Supporting Diversity and Inclusion in the Classroom

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Why is diversity important in the geosciences?

Questions to frame today’s discussion

• What biases do we bring into the classroom?

• Defining issues & how they impact student learning and performance

• What strategies might we employ to make our classrooms more inclusive?

What biases might students bring into the classroom?

2016 NIH study on how college biology students view classmates’ intelligence and achievements:

• Males more likely than females to be named by males as knowledgeable about course content

• Males overestimated male grades by 0.57 on 4-pt scale

• Females appraised students based on performance without showing bias


Bias & micro aggressions in the classroom

• “I’m almost guaranteed to have two seats next to me open, unless one of my black friends is in my class.”

• “It wasn’t so much that the professors made the class hard, it was the study groups and stuff...Sometimes you are not even invited into the study groups.”

• “One day I was standing in the hallway and there was this group of white kids talking, and they basically said that the only way you come to this school as a black kid is if you’re on an athletic scholarship or if they lowered the standards for you.”

Alexander et al., 1998. Minority Undergraduate Retention at UW-Madison; LEAD report

Types of biases & assumptions

Stereotype threat
Imposter syndrome
Implicit bias
Microaggressions
White privilege
Equitable teaching strategies

• Allow students opportunities to think and talk about geoscience
• Encourage, demand, and actively manage the participation of all students
• Build an inclusive and fair classroom community for all students
• Monitor (your own and students’) behavior to cultivate divergent geoscience thinking
• Teach all of the students in your classroom

Diversify your Syllabus

• Make a concerted effort to include readings from diverse authors & perspectives on your syllabus
  • Example: “History of Oceanography”
• Include a statement about inclusion on your syllabus
  • “[Our Department] embraces a notion of intellectual community enriched and enhanced by diversity along a number of dimensions, including race, ethnicity and national origins, gender and gender identity, sexuality, class and religion. We are especially committed to increasing the representation of those populations that have been historically excluded from participation in U.S. higher education.” – example from Brown University https://ctl.yale.edu/DiversityStatements

What strategies might you employ to create a more inclusive class in your next course?