

Diversity and Inclusive Teaching: “What would you do?”

Case Study One:

Professor Courtney sometimes invites students to the board to solve problems before the class. She believes students learn more from solving problems themselves with her guidance than from passively watching her complete the process. But the same students – all white men and one black woman -- always volunteer. She knows, from the homework assignments, that there are other women, as well as a few international students, who are also doing well and who should feel confident solving before the others. But if they don't want to participate, that is their choice. She also notices that some of the international students don't make eye contact and it bothers her that they are so disengaged in the class. Why force them to contribute if they aren't really there?

Case Study Two:

Professor Forter allocates 20% of the class grade for class participation. She believes the discussion is one of the most important parts of the class and that students must be encouraged to participate fully and be rewarded for the intellectual work they do. This semester, she has a student with a pronounced stutter and another who is struggling to speak English as a second language. While she tends to call on people who are not speaking up, or make encouraging comments “let's hear from someone we haven't heard from yet today,” she has avoided putting these students on the spot. The students are not participating and seem increasingly alienated from the rest of the class. And then there is the problem of grading.

Case Study Three:

The class is discussing a novel in which a Native American teenager is sexually abused by her stepfather. One white student says it's an important thing to depict, because "we all know that male dominance and violence against women is more widespread and damaging in minority communities than white communities." She argues that the novel courageously represents a cultural difference that needs to be brought to light. A few students look uncomfortable, and someone changes the subject entirely. An African American student speaks up, "Excuse me for interrupting, but that was messed up. At first it sounded like a feminist comment, but it's really a racist comment." The students look to the professor. What should s/he do?

Case Study Four:

Professor Dawes does not give grades on the first, low stakes assignments of the semester because he wants his students to focus on the learning, not the grade. He asks his TAs to give feedback, but no letter grades, in the initial weeks. He also invites students to come to office hours for feedback, but they never do. He wishes they would as that way he might learn some of their names. When students do get their first grade, days before the last day to drop classes, there is often an exodus. It is one of Temple's most challenging classes, and in the past, Professor Dawes has resigned himself to the idea that not every student is cut out for this class. But this time he notes that most of the departed are women and students of color. The department has been talking about lack of retention for women and students of color and he wonders if there is anything he might do differently.