Diversity is about all the ways in which we differ. Typical diversity dimensions include but are not limited to race, ethnicity, age, gender, physical ability and sexual orientation. Regardless of what courses you teach, issues of diversity will come up either intentionally, in the curriculum or class discussions or casually, in conversations amongst students.

Your role as an instructor is to create an inclusive classroom where all students are engaged, feel comfortable participating in classroom discussions and are encouraged to discover different perspectives and respectful of you and each other.

**Syllabus**

Some of you may have sole control of the course content while others may not. If you do, and if the course is relevant, consider including multiple voices, perspectives and scholarship. It is also important to include works of authors belonging to the groups that you’re discussing. For example, if you are discussing the immigration of Chinese to the U.S., you may want to assign readings of books or articles written by Chinese-American writers who can provide an insider’s perspective.

Include ground rules for classroom behavior and discussion such as being respectful to each other, listening actively to understand different points of views and to engage in constructive dialogue. You may want to discuss this on the first day and invite students to add to the ground rules for the class for the rest of the semester.

Check the religious holidays on http://diversity.missouri.edu/get-involved/religion/holidays.php before assigning dates for your tests and exams. Your students will appreciate your sensitivity to the different faiths in the classroom.

Have a variety of ways to present your course material and prepare an array of assignments and methods of assessing your students’ work to facilitate learning for each and every one of your students.

Make sure that all class material is accessible for all students.

It is highly recommended that you include the University of Missouri’s non-discrimination policy in your syllabus—The University of Missouri does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, national origin age, disability, or status as a Vietnam Veteran.

Include also a statement about accommodation for students with disabilities. The Office of Disability Services and the ADA Coordinator recommend the following wording:

*If you need accommodations because of a disability, if you have emergency medical information to share with me, or if you need special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please inform me immediately. Please see me privately after class, or at my office.*

*To request academic accommodations (for example, a note taker), students must also register with the Office of Disability Services, S5 Memorial Union, 882-4696. It is the campus office responsible for reviewing documentation provided by students requesting academic accommodations, and for accommodations planning in cooperation with students and instructors, as needed and consistent with course requirements. Another resource, MU’s Adaptive Computing Technology Center, 884-2828, is available to provide computing assistance to students with disabilities.*

Learn more! Visit the MizzouDiversity website at diversity.missouri.edu.
Creating an inclusive and open classroom

The Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning at Harvard University suggests the following:

- Get to know each student individually. Learn their names and how to pronounce them correctly.
- Ask and acknowledge each student’s thoughts about the subject. Accept all views as worthy of consideration. This lets students know from the very beginning that their thoughts have a place in the classroom, that there are differences and that the differences are welcomed.
- Present all sides of an issue.
- Ask students to research the position they’re least comfortable with and come prepared to articulate a defense of that posture.
- Be open and friendly in and outside of class.

Monitoring Your Behavior and Language

Take note of your own ethnocentrism and preconceptions towards different groups of people. If left unchecked, these biases may become self-fulfilling prophecies with your students.

Be aware of how you communicate to your students, both verbally and in your body language.

- Discard usage of outdated terms such as Orientals to describe Asians or Asian-Americans. If you are using older reading material, explain to your students about the change in terminology.
- Use a gender neutral term if you are referring to both genders.
- Refrain from using examples that reinforce common stereotypes. Using “he” when referring to engineers or “she” when referring to secretaries plays into the traditional stereotypes of these professions.
- Pay attention to your assumption of a shared point of view with your students. Assuming that everyone goes to church on Sundays, for example, is insensitive to your Muslim students who attend Friday services at the mosque.
- Minimize regional expressions and idioms in your lectures. Students from a different region or culture may miss your point all together. For example, if you have many international students in your class, and you use the idiom, “well, it’s all water under the bridge now,” it is highly unlikely that they will know what it means.
- Pay attention to your eye contact with students. Do you subconsciously favor certain students over others?

Do not ask individual students to speak on behalf of the groups that you assume they belong to. This is not fair to the student and discounts the student’s unique individuality.

Dealing with Difficult and Sensitive Issues and Situation

If your syllabus includes controversial topics such as slavery, sexual orientation, or forced relocation of Native Americans, you will need to plan and anticipate for difficult and emotional classroom discussions. Remember always that your role is to provide a safe class setting for optimal learning to take place.

Remind your students of the ground rules for class discussion covered in your syllabus and other additional ones that they may have.

Do not ignore the situation when a student makes a hurtful comment to you or another student. Acknowledge that an inappropriate behavior has occurred. You need to decide how much time you want to spend on it in class or deal with it after class.

Do not be defensive even when the student is disruptive. Always listen respectfully and acknowledge the possibility that the student may be correct. Your behavior in such a situation will be a role model for your students.

Remind your students to focus on the argument not the person. Be in control of your class by not allowing personal attacks to occur. It is not conducive to learning.

You may want to ask students to step back after a heated discussion, analyze what went on and what they learned from the process.

If necessary, stop the class, assign students to research the issue and write a short essay for the next class meeting. Or, ask students to write about the issue for five minutes in class and then invite them to read them out to the class afterwards.

Inform your supervisor immediately if you run into issues that may escalate into an unresolved conflict in the classroom. You and your supervisor may also consult with offices on campus such as the Program for Excellence in Teaching for advice.