

Question 6:
How do you address issues of diversity in your classroom?

“Whether I am teaching an introductory course on communication theories in a large lecture hall or leading a small graduate seminar, issues related to diversity, inclusion, and social justice remain central in my classroom. Instead of marginalizing issues related to diversity and inclusion to one class meeting or a single textbook chapter, I aim to emphasize its importance throughout the semester. For example, students in my undergraduate course on persuasion complete a semester-long service-learning project on combatting cyberbullying and online discrimination. At the beginning of the semester, I facilitate a series of workshops on social media activism, diversity, and social justice. Next, students work in teams to develop, design, launch, and evaluate anti-hate social media campaigns. This project has helped students reflect critically on the ways that people use social media to perpetuate and advocate against social biases and discrimination.

In addition to major course assignments, workshops, and service-learning projects, I address issues of diversity and inclusion in subtler ways. When designing my courses, for example, I strive to carefully select readings from scholars who occupy diverse social identities and positions. My PowerPoint slides, video clips, and audiovisual aids feature photos of people from diverse backgrounds (as representation matters!), and I am mindful of the use of gendered and racialized language in class discussions. From the designing my courses and developing lesson plans to taking students in the classroom, diversity and inclusion are important issues in my teaching.”

Lisa K. Hanasono, Bowling Green State University
2015 CSCA Outstanding New Teacher Award

“We are fortunate to live in an era when classrooms include students of different races, ethnicities, genders, sexes, sexual orientations, gender identities, abilities, ages, and socioeconomic classes. Particularly for the field of communication, this rich diversity offers marvelous opportunities for teaching and learning.

Addressing and incorporating diversity into our classrooms begins with conceiving classes and instructional units in ways that reflect a fuller range of human communication practices than have traditionally been present. For example, when teaching public speaking, we can recognize call and response and wave patterns of speaking; when teaching about social movements, we can feature African American women’s behind-the-scenes, collaborative work for Civil Rights alongside the public oratory of leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr.

Incorporating diversity into the classroom also requires careful selection of textbooks and readings. Today, there are a number of textbooks that are inclusive of the range of humans. By ‘inclusive,’ I mean not only the written text (use of examples of many different kinds of people and their linguistic practices, non-generic language), but also

the artwork: Photos should reflect the range of people who make up our world. Additional readings, if assigned, should also be selected to give insight into a variety of communication cultures and perspectives.”

Julia Wood, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill
2006 Donald H. Ecroyd Award for Outstanding Teaching in Higher Education

“I happen to teach at a very diverse institution and it is one of the things I truly love because I learn so much from my students about their own cultural, ethnic, racial and religious backgrounds. On any given issue that we address in class, it is this diversity of backgrounds that enhances the class discussion and demonstrates to all students that not everyone shares the same perspective on an issue and that everyone’s values must be respected.”

Sara Chudnovsky Weintraub, Regis College
2014 ECA Donald H. Ecroyd & Caroline Drummond Ecroyd Teaching Excellence Award

“I don’t. My classroom is all about the subject. I do what I need to do to help each student master the course material. If that is attending to diversity, then that’s what I do.”

Joe Ayres, Washington State University
2005 Wallace A. Bacon Lifetime Teaching Excellence Award

“I created an exercise that I used in my public speaking classes for almost twenty years and which I published in a pedagogical journal. When we talked about choosing inclusive topics, I gave everyone a short ten-question quiz on the Constitution. We then reviewed the answers together. Everyone failed it. That’s when I sprung the surprise on them: They had all just failed a modern-day example of a literacy test used throughout the South to prevent African-Americans from voting. During the debriefing, we talked openly and candidly about their feelings of marginalization, alienation, and exclusion. As a direct result of this experience and our discussion of it, students rarely, if ever, delivered speeches that were purely of interest to the speaker. It really got them to adopt a receiver-oriented, inclusive frame of mind.”

Alfred G. Mueller II, Neumann University
2013 ECA Donald H. Ecroyd & Caroline Drummond Ecroyd Teaching Excellence Award

“The subject matter I teach lends itself to discussions of diversity and difference in the classroom. The study of Political Communication necessitates examination of discourses of critique, dissent, and protest. Similarly, the study of American Speeches invites the exploration of how marginalized groups throughout American history have used rhetorical strategies to expand their spheres of influence. And the study of Rhetorical Criticism is a workshop for investigating how different viewpoints and

perspectives can give us very different interpretations of rhetorical texts. In teaching these classes it is important to create a class climate that encourages students to express differing viewpoints. In class discussions I emphasize the need for all of us to build sound arguments and to critique arguments thoughtfully. This emphasis on critical thinking helps students consider the importance of seeking diverse perspectives and some of the issues related to honoring diversity.”

Ann E. Burnette, Texas State University
2016 SSCA John I. Sisco Excellence in Teaching Award
