

Inclusive Education: A Short Guide for RISD Faculty

INTRODUCTION

Last spring at RISD, the [Room of Silence](#) documentary and the [Not Your Token](#) protests made it painfully clear that cultural uniformity, bias, and discrimination are present and felt in our studios and classrooms. In response, President Somerson established the Social Equity Action (SEA) working group and charged everyone on campus with consciously improving this aspect of RISD's culture. She wrote, "To advance our community, to transform and grow, we must place diversity, inclusion, and equity at the center of what we do."

How does this work fit into our role as faculty? We believe that creating diverse, inclusive, and equitable teaching environments is a professional and ethical responsibility. In order to adequately prepare our students to "make lasting contributions to a global society through critical thinking, scholarship and innovation," we must foster an environment that is committed to these goals on every level: curricular, pedagogical, social, and professional. In planning curriculum, we ought to strive to deepen students' understanding of diverse cultural histories and the political and cultural dynamics that shape hierarchies and notions of difference. In crafting our pedagogy, we ought to be attentive to students' diverse perspectives and learning styles and recognize that feeling represented, included, and heard is essential to learning. In preparing students to live ethical social and professional lives, we ought to provide opportunities for meaningful, conscientious engagement with our immediate communities and the world at large and cultivate a spirit of shared humanity that is in all of our lifelong mutual interest.

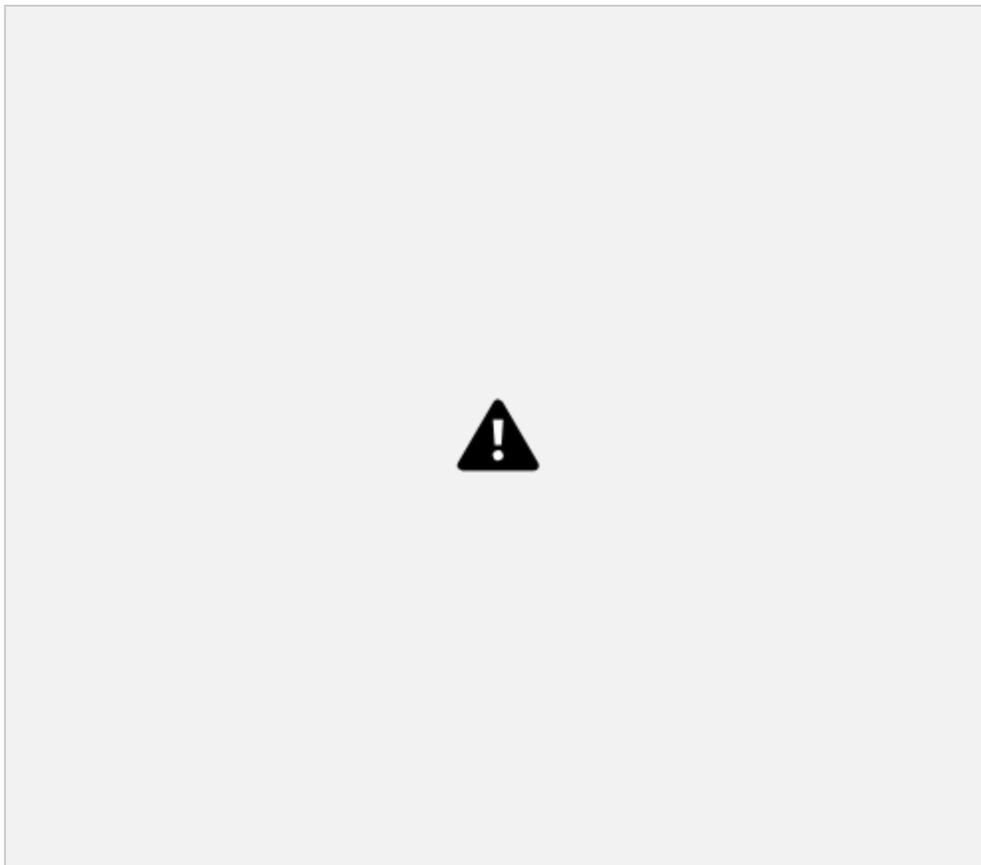
Having constant contact with students means we can initiate, facilitate, and encourage ongoing conversation and growth. It is therefore our responsibility to model open, productive discussion and unbiased thinking. This is an exciting and weighty—perhaps even intimidating—call to action. Given the complexity of the current political and cultural moment, as well as the rapidly expanding boundaries of many disciplines, classroom discussions can become confusing and uncomfortable. We don't all have experience managing difficult dialogues, but we all have the responsibility to learn. To better support such efforts, SEA presents this short guide to inclusive teaching, with a focus on facilitating respectful, constructive, and rigorous dialogues in our studios and classrooms.

This guide is not meant to be comprehensive or absolute, but rather a starting point for discussion, action, and advocacy. We welcome feedback and additions. Further resources and training will follow.

