



Murdoch
UNIVERSITY

Culturally inclusive **classrooms**

Murdoch University is committed to creating a work and study environment that values the rich diversity of its staff and students. We know that learning is shaped by who we are and influenced by a range of factors including previous educational experience, life experiences, access, stability (financial, residential), support (family, peers), approaches and strategies to learning, confidence with learning, maturity and values.

To create an environment where diversity is genuinely valued, equity needs to be embedded into the core business of each working area within the University, and requires mutual respect, effective relationships, clear communication, explicit understandings about expectations and critical self-reflection.

A culturally inclusive university means that:

- Individual students can participate fully in classes, aim to study better, aim to achieve better academic results, experience less stress and have enhanced career prospects.
- All staff can interact more fully with other staff and students, and can extend and develop their own cultural awareness.
- The university as an organisation benefits from culturally diverse staff and students through exposure to alternate perspectives and experiences.

In an inclusive environment, people from all backgrounds can:



FREELY EXPRESS

who they are, their own opinions and points of view



FULLY PARTICIPATE

in teaching, learning, work and social activities



FEEL SAFE

from abuse, harassment or unfair criticism

Strategies and tips for designing a culturally inclusive teaching and learning environment

This requires a focus on culturally inclusive practices to facilitate:

- Effective and inclusive communication between students and staff
- A student-friendly university environment
- Inclusive responses to student expectations

Treat diversity positively

1. Use the learning opportunities inherent in multicultural student backgrounds.
2. Encourage students to relate their learning to their personal experiences and perspectives and use their backgrounds as a learning tool.
3. Avoid generalising behaviour (such as expecting particular behaviour from an individual because that person comes from a certain cultural group) or having stereotypical expectations of people (positive or negative), e.g. assuming that students from a particular background would all have a particular learning style or approach to learning.
4. Expect an individual student to speak for their personal experience as an individual and not as a representative of their culture.
5. Plan opportunities for all students to contribute input related to their own personal experience and culture (but avoid making any student a cultural representative).

Be approachable

1. At the first lecture, set up an introduction system so that all students can get to know something about you, their class peers and the diversity of experience in the class.
2. Use Blackboard to talk about your approach to teaching and learning. Include some information about your own cultural origin and any cross-cultural teaching/ learning experience you may have had.
3. Reduce the barriers between you and your students to develop rapport and provide opportunities for students to introduce themselves to you and other students.

Be mindful of language and communications

1. Speak clearly and not too fast, as students may find it difficult to understand your accent, word usage, and meaning. Brief pauses may help students to understand what you are saying. Signal clearly when you are introducing a new topic.
2. Use a respectful tone of verbal and non-verbal communication. Be aware that there may be an unconscious inclination to 'talk down' or to talk simplistically to individuals from non-English speaking backgrounds.
3. Avoid or explain slang, jargon, idioms and colloquialisms.
4. Be careful with or avoid culturally specific humour and irony; and do not use sarcasm.
5. Explain discipline, college, school or university-specific concepts and terminology.
6. Introduce technical terms that are vital to learning early in a course.
7. Do not pretend to understand when others are speaking, say that you don't and ask the speaker to repeat what they said.

Be proactive and flexible

1. Be aware of the support services that are available at Murdoch and how they may be accessed.
2. Anticipate and plan for a broad range of students at course design stage.
3. Use a variety of international case studies, profiles, guest speakers, videos etc. into the curriculum.
4. Incorporate a variety of assessment tasks; individual assignments and group work, online and/or in-class participation, exams etc, to help create a more inclusive learning environment.
5. Design assessment tasks so that they avoid advantaging specific groups, for example, relating questions to something where local knowledge or skills particular to a local culture is required.
6. Try to accommodate different communication preferences. Some like to discuss and debate, others have difficulty speaking in front of others and may prefer written communication.
7. Take responsibility for familiarising yourself with diverse cultures. Do not expect people from other backgrounds to always educate you about their culture, history or to explain racism or sexism to you.
8. Where it is reasonable and practicable to do so, include flexible study and assessment arrangements to accommodate students whose religion requires them to pray at certain times of the day or to attend other religious ceremonies at particular times of the year.

9. Understand and respect the importance and significance of the main religious holidays to students when determining examination dates, assessment dates, field trips and arranging placements.

Establish clear expectations in the classroom

1. Outline behavioural and language expectations and the University policy on equal opportunity.
2. Establish ground rules for group discussions and actively discourage student language or behaviour that is ethnocentric, racist or discriminatory; do not let damaging statements pass without comment.
3. Require students to cite the quality of the evidence on which claims are made, whether from theory and/or research or from experience, media, family folklore.
4. Explain and clarify academic expectations and standards regarding written work.
5. Check that your students understand the Australian university context and what is expected of them.
6. Clarify the format and purpose of the particular session type you are teaching and the type of student participation expected.
7. Explain the written topic outlines, objectives and outcomes that are provided to students, checking that everyone understands.
8. Teach appropriate citing, referencing and how to avoid plagiarism in papers. Provide relevant information and resource sessions if necessary.
9. Make your marking scheme quite clear. Let students know if the emphasis is on communicating information and ideas or on language accuracy. Sometimes students can be anxious about being penalised for poor English expression.

Establish appropriate modes of address

1. If you interact one on one with students, ask what form of address and pronoun they prefer.
2. Make an effort to pronounce the names of students correctly.
3. Use inclusive language that doesn't assume Western name forms: 'family' name, not 'last' name; 'preferred' name, not 'Christian' name.
4. Students from more formal educational cultures, where status differences related to age or educational qualifications are important, might be uncomfortable in addressing teaching staff by their given names. A compromise can be for students to use your title and given name, e.g. 'Professor Frankie', 'Dr Helen'.
5. If in doubt, ask.

For more information about culturally inclusive classrooms, visit murdoch.edu.au or email access@murdoch.edu.au