Reflecting on Your Practice:
Applying Equity-Focused Teaching Principles

Equity-focused teaching is:
- A corrective tool that allows instructors to acknowledge and disrupt historical and contemporary patterns of educational disenfranchisement that often negatively impact marginalized and minoritized students.
- An intentional focus on systemic inequities. Systemic inequities shape all students' individual and group-based experiences of social identity and produce vastly different relationships of power in and outside of the classroom, which impact students' learning and success.
- An ongoing commitment and practice that should develop across the life of a teaching career. This commitment is always in the service of achieving just experiences and outcomes for both students and teachers alike.
- The corrective work of equity-focused teaching involves deliberately cultivating a learning environment where:
  - Students have equal access to learning
  - Students feel valued and supported in their learning
  - Students experience parity in achieving positive course outcomes
  - Students share responsibility with instructors for the equitable engagement and treatment of all in the learning community.
    - *CRLT's definition of equity-focused teaching, synthesized from scholarship on teaching and learning and many conversations with U-M instructors*

This resource provides a framework of five interconnected research-based principles that can guide instructional choices across all domains of teaching (including content selection and delivery, interactions among students and between students and instructor, and assessment) in order to support the sort of inclusive environment described above. These inclusive teaching principles are relevant to any discipline or teaching setting:

- **Purposeful Engagement of Difference**: Acknowledging students' different identities, experiences, strengths, and needs; leveraging student diversity as an asset for learning.
- **Academic Belonging**: Cultivating students' sense of connection to the discipline and scholarly/professional communities.
- **Transparency**: Clearly communicating about norms, expectations, and evaluation criteria.
- **Structured Interactions**: Providing or eliciting goals, protocols, and processes that support equitable access and contributions to interactive elements of the learning environment – and disrupt patterns that reinforce or reflect system inequities.
- **Flexibility:** Responding and adapting to students' changing and diverse circumstances; engaging empathetically with student needs, both emerging and persistent; balancing intentional design and commitment to providing accommodations.

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This resource is not intended as a check-list for ensuring your teaching is equitable, accessible, and inclusive. Rather, it is designed to help individual instructors reflect upon a range of inclusive teaching practices in order to reinforce those practices you already use—as well as to identify new ones you might explore and adopt.

Here is a suggested way to engage with these lists: Reflecting upon your teaching practice, do you or would you use any of the following strategies?

> ✓ = I **regularly** use this or a similar strategy in my teaching
> ~ = I **sometimes** use this in my teaching
> X = I **do not or would not** use this in my teaching / this is not applicable in my setting
> ☆ = I **would like to try** this, though I may need more information or resources

We hope this reflection provides a useful basis for further exploration of inclusive teaching practice, through conversation with colleagues, consultation with CRLT, or reading in relevant scholarship.

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PURPOSEFUL ENGAGEMENT OF DIFFERENCE: Acknowledging students' different identities, experiences, strengths, and needs; leveraging student diversity as an asset for learning.

Examples of practices that align with this principle include:

___ 1. Normalize the fact that students will have a range of background preparation, and find ways of highlighting those differences as assets for learning (e.g. learners who are new to material can often pose useful critical questions that help those familiar with the material identify gaps in their understanding or think about the material in new ways).

___ 2. Reflect upon and share the ways your own identities shape your relationship to your work/the discipline.

___ 3. Draw examples you use to illustrate course concepts from a range of social or cultural domains. Or invite students to identify examples from their own arenas of knowledge or expertise. Or, provide opportunities for students to consider the relevance of course concepts to concerns of communities that they are part of.

___ 4. Use a background questionnaire early in the term to learn about individual students' past academic experiences, goals, concerns, or other information that could help you plan relevant and inclusive learning opportunities.

___ 5. Deliberately choose course materials and activities with a range of student circumstances in mind (e.g., physical abilities and disabilities, financial and technological resources, time commitments such as work or family care obligations).

___ 6. Proactively invite requests for accommodations as a chance to include everyone more fully in learning (through a non-stigmatizing syllabus statement, a reminder in class, an email).

___ 7. Communicate concern for students' well-being, and share information about relevant campus resources to support students with a broad range of experiences and identities.

___ 8. Ask students to make observations about content (e.g. simply describe a figure, graph, diagram or process) before moving to analytical questions. This can provide everyone a common starting point, highlight students' different perspectives/approaches, and model analytical processes you want to teach.