CONTEXT

In her 1970 novel *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison writes that romantic love and physical beauty are "probably the most destructive ideas in the history of human thought." In one short sentence

she identifies two of the central, most revered and universalized themes of Western art and literature and, over the course of the novel, exposes their calamitous racial and gendered histories and effects. The foundation of an inclusive classroom is an understanding and articulation of the way similarly institutionalized, normalized, and naturalized ideas—what constitutes legitimate and/or normative knowledge, beauty, value, humor, experience, identity—is shaped by particular configurations and contexts of power. In other words, we ought to grapple with the following questions: What are we teaching and why? What values or vision of the world does our course material support and normalize? Whose experience is represented/universalized and/or left out/marginalized? Are we making our students aware of the power dynamics that shape the production, canonization, and reception of our material? How does the way we teach replicate social hierarchies and inequities? Are we adequately defining and contextualizing the evaluative criteria we are using? Are we adequately engaging students' own experience in relation to the material?



A common misconception about inclusive teaching practices is that they incite censorship under the guise of political correctness and result in the dilution of academic rigor. As will be discussed in detail in the rest of this document, this misconception exposes a fundamental misunderstanding of inclusive teaching and its dynamic teaching practices. An inclusive classroom is the opposite of a silent or censored classroom: it encourages a critical examination of the power dynamics that shape cultural production, incorporates culturally relevant material,

and integrates real-world concerns. Admittedly, this process is complicated, unstable, and sometimes overwhelming to both grasp and talk about. Building knowledge about the evolution of identity politics is a necessary first step. Just five to ten years ago in popular and scholarly cultural discourse, it was common to see the prefix “post” attached to a multitude of identities—post-feminist, post-Jewish, post-racial (particularly after the election of President Obama), and so on. In its most productive sense, the prefix “post” indicated a move away from [essentializing](#) and absolute definitions of identity (the notion that you are completely defined by your race or sex, for example); at its most problematic, it was understood to imply that as a society we had transcended the structural hierarchies and inequalities that inform and shape these notions of identity (see, for example, this discussion of a [post-racial](#) U.S.) and that we ought to practice [colorblindness](#). Also not long ago, social justice literature divided identities into the “Big 8”—ability (mental or physical), age, ethnicity, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status. Today, we recognize that many other factors play into identity, too—from educational background to home language to learning style.

The legacy of these debates is that when we discuss identity today, in the classroom and beyond, we have to grapple with its complexity, fluidity, [performativity](#), and [intersectionality](#), in short, the ways in which various structures of identity overlap and inform each other (for a more detailed discussion see Kimberle Crenshaw’s seminal essay “[Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex](#)”). We also cannot fail to recognize the constitutive role of structural inequity in our classrooms and society at large, the “normalization and legitimization of an array of dynamics—historical, cultural, institutional, and interpersonal—that routinely advantage some members of the population while producing cumulative and chronic adverse outcomes for others” (see, for example, Patricia Rose’s discussion of [structural racism](#) and Kwame Ture’s elegant [definition](#)).

IDENTITY FLUENCY

Conversations about the politics of identity are often restricted by the feeling that one lacks expertise and does not know current or preferred terminology, and therefore may give offense. Developing identity fluency—a sense of the language of identity and the issues at stake in its evolution—is an important step in building healthy dialogues and diverse pedagogy. At the same time, we must give ourselves permission to make mistakes, and to turn those mistakes into teachable moments. Keep in mind that many of the terms preferred by representative groups (black vs. African American, for example) are constantly evolving and vary by individual, cultural moment, and social context. An unintentional misuse, or outdated use, of terminology might be followed by a simple apology and an invitation to further dialogue—“I’m sorry, that was inappropriate. What is the preferred term and why?” or perhaps, “Let’s talk about the issues around these forms of naming, then let me try again.” An open, instruction-focused discussion like this can help defuse simmering tensions and reframe the issues as systemic—not personal—issues of identity and representation.

SEA provides the following statements regarding three fundamental terms around identity—diversity, inclusion, and equity—to establish a common ground.

Diversity: We are committed to a learning environment that respectfully engages both the individual and sociocultural differences that comprise the complexity of our current social and historical context: race, ethnicity, socio-economic standing, gender, sexuality, belief systems, disability. Central to this commitment to diversity is an understanding of the complex histories, expressions, and needs of different identities and communities, as well as their *intersectionality* (the way in which oppressive systems—racism, sexism, homophobia, classism, xenophobia, ableism—shape and inform each other), so that we are attuned to the multidimensionality of the ways in which marginalization and social inequality are expressed.

Inclusion: As a community we are committed to an active, intentional, and ongoing engagement with diversity so that all our community members feel recognized, heard, and able to participate. We recognize that forms of inclusion must be practiced and supported throughout the institution both inside and outside the classroom, in our curricular and co-curricular environments and opportunities, and in the range of engagements and professional opportunities we offer in the world beyond RISD. We also emphasize that this engagement must be rigorous and thoughtful, and practiced in ways that increase content knowledge, critical thinking, and a nuanced understanding of the systemic and institutional forces that shape identity today.

Equity: We recognize that a truly rich and diverse learning environment consists of groups that bring different experiences, viewpoints, and talents to the community, and that therefore we cannot adopt a “one-size-fits-all” approach if we are to ensure that all members are to thrive. In short, different members of our community need different types of support. As a community we must take decisive measures to address the systemic marginalization (historical legacies of oppression based on race and class for example) of certain groups that continues to limit their access to and participation in higher education (“the achievement gap”). We also recognize the need to better address the particular concerns of our growing international student population. In order to provide equal opportunity to all our community members, we must therefore work on identifying and diversifying effective means of support, from pedagogy and evaluation methods that take into account different learning modes, contexts, and skills, to mentoring and financial aid.

