to coordinate accommodations. The OAE is located at 563 Salvatierra Walk (Tel. 723-1066, 723-1067 TTY)."

Other Accommodations

Consider including in your syllabus and discussing on the 1st day a general statement about accessibility, such as:

Sample text: "I aim to make this class as accessible as possible to all students, including students who are non-traditional, underrepresented, first-generation, community college transfer, bi-lingual or multi-lingual, ESL, international, low income, etc. Please feel free to my visit office hours and let me know if there are any extenuating circumstances that might prevent you from fully succeeding in this class. Examples might include: access to Internet or computers, printing class materials, issues with childcare, etc. I will do my best to work with *all* students to find resources to support your success in this class."

General Campus Resources at Stanford

Include a section in your syllabus on academic and community resources on campus, such as:

- Resources for printing resources, academic skills (academic coaches and study skills guidelines), tutoring, and student jobs: https://vptl.stanford.edu/students

- Stanford Hume Center for Writing and Speaking: https://undergrad.stanford.edu/tutoring-support/hume-center/writing

- Community Centers on campus, such as Asian American Activities Center, Black Community Services Center, Diversity and First Generation College Student Office, El Centro Chicano, LGBT Community Resources Center, The Markaz Resource Center (for Engagement with the Cultures and Peoples of the Muslim World), Native American Cultural Center, and the Women's Community Center: https://undergrad.stanford.edu/tutoring-support/community-center-resources

Note on Setting Class Ground Rules:

Collaboratively establishing class ground rules is helpful for fostering a respectful class culture and for encouraging maximum participation in class discussions and group activities.

★ Resources about setting class ground rules:

- http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/activities/groundrules.html

- http://ncdd.org/rc/item/1505

Some instructors may want to do this on the 1st day. However, there are compelling reasons to do this on the 2nd or 3rd day of class, such as:

- Lack of time on the first day
- Students may be "shopping" courses in the first week and thus may not return after the first class session.
- Waiting until the 2nd or 3rd class to collaboratively establish class ground rules allows students the opportunity to settle into the class community enough to feel more comfortable speaking up about what they believe are important.

Resources:

★ **Other resources for 1st Day Practices**

- https://vptl.stanford.edu/faculty-instructors/diversity-inclusion/first-day-best-practices

- http://gsi.berkeley.edu/gsi-guide-contents/pre-semester-intro/first-day-plan/

Student Information Sheet Sample:

Student Information Sheet - PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY

Official Name (as listed in enrollment):

By what name do you like to be referred?

Preferred Gender Pronoun:

Year: (circle)

      Freshman   Sophomore   Junior   Senior Grad Student

Transfer Student or International Student? (circle one)   Yes   No

Preferred Email Address:

Your declared or intended major:

Have you taken any classes on [class theme] and/or have you taken any classes in [department name]? If so, describe:

What other classes are you taking this quarter?

If you are an undergraduate student: Do you intend to apply to graduate school (or have already applied)? Briefly describe:

Extracurricular activities and interests:

Why are you interested in taking this class?

Briefly, what comes to mind when you think of the course theme?

Anything else you would like for me to know?