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For Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion



Fostering Inclusion and Equity in Remote Teaching

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Teaching that prioritizes inclusion and equity is an essential task for instructors. However, teaching remotely due to the Covid-19 pandemic presents unique questions that faculty should address to support their students' emotional and cognitive well-being. Below, I present six tips to promote an inclusive and equitable remote learning space for this moment.

Acknowledge your own and students' emotions

Given the current moment, many students are experiencing stress and trauma. A trauma-informed pedagogy asks instructors to acknowledge and reflect on their own emotions as they prepare to enter this new learning space. Similarly, provide a space for students to process their own emotions as well. This can be done through individual reflection prompts, asynchronous discussion boards, or a guided discussion in a synchronous space.

Consider if you can give students agency in the course

Since we know students may be experiencing additional burdens and stress, consider ways that you may be able to provide students flexibility in the remainder of the course. A first step is to allow students to help shape the learning environment, including considerations for engagement and their expectations for themselves and others in the course. Additionally, it

may be beneficial to give students choice in the types of assignments or tasks remaining in the course. Giving students some agency will allow them to feel some sense of control in a time of great uncertainty.

Understand students' unequal access to technology in determining how to run your course

A recent post from PhysPort, a blog about teaching in physics provides considerations for what faculty should consider when thinking about students ability to access the course:

Recognize that not all your students will be able to attend synchronous online classes due to internet access, connectivity, scheduling, health, and family situations. Some platforms allow participants to call in via phone, which allow them to hear and participate in audio conversations, but not see slides, screenshare, or video. Find ways for students who can't connect in real time to still participate (e.g. by making recordings available after class), or consider not running synchronous classes at all: asynchronous learning can be much more equitable for students with different levels of access, health and privilege. These are also good things to keep in mind when you are teaching in-person classes.

Consider available grading options

This may be difficult for some faculty in professional schools and in some undergraduate programs, but I encourage instructors to be open to new ideas for grading. For example, some have suggested that you tell students that they cannot receive a grade lower than what they currently have in the class. Such an approach will help deescalate student stress levels and acknowledge that not all students will have equal opportunities or access to complete the rest of the work for the course.

Ensure your materials and technology are accessible

As you integrate new ways to engage students and access materials for your course, ensure that these new platforms and methods are accessible. You should consider how students who use assistive technologies can engage the course as well as best ways to students with accommodations.

Do what you can to promote your own self-care

We recognize that this is a difficult time for you as instructors as well. For some, this new reality may mean balancing professional and personal responsibilities in unique ways. For others, this can heighten feelings of loneliness and isolation. Regardless, of your situation, it is important to do what you need to do to take care of yourself. It is though caring for our own well-being that we can best support our students.

These six steps are only a beginning for how to foster inclusion and equity in your remote course. I recognize that this moment presents many challenges. I also recognize that others

may have ideas to promote an inclusive and equitable course environment. If you have additional ideas, feel free to leave them in the comments for others to read.

Additional Resources

“As Human as Possible” by Colleen Flaherty, Inside Higher Ed

“Hope Matters” by Mays Imad, Inside Higher Ed

“Inclusion, Equity, and Access While Teaching Remotely” from Rice University Center for Teaching Excellence

“Maintaining Equity and Inclusion in Virtual Learning Environments” from San Diego State University

“Please Do a Bad Job of Putting Your Courses Online” by Rebecca Barrett-Fox

<https://wabash.center/2020/06/fostering-inclusion-and-equity-in-remote-teaching/>