Equity is easy to misunderstand—many think it’s synonymous with equality, that it is achieved by providing the same resources for everyone—so we offer the following metaphor: Imagine there’s a shelf of classroom materials, and everyone is given the same stepstool to reach it. Some students may have already been able to reach the shelf, and others might be able to only with the stepstool. But what about the students who still can’t reach? What about those who are afraid of heights and can’t use a stepstool? What about those who are unable to stand at all? The equal resource in this situation is not actually useful for all students, mainly because it assumes only one type and level of need. Equity is about broadening the scope of possibilities

for all students so that each one can utilize their strengths to achieve the same goals. (See below for suggestions on how to foster an equitable studio and classroom.)

At RISD, issues of race and ethnicity, gender, and linguistic affiliation have been especially prominent in campus discussions recently, and so despite there being many identities worthy of deeper exploration and learning, we have for the sake of brevity decided to focus attention on these three. While there is an immense bibliography on any one of these issues, we offer here a few suggestions for further reading, as well as some helpful glossaries that provide both terminology and frames for further discussion.

Race

Although racialized violence and systemic racism have existed throughout American history, the last few years have made race omnipresent in discussions about the state of America today. From the disturbingly long list of unarmed black men, women, and children being killed by police and the Black Lives Matter protest movement it inspired, to a presidential nominee who advocates for building a wall between the US and Mexico and banning all Muslims, one can hardly watch or read the news without encountering the weight of racial tensions in contemporary American culture. Colleges and universities, once considered too progressive to fall prey to traditional forms of racism, are being called to task for the ways institutionalized racism still permeates campus culture and pedagogical practice. Following on the heels of student protest movements from University of Missouri, Yale, and many other schools around the country, RISD's Not Your Token demonstration brought issues of race (and its intersection with other aspects of identity, like class and gender) into the collective RISD conscience.

In order to better understand the ways race plays a role in RISD students' experience, we have compiled the following list of resources:

- [Racialequitytools.org](http://racialequitytools.org) offers hundreds of resources for building racial equity. Their [glossary](#) offers concise definitions of common terms, from "ally" to "implicit bias" to "structural racism."
- For an excellent overview of the evolution and politics of racial stereotyping in the U.S., see Marlon Riggs' documentary "Ethnic Notions" (1986) available for streaming through the RISD library: <http://0-risd.kanopystreaming.com.librarycat.risd.edu/video/ethnic-notions-0?final=1>
- Further reading on the issues of systemic racism and its legacies in the U.S.:
Manning Marable, ["Structural Racism and American Democracy"](#)
Ta-Nehisi Coates, ["The Case for Reparations"](#)
Claudine Rankin, ["Citizen: An American Lyric"](#)

Gender

In 1978, Lois Gould wrote a short story, [X: A Fabulous Child's Story](#), in which she satirizes the difficulty of raising a baby without letting anyone know "its" biological sex. The story was meant

to show the myriad ways society imposes rather ridiculous confines on the basis of being sorted into one of two dichotomous categories, male or female. It highlights the very real implications of social construction of gender, from what to wear to how to play, learn, and talk, who to love, and where to use the restroom. Fast forward to today and it is clear that students are demanding the recognition of identities beyond those two simplistic categories, all the while recognizing the ways those labels and the roles associated with them continue to shape how we are treated and the opportunities we are afforded. The rise of [a new wave of intersectional feminism and trans* activism](#) have awakened a discourse at RISD about what gender is and its function in one's life and work as an artist/designer/thinker/citizen. Many of our students have rejected traditional gender roles, but beyond that, many are now identifying as agender, or non-binary, asking to be referred to not as he or she, but they, ze, or other alternative gender neutral pronoun. In a recent campus survey, 27% of RISD students identified as LGBTQ, suggesting that students do not fit the traditional heteronormative model.

The following resources will familiarize you with terms and concepts related to feminism, trans* and non-binary identities, and queer identities:

- Tolerance.org provides an excellent [glossary of the gender spectrum](#), along with best practices in respecting gender identity in the classroom.
- The Representation Project <http://therepresentationproject.org/> and the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media <http://seejane.org/> explore the ways the media perpetuate gender stereotypes.
- The Everyday Sexism project highlights the insidious ways sexism permeates cultures all around the world <http://everydaysexism.com/>.
- Feministing <http://feministing.com/> takes an intersectional approach to feminism which places the struggles of queer and trans* individuals, as well as people of color as central to feminist activism.
- This [Robot Hugs](#) comic provides a quick and fun primer on how to (and how not to) enquire and respond to preferred gender pronouns (PGPs).
- The LGBT Resource Center at University of Wisconsin Milwaukee created an excellent longer [set of guidelines](#) on PGPs.
- Emory University's "[From Gender Specific to Gender Spectrum](#)" site includes some interesting recent articles and additional information about transgenderism.

Multilingual and Intercultural Identity

In the past decade, RISD's international student population has increased from 17 to 35 percent. Teaching and learning in a community of students and faculty from many cultural and linguistic backgrounds is both a given in our globalized world and a privilege. We all have an opportunity to draw from diverse cultures and languages in our course material, critiques, and conversations, enriching everyone's perspectives and building [intercultural competence](#).