___ 9. Present course material in a variety of modalities (readings, diagrams, lectures, podcasts) rather than relying on one mode of engagement.

___ 10. Accompany verbal instructions with a written corollary. (Multiple modes can be helpful to students with processing disabilities as well as multilingual learners.)

___ 11. Acknowledge the ways that campus or world events may be creating barriers to students' capacity to engage in coursework, or their sense of being welcomed and valued; acknowledge the differential impacts developments may have on different students.

___ 12. Create opportunities for students to explain their different approaches to the work of the course (solving problems, choosing paper topics, studying for exams, etc.)

___ 13. Design and explain class activities in ways that acknowledge and welcome a range of student bodies and physical abilities.

What other strategies do you use to acknowledge or affirm students' different identities, strengths, or needs in your courses? What else could you do?

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ACADEMIC BELONGING: Cultivating students' sense of connection to the discipline and scholarly/professional communities.

Examples of practices that align with this principle include:

____1. Communicate high expectations and your belief that all students can succeed.
____2. Cultivate growth mindsets: Allow for productive trial and error (e.g. through low-stakes practice quizzes, modeling, or discussion of interestingly productive wrong answers). Emphasize that risk, struggle, and failure can be important parts of any learning process and/or the scientific method.
____3. Assess students' prior knowledge about your field and topics so you can accurately align instruction with their strengths and needs.
____4. As a way of validating the range of backgrounds students bring, help students connect their prior knowledge or skills to new learning. (e.g., when introducing a new topic, ask students to reflect on what they already know about the topic, or invite them to identify relevant skills they bring from different domains)
____5. Learn and use students' names and pronouns, and encourage them to learn and use one another's, accurately pronounced and spelled. Be aware that what students choose to be called may differ from the name that appears on your class roster.
____6. Highlight the diversity of contributors to your discipline (through the authors you assign, the research you highlight, the guests you invite to meet with your students, etc.), and/or sponsor discussion about the reasons for a history of limited access to the field and current efforts to change it.
____7. When inviting outside critics or speakers, seek to identify professionals who bring a range of backgrounds, including identities that are different from yours.
____8. Prepare outside visitors to contribute to the inclusive environment in your classroom (by making sure they are aware of accessibility needs, sharing norms you've established for inclusive discussions, etc).
____9. Encourage or require students to visit office hours early in the term, and use that time to learn about their interests and experiences with course material.
____10. Deliberately avoid generalizations that may exclude students who are already feeling marginalized on campus; these are often communicated through phrases (e.g. "when you go home for Thanksgiving," "just walk over to my office.") that make implicit assumptions about students' physical ability, family structure, social identities, citizenship status, or economic means.
____11. Carefully choose examples for illustrating course concepts to be meaningful to students with a range of backgrounds, and acknowledge that not all students share the same cultural references. (This would include making clear that you're citing a movie, comic book, band name, etc. so students can learn more if they're not familiar with the reference.)
____12. Create intentional opportunities for students to provide feedback on their experience of the learning environment and share ideas for improving it. This could include short anonymous polls, check-ins at the beginning of a class meeting, or more substantial written feedback opportunities.
____13. Build rapport in your classroom: e.g., encourage students to introduce themselves and use one another's names, encourage getting to know people in the class as multi-faceted individuals, etc.

What other ways do you help facilitate students' sense of belonging in your class, discipline, or professional field? What else could you do?

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TRANSPARENCY: Clearly communicating about norms, expectations, and evaluation criteria.

Examples of practices that align with this principle include:

___1. Explicitly communicate the purpose, task, and assessment criteria for graded assignments. Also identify any assumed capacities, abilities, skills, or prior knowledge embedded in your assignments or course learning activities, and connect students to resources that help them bolster those skills if necessary.

___2. Explain the learning objectives of the activities you use class time for (e.g. solving problems, providing feedback on a peer's work, working independently on projects).

___3. In course materials, meetings, and communications, express your commitment to creating an accessible, inclusive course, and invite student feedback about practices that do and don't facilitate that goal.

___4. Let students know how you'd like them to address you.

___5. Share guidance on how students should communicate with you (or others on your instructional team). This might include identifying which kinds of questions/topics are best to raise in office hours vs. over email vs. during class. Consider offering multiple options in order to maintain both transparency and flexibility.