This opportunity also comes with challenges for some of our international and non-native English speaking students, who can face a steep learning curve as they adjust to a new culture, a new language, and, often, different ways of teaching and learning. While there is no question that English-language competency—an ability to understand and communicate effectively, both orally and in writing—is necessary for success in a RISD education, there is considerable debate about what “competency” means, and it is not, once again, a one-size-fits-all criterion. Obviously, language is always evolving and is often enriched by intersection with other languages. Vocal or written accents aren't a problem we need to fix but rather an opportunity to negotiate meaning together and learn from each other, as Ilona Leki, author of *Understanding ESL Writers*, suggests:

Beyond a certain level of proficiency in English writing, it is not the students' texts that need to change; rather it is the native-speaking readers and evaluators (particularly in educational institutions) that need to learn to read more broadly, with a more cosmopolitan, less parochial eye. The infusion of life brought by these ESL students' different perspectives on the world can only benefit a pluralistic society which is courageous enough truly to embrace its definition of itself.

This openness to linguistic complexity includes English dialects as well. Vershawn A. Young draws a connection between the negative judgment of Black English as non-“standard” English and the judgment of races in [his study of code switching](#). He compares the insistence on code switching, which removes certain languages from respected and affluent discourses like academia and business, to separate-but-equal Jim Crow legislation. Drawing this parallel reveals the flaws in logic and ethics the two practices share: How can separate be equal? How can anyone's language — and, with it, their identity—be considered inappropriate, informal, or unintellectual?

This is a jarring assessment of a practice so long promoted in an attempt to accept and integrate others' languages. Young identifies an alternative: “code *meshing*”: conscientious, strategic, and purposeful use of multiple dialects at once. As faculty we can advocate for code meshing by being receptive to such mixing and responsive to how it functions in a text. Here, Young explains the multiple benefits of this strategy:

The ideology behind code meshing holds that people's so-called “nonstandard” dialects are already fully compatible with standard English. . . . While also acknowledging standard principles for communication, [code meshing] encourages speakers and writers to fuse that standard with native speech habits, to color their writing with what they bring

from home. It has the potential to enlarge our national vocabulary, multiply the range of available rhetorical styles, expand our ability to understand linguistic difference and make us in the end multidialectical, as opposed to monodialectical.

Further reading on language and culture:

- The Center for Research on Learning and Teaching at the University of Michigan offers a clear, concise [summary of pedagogical issues and strategies](#) concerning international students in the US classroom.
- This [Inside Higher Ed article](#) goes into more detail about these pedagogical issues and strategies as well as the debate around "grade adjustment" for international students.
- The video documentary *Writing Across Borders* provides context for and students' unique experiences of adapting to American academic rhetoric. See [part 1](#), [part 2](#), and [part 3](#).
- *Across the Seas*, a 45-minute film by Brown-RISD Dual Degree alumni Xiangjun (Shixie) Shi follows two first-year Brown students from mainland China as they adjust to American culture, both academic and popular. See [part 1](#) and [part 2](#).
- An important debate about language and the art world emerged a few years ago with the essay "[International Art English.](#)" which sought to analyze the origins of jargony, verbose art speak. The artist-writer Hito Steyerl responded with "[International Disco Latin](#)" a call to arms for international artists to invent a new language of their own. It might make you think differently about the values of English-language conformity.

A SHORT GUIDE TO INCLUSIVE TEACHING

In the wake of the screening of *The Room of Silence* and the *Not Your Token* demonstration at RISD, many faculty expressed a desire for guidance on how to be more inclusive in their studios and classrooms. It is one thing to want to have meaningful discussions and critiques that don't leave specific groups of students feeling marginalized, but another to know how to go about creating an environment to actually achieve these goals. In creating this guide, we aim to provide suggestions (not prescriptions) to help faculty become more attuned to issues of diversity, inclusion, and equity in their pedagogical practice. We hope that all faculty will read the following and take the opportunity to reflect on their own teaching methodologies—from course planning and selection of content to specific assignments and method of assessment, as well as formal and informal interaction in discussion and critique). The steps provided below are by no means complete or comprehensive, but represent some of the most prominent and tested methods for being more inclusive and equitable. We hope that everyone finds useful ideas that can be incorporated into their own teaching practice.

1. Understand privilege and cultivate allyship.

Inclusive teaching requires active and respectful listening and thoughtful and generous contribution. In order to truly engage with different perspectives and opinions, each of us must work to fully understand our own. We must ask ourselves not only what our values and assumptions are, but also where they come from. The theorist Jonathan Culler defines theory as a “critique of common sense, of concepts taken as natural.” A “theorizing” of our own conception of common sense, of the things we take for granted and assume are common to everyone—our right to walk down a street at night, or drive a car, or to speak out in public—is essential to engaged dialogue. It reveals our own privileges, disadvantages, and biases. Without this kind of self-reflection, we enter conversations with a skewed sense of what is right or wrong, what is fair or unfair, what is personal or universal.

This process of self-reflection can sometimes be difficult and troubling. It’s not always easy to admit the constructedness and limitations of our preconceptions. But this practice is not meant to induce shame or guilt, nor to place blame on ourselves or others. It’s not an effort to identify yourself as “good” or “bad” or any other label; in fact, labels obscure understanding and prevent growth, as Thomas West notes in his essay [“The Racist Other.”](#) West explains how using the term “racist” to identify a certain type of person—usually denying the label for ourselves and placing it on others—only blinds us to the systemic racism and ideological forces that surround and affect us daily. He says that he “agree[s] with bell hooks: that since we live in a racist culture, we are all in a sense racists, and so, we all have to be continually on the lookout for manifestations of racist thinking in ourselves.” The same is true of any -ism, of any potential for bias. We must initially and constantly reflect on our own identities and how they relate to our ideas. We must acknowledge our own biases, rather than hiding from them or denying them. We must understand ourselves better in an effort to understand others better. See [Understandingprejudice.org](#) for multiple activities that allow you to test your unconscious biases and understand their effects within our society.

A good place to start this process is by developing a better understanding of privilege itself. Peggy McIntosh’s [“White Privilege and Male Privilege”](#) describes the experience of discovering her own skin-color privilege and recognizing its effects on her life and interactions. The idea is not that some people are privileged and others not, but that social contexts create norms and structures in which some aspects of our identities may afford us privileges that others do not receive. Thus, a white lesbian woman may face both overt and subtle forms of sexism and homophobia, but receive [the privileges of being white](#). The very idea of privilege is that unless you are attuned to it, it can blind you to the benefits received for being white, male, straight, able bodied, etc. The person who suddenly has to use a wheelchair now sees the world from a completely different vantage point, where once simple routes become unnavigable. Unless faced with the very real barriers to equal status, we do not see our advantages and the way they

can become codified and institutionalized systems. For example, Christians in the United States take for granted that their religious holidays are celebrated throughout the culture and are often recognized by their place of employment, a system which is then imposed upon people of other faiths and non-religious individuals whose traditions and beliefs are often ignored, marginalized, or demonized.

Recognizing systems of privilege allows us to move away from the idea of prejudice and discrimination as being primarily located at an individual level. This does not exempt us from responsibility, however. Indeed, much harm is done by being complicit in cultural systems that consistently disenfranchises specific groups of people, while privileging others. To rectify this, it takes not only recognition and activism by those who have been marginalized, but active participation and allyship of those in positions of privilege to change the cultural systems that perpetuate inequality. In this video of Dr. Omi Osun Joni L. Jones delivering a speech called [Six Rules for Allies](#), she provides guidelines for being an ally to any marginalized identity, particularly within an academic setting. As faculty, our role in shared governance gives us remarkable power to shape not only our own classrooms, but larger institutional structures. Faculty allyship is therefore key to RISD becoming a more equitable institution.

One of the most common things asked of allies is to listen, and clearly the key to becoming more inclusive is to not only expose ourselves to a range of experiences and perspectives, but to help create a platform for diverse voices to be heard. This doesn't mean that we should all agree or that one's personal experience should somehow replace evidence in making an argument. However, cultivating an understanding of where our students are coming from and how that might differ from one's own perspective will ultimately make one a better educator.

Our students have made some important work detailing the complexity of identity and belonging at RISD. Like the *Room of Silence* documentary we linked to above, Qualeasha Wood's video [Prepare Yourself](#) seeks to raise awareness of the marginalization and erasure students experience on our campus. In addition, the Global Initiative (GI) student group has hosted a number of events to raise awareness and allow for discussions on issues of global significance (from race on college campuses to porn culture and its effect), in which students are encouraged to share their perspectives and experiences. Many faculty who have attended these events have reported finding them very eye opening to understanding where students are coming from.

For more grounding in how faculty can not only be aware of injustices in education but take action to transform the practices and structures that perpetuate them, see the following resources on critical pedagogy.

- This [NYU site](#) provides helpful definitions on pedagogical approaches -- most notably critical pedagogy -- that address the "issue of power in teaching and learning" and seek "to provide education that is democratic, emancipatory, and empowering to students."

- [The Critical Pedagogy Reader](#) is a seminal collection that brings together major thinkers in the field and is organized around issues of class, gender, racism, literacy, and social change.
- bell hooks is one of the important figures in the field of critical pedagogy in the U.S. See her 1994 book [Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom](#). The video "[bell hooks: Cultural Criticism and Transformation](#)" is also available at the RISD Library.

2. Design your course so that *all* students have equal membership and voice.

In fall of 2015, just as faculty around the United States were returning to teach, [an article in the Atlantic by Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt](#) proclaimed that appeasing student concerns about widespread experiences of marginalization amounted to coddling, and that student requests for accommodation were an assault on faculty's academic freedom. In response, [Kristin Poling critiqued](#) Lukianoff and Haidt by suggesting that being sensitive to students' needs didn't stifle learning, but allowed for more in depth and reflective dialogue, stating, "it is both appropriate and pedagogically useful for the classroom to be treated as a privileged space, where special protections enable intense and challenging dialogues to occur." Rather than seeing accommodating students' needs as inherently infringing on faculty's purview or somehow lowering the standards of discourse, we argue that being thoughtful about inclusion of students with differing backgrounds and abilities will allow for a richer educational environment for all students and faculty.

Our student population is more diverse than ever. If we could make assumptions about shared backgrounds, identities, values, etc. in the past, we can't now. There's no such thing as a "standard" student, and trying to teach to this non-existent "standard" student often proves frustrating for faculty and students alike. By being attentive to the diverse backgrounds of students, faculty can design their assignments, classroom practices, and assessments to be more accessible for a broad range of students, while maintaining and indeed often enhancing rigorous standards of achievement.