___6. In discussion-based courses, communicate your sense of the instructor's and students' respective roles in shaping and guiding class discussions. (What are students' responsibilities, what are yours? When and why might these shift?)

___7. For writing assignments, explain your expectations around the relative importance of students' ideas/analysis and their sharing of information or ideas/words published by others. (This can be especially important if you have students who have previously learned in educational systems where deference for expertise is prioritized over original thought.)

___8. Offer guidance on how students might prioritize various course tasks or requirements and allocate their time strategically.

___9. Create dedicated opportunities (time during class, dedicated office hours, online forms, etc.) for students to ask questions about assignments and expectations.

___10. Invite students to share information about their own expectations about the learning environment based on their prior experiences to help you understand where your expectations may be mismatched and what you might need to explain.

___11. Explain the meaning and purpose of office hours when encouraging students to attend.

What other ways do you seek to be transparent about norms and expectations? What are additional areas where you could be more explicit about your expectations or assessment process or criteria?

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STRUCTURED INTERACTIONS: Providing or eliciting goals, protocols, and processes that support equitable access and contributions to interactive elements of the learning environment – and disrupt patterns that reinforce or reflect system inequities.

Examples of practices that align with this principle include:

_____1. Develop discussion guidelines or community agreements about class, lab, or team interactions.

_____2. Reflect upon those guidelines with students at strategic points throughout the term.

_____3. In facilitated discussions or Q&A sessions, use strategies for including a range of voices. (e.g. take a queue, ask to hear from those who have not spoken, wait until several hands are raised to call on anyone, or use paired or small group conversations to seed larger discussion.)

_____4. Give all students time to gather their thoughts in writing before discussing with the whole group.

_____5. Task students to work in pairs or small groups on brief, well-defined activities (with a timeline and specific goals/outcomes).

_____6. When possible, assign student groups/teams or provide criteria for student-formed groups/teams that both help leverage diversity and avoid isolating students from underrepresented identities.

_____7. In presentations of group work, guide students to share speaking responsibilities equitably or provide guidance for choosing a spokesperson.

_____8. At the beginning of group or team projects, create time and a process for students to discuss their respective strengths, personal learning goals, anticipated contributions, etc.

_____9. During long-term group or team projects, provide a process for students to reflect upon the team work/dynamics and provide constructive feedback to one another while the project is still underway.

_____10. Give students regular opportunities to reflect upon ways their learning has been enhanced by interaction with classmates. This could be as simple as asking them to reflect on their learning at the end of a session with the question, "What did you learn from someone else today?"

_____11. Establish processes for ensuring you're giving equitable time and attention to each student/group in lab settings.

What other strategies do you use to structure equitable and inclusive interactions among and with your students? What else might you do?

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FLEXIBILITY: Responding and adapting to students' changing and diverse circumstances; engaging empathetically with student needs, both emerging and persistent; balancing intentional design and commitment to providing accommodations.

Examples of practices that align with this principle include:

___1. Clearly articulate core course learning objectives so you can make deliberate decisions about what elements in the course can be revised, adapted, or made optional in response to individual and/or collective student needs.

___2. Design course policies that provide clear pathways if students need to be absent, turn in work late, leave class early, etc. Explain how these are designed to support student learning when unforeseen circumstances arise; avoid framing such policies as simply punitive.

___3. Build in opportunities for student choice: e.g., flexible or self-paced deadlines for assignments if possible, multiple options for topics or modalities for assignments, optional opportunities for instructor or peer feedback on drafts.

___4. Solicit feedback from students about what teaching approaches or technologies work best for their learning and be willing to make adjustments accordingly when you can.

___5. When content coverage is in tension with responding to student learning needs, prioritize student learning needs: e.g., be willing to adjust lecture pace, reduce information on slides, make course materials available to students for study and exam preparation, etc.

___6. Before introducing a new technology in your course, learn about students' prior skill and familiarity with it in order to gauge how demanding learning the technology is likely to be and to make informed decisions about students' capacity to add that learning to the core learning in your course.

___7. Design your course with both synchronous and asynchronous options for participation. (Flexible design choices can help you adapt to changing conditions across the university and meet student needs as they arise.)

___8. Regularly assess student understanding of key course concepts so you can provide relevant instruction or access to supplementary materials to fill common gaps.

What other ways do you build flexibility into your courses to support and respond to students' range of needs and circumstances? What else could you do?