Many of the ways that students feel disadvantaged or marginalized within a classroom come before dialogue or classroom dynamics even emerge; they come from how a course is set up by the instructor. Selecting course materials, preparing the syllabus, and planning the class activities, faculty play an enormous role in setting the tone of the course, including who feels included and who does not.

As highlighted in the previous section, the first and obvious step to being inclusive in the classroom is to consider your own positionality within the classroom space (for a good overview, read [How does your positionality bias your epistemology?](#) by David Takacs). How do your identities shape the way you organize your class, the activities and assignments you create, and how you assess student learning? In many of the examples below, a willingness to be flexible

(in terms of your method of delivery, assessment, assignments, etc.) can go a long way to allowing students to feel welcome and valued in the classroom, and therefore more invested in your class. We do a disservice to students if we ignore the cultures, contexts, histories, and meanings that they bring to the classroom. We must make space, either in the content or mode of teaching, to include these contexts and/or enable contributions from students.

One of the most consistent concerns raised by students from the Not Your Token rally was a lack of consideration by faculty about the cost of required materials for class (course books, art supplies, etc.). Several students told of being turned away from class for not being able to afford their supplies. When planning your course, be attentive to the financial cost of the required materials and consider what lower cost alternatives might be permitted if necessary. This is especially important if the course is required, as students cannot opt for a course with less financial burden. If you find such high-cost materials necessary and without substitute, warn students well in advance.

Another consideration is whether most of the readings you assign or artists/designers you cover hail from a similar background. Are women and people of color and various cultural identities well represented? If not, is it possible to be more inclusive? Perhaps you feel unable to adequately cover material foreign to your area of expertise. Is there a way to invite other RISD faculty, guest critics, or visiting lecturers to speak in your class? You could also have students present material on artists, designers, or scholars that they admire or identify with in order to allow for diverse student backgrounds to be recognized and heard.

How you deliver content and assess student learning can also differentially affect students from various backgrounds and with diverse learning styles and abilities. Clearly, different modes of presentation (oral, visual, experiential) work best for different students, and communicating information in multiple forms is helpful. As a global institution, RISD welcomes students from around the world, with vastly divergent educational and cultural practices. For example, some cultures encourage student discussion and sharing perspectives as a means of demonstrating understanding and attentiveness, whereas others promote deference to faculty and discourage open student discussion.

In recent years, the concept of universal design for classrooms has encouraged educators to be varied and flexible in their pedagogical practice in order to recognize the diverse needs, backgrounds, and abilities of students. Rather than conceptualizing inclusive teaching as the accommodation of particular students (those with learning or physical disabilities, English language learners, etc.), [universal design for learning](#) assumes all students benefit from having greater flexibility in how they demonstrate their mastery of material. Ask yourself: Does participation always necessitate speaking? Could students submit written comments or critiques as a valid form of participation? Could you give them short prompts for pre-writing exercises that they might then use to talk about in class? Might students demonstrate mastery of content, a strong argument, and evidence with an oral presentation or creative project supplemented by some writing?

Just as research suggests that the “because I said so” method of parenting is not the best for creating moral and ethical children, the “because I said so” method of teaching is less than ideal for cultivating active, engaged, and reflective learners. Allow students to choose questions to answer on a quiz or test, or assignments to complete throughout the semester. Allowing students freedom on some aspects of an assignment may yield more engagement in the process. Offering choice allows the students to feel more autonomous and creates a system in which students with different learning styles can be equally successful.

Being flexible and allowing students to be more autonomous is not about pandering to student desire, but reflecting on why we, as faculty, make the choices of assignments and assessments that we do. If we have a good reason for a certain assignment or mode of assessment, we should articulate it upfront, and if possible provide a clear method of how the work will be assessed ([rubrics are helpful](#)). Be sure class expectations are clearly detailed and modeled: What do you mean by participation and discussion? What do we mean by analysis and theory? What are the expectations for your writing assignments? Explore different ways of approaching critique to allow for a more inclusive space. See this Academic Commons Program [report on critique](#) at RISD and Liz Lerman’s [Critical Response Process](#).

When students come to you with specific requests for accommodation, make sure they are registered with the disability services office. Remember that legally recognized accommodations must be followed for students who qualify, including additional time on exams or with assignments and required note takers. Providing written notes or slides from lectures for all students, giving ample notice of assignment due dates, and offering flexibility in what form a project takes can help reduce the stigma that many students face in asking for individual accommodations. Once again, the idea behind universal design is that rather than making students feel individually ostracized for requesting an accommodation, the classroom as a whole becomes accommodating.

Finally, for many years, faculty and administrators alike have joked about RISD’s studio culture, where students sacrifice their whole life (and sleep) with a sense of bravado and grit. Rather than think of this as humorous, or even character building, we need to reflect on the mental and physical toll that overwork and lack of sleep can have on our students. The rate of mental health issues and burden on our counseling services is at an all-time high. In planning courses, what can faculty do to recognize and ameliorate this problem? Would having one less assignment or reading be detrimental to our course objectives? Could the course be front loaded, so there is less due at the end of the semester when students seem most taxed? How might you connect the content of your course to co-curricular programming that enriches students outside the formal classroom environment and offers opportunities for relaxation and socializing? When students seem taxed, stressed, or sleep deprived beyond their ability to keep up with the workload or function, consider reaching out to either the student or counseling services. Here is a guide call [Helping Students in Distress](#) put together by Counseling and Psychological Services.

In sum, faculty have a lot of power to shape the dynamics of the classroom. Please consider how you might incorporate the following best practices for being inclusive and sensitive to students from diverse backgrounds:

- Contemplate the financial burden of materials for your course and provide lower cost alternatives when possible.
- Review your syllabus. Do your readings and content reflect a range of perspectives? If not, acknowledge this and invite discussion or allow students to bring examples.
- Vary your method of delivery for course content (lecture, large or small group discussion, slides, videos, podcasts, classroom activities, field trips, guest lectures) and provide notes/slides when possible.
- Give students multiple options for approaching assignments and meeting requirements (speaking, writing, etc.), allowing for the accommodation of various learning styles and abilities.
- Consider and reconsider the purpose of every reading and assignment, how/what you grade, and provide students a rubric or guidelines for assessment in advance so they can better understand how you will be grading them.
- Be attentive to students who may need extra help and support and reach out, either to the student or to one of the resources listed at the end of this toolkit.

3. Facilitate constructive discussion

RISD is famous for its dynamic critique culture and our small, engaged, discussion-based classes. At times, however, we are failing to create environments in which productive, engaged, and respectful discussion takes place. The major causes include failing to establish clear expectations and parameters and an inability to facilitate discussion among students from diverse cultural and educational backgrounds. In our role as professors, we can establish the necessary climate for inviting all voices into class discussion. The following ideas and resources can help you do so.

Set ground rules.

On the first day, set ground rules for the conversations you'll have. This includes clearly defining both what you mean by conversation and the mechanics and practices of the conversation itself. Rather than dictate these rules, have students participate in creating them to create shared responsibility and engagement. You can even turn the list into a "contract" that holds yourself

and every student accountable. But remember that nothing is carved in stone: if something unexpected happens throughout the semester, take a moment to decide, as a group, on necessary amendments.

Defining the conversation: What do we mean by critique and discussion? What are some of the main critical frameworks and strategies in your discipline? How are you going to model and/or introduce some of these to your students? What is the most effective way of doing so? How might students be included in the process of identifying those frameworks and strategies?

Here are some common sense ground rules that might work as a starting point for facilitating inclusive conversation:

- Do not interrupt. Allow others to finish articulating their thoughts before sharing yours. In turn, if you are speaking, try to keep your remarks succinct and pertinent.
- Acknowledge the space and time your voice occupies.
- Frame interactions within the room with the acknowledgement of social hierarchies (including age, race, gender, sexuality, ability, etc.).
- Ask for preferred names, pronouns, and any other preferences and provide a private way to answer this, too. Individuals determine how they want to be referenced.
- Individuals choose if they want their identity to be part of the conversation. No one is here as a representative of their particular race, class, etc. and no one should be targeted as “authentic voices” or authorities on any issue.
- Assume best intentions.
- Everyone shares responsibility for class discussion, including its time limits.
- Trigger warnings: A trigger warning is a quick warning, much like the announcements during the evening news, that violent and potentially disturbing material will be covered in the class. This small gesture of concern for our students’ mental well-being helps us avoid unintentionally subjecting students to reliving a trauma. Trigger warnings do not imply that we must then change or censor what we are teaching but rather allow affected students to determine whether, where, and how they want to interact with the material. See [here](#) for a more detailed discussion of the benefits of trigger warnings.

More ideas and models for inclusive dialogues:

Mix it Up’s [Reaching Across Boundaries: Talk to Create Change](#) includes a suggestion to point out and explaining things that aren’t helpful to the conversation, speaking up when you’re hurt or offended, and being conscientious about our own defensiveness.

Kathy Obear visited RISD in April, 2016, and provided this packet on [Creating Inclusive Campus Environments](#).

“[Talking Over the Racial Divide](#)” is about a University of Maryland course focused on dialogue about race. In it, the authors share their basic ground rules and goals for the course as a whole.

The instructors prioritized “cultivating trust and patiently sanding away politeness and resistance” in an effort to overcome fear of the uncomfortable.

Respond when you witness microaggressions or more overt offenses.

Consider the timing of these interventions: should the offense be addressed immediately, or do you/students need time to reflect and formulate a response? Should you call this out publicly, or approach the individual(s) personally? Here are some suggestions on how to communicate your response.

Express disagreement:

- “I don’t find that funny, and I would appreciate you not making jokes like that around me anymore.”
- “You’re basing this off of stereotypes, and I personally find that unconvincing and offensive.”
- “I expect more respectful and thoughtful behavior from a fellow member of the RISD community.”

Introduce a different perspective:

- “That image brings up a really painful history because it was used to justify the internment of Japanese-Americans during WW II. Was that intentional, and if so why?”
- “Yes X is beautiful, but what would you say to those who claim that its construction polluted their village. Ought we to take that into account in the discussion of beauty?”
- “Why did you choose to incorporate men’s and women’s restrooms into your design instead of gender-inclusive ones?”

Advocate and ally:

- “We haven’t heard from any of the women in the room yet today. Let’s make some space for everyone’s voice to be heard.”
- “I think you meant Sarah. Remember she asked us to call her by that name at the start of the semester.”
- “There’s nothing more natural about it being a male and female pair. Is there something else you’ve done in this painting to draw from nature?”

Respond openly and honestly when others point out your own missteps.

- “I never thought about that before. I’ll take some time to consider that perspective.”
- “I’m sorry I made that assumption. What would be more appropriate for me to say?”
- “I’m sorry my instinct doesn’t yet align with what I’ve learned.”
- “I’ll practice putting that into action.”

Keep these dialogues going.

- Encourage curiosity and an open mind by creating space for constant questioning and engagement in the classroom.
- Invite other perspectives with a diverse range of material/reading, event planning and collaboration, including student perspectives/voices.
- Insist on critical thought and engagement. Intellectual work in the classroom is not about dismissing, excusing, or ignoring but rather examining where the impulse to do so might come from.

4. Connect with Campus Resources

The following staff, faculty, and offices are here to support us in actively challenging and broadening our perspectives on the world, reassessing the content and structure of our courses, developing inclusive pedagogies, and facilitating our own and others' interaction.

SEA Committee Faculty

The following faculty currently serve as SEA committee members:

Patricia Barbeito
Professor, Literary Arts + Studies
pbarbeit@risd.edu

Paula Gaetano-Adi
Assistant Professor, Experimental + Foundation Studies
pgaetano@risd.edu

Khipra Nichols
Associate Professor, Industrial Design
knichols@risd.edu

Jennifer Prewitt-Freilino
Associate Professor, History, Philosophy + Social Sciences
jprewitt@risd.edu

Lisi Raskin
Associate Professor, Sculpture
eraskin@risd.edu

Tracie Costantino
Dean of Faculty and Associate Provost

Tracie provides mentoring and a range of development/enrichment programs for all RISD faculty.

ProvWash, 409
401-709-8586
tcostant@risd.edu

Office of Intercultural Student Engagement (ISE)

ISE supports an inclusive campus community at RISD by promoting cultural awareness, dialogue, and interaction. Among other services, the office provides leadership in the areas of student success, retention programs, campus education, and immigration compliance and advises students on social, cultural, and personal matters.

ise.risd.edu/ise/

Ewing Multicultural Center
401-277-4957
ise@risd.edu

Barbara Baker, Director of ISE
401 277-4820
bbaker@risd.edu

Emma Montague, Assistant Director of ISE
401 277-4908
emontagu@risd.edu

Title IX Compliance

This office facilitates RISD's compliance with Title IX, a federal law that prohibits discrimination (including harassment and bullying) on the basis of sex as well as sexual assault in schools that receive federal funding, and provides information and resources to students and faculty alike.

Titleix.risd.edu

Sydney Lake, Title IX Coordinator
slake@risd.edu
401 427-6919
Carr House

Elizabeth Rainone, Deputy Title IX Coordinator for Employees
Human Resources Office, Prov Wash 3rd floor
erainone@risd.edu
401-454-6427

Disability Support Services

The office of Disability Support Services helps students who have cognitive (learning), psychological, and physical disabilities succeed at RISD by introducing them to services and accommodations they're entitled to. The coordinator invites faculty to contact her with any questions about accommodations, making your classroom inclusive, accessibility concerns on campus, or referring a student to this office.

<http://info.risd.edu/disability-support-services-dss/#faculty-resources>

Brittany Boyne, Coordinator of Disability Support Services and ADA Compliance Officer

Carr House 311

401 709-8460

bboyne@risd.edu

RISD Writing Center

The Writing Center provides individual tutoring in writing, public speaking, and visual communication for all RISD students. We also work with faculty to help develop assignments and to co-design and deliver in-class workshops. Staff and tutors are conscientious about the ways language is connected to identity. Jim Zvi, Assistant Director of English Language Learning, is available to help faculty support non-native English speakers.

risdwritingcenter.com

College Building, 240

401-454-6486

writing@risd.edu

Jen Liese, Director

jliese@risd.edu

Meredith Barrett, Assistant Director of Writing and Related Literacies

mbarrett01@risd.edu

Jim Zvi, Assistant Director of English Language Learning

jzvi@risd.edu

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)

CAPS provides guides and consultation for faculty to refer students to counseling. Issues of identity, belonging, and relating to others are common topics to discuss with a counselor. CAPS can also recommend off-campus providers.

Thomson House, 63 Angell St.

401-454-6637

<https://risdcounseling.wordpress.com/>

counserv@risd.edu

Shauna Summers, Director CAPS

401 277-4819

ssummers@risd.edu

Joanne Duval, CAPS Assistant
401 454-6637
jduval@risd.edu

Residence Life

Residence Life is dedicated to making RISD a safe, supportive, and empowering environment for students. They provide opportunities for student engagement and leadership, as well as promoting health, cultural competence, and responsibility. Faculty can learn a lot about student life and the student experience outside of the classroom—not only from Res Life staff, but also from the peer Residence Advisors who work closely and build personal relationships with fellow students.

risdhousing.com

South Hall (30 Waterman St.), 1st Floor
401-454-6650
rlo@risd.edu

Joshua Peipock, Associate Director of Residence Life
401 454-6654
jpeipock@risd.edu

Has this guide been helpful? Let us know ...

You can contact the entire SEA Working Group with broader comments, concerns, and questions about the RISD community by emailing sea@risd.edu.