

My exposure to and engagement with techniques of diversity, equity, and inclusion while teaching at Columbia University has taken a number of forms. While I cannot claim to come from an underprivileged background myself (with the exception of occasional economic hardship), I recognize and affirm that it is an essential part of my role as an instructor to ensure total accessibility to course materials, conversations, and my time and presence; to basically and continually respect the chosen and expressed identities of my students; and to provide references and mentoring to all students with a particular attention given to those who are overcoming tremendous adversity in even getting to the point of attending a prestigious collegiate institution, let alone participating in high-level, intellectually challenging seminar classes in history or other disciplines.

Accessibility to myself and my class resources has been important to me throughout my time at Columbia. Multiple rounds of evaluations have affirmed that my students found me to be extremely available on multiple platforms to answer questions or direct them to resources. During the shutdown of Columbia's campus in Spring 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I also expanded my understanding of what accessibility could really mean. I redeveloped assignments and timelines to make sure students were able to complete work by the end of the semester no matter their personal circumstances, and checked in face-to-face (virtually) with every student frequently to assess their well-being and offer support. I also provided asynchronous options to students who were unable to attend classes or were so many time zones away that for them to attend class would have been unduly impractical. I intend to carry forward the lessons of this semester into future years and make sure my future syllabi and courses offer a good deal more flexibility in their options than I had previously offered, and as a reminder to always readjust my expectations of students based on a host of different circumstances.

My initial policies for all classes state that I will not allow incidents of discrimination among students along many different lines, including perceptions of race, gender, sexuality, religion, political outlook, age, dress, or disability status. One of the most painful experiences of my teaching career – which, ironically, was tremendously to my benefit – was to be told by a student who was switching into my seminar section that their previous instructor had made clear they would not acknowledge or respect the student's gender identity. Such behavior is something I would never tolerate myself, and I believe it is an act of basic human decency to respect the identities and self-presentations of all of my students. It was my pleasure to watch this student of color grow and be comfortable in my classroom; to be guided by them when they were kind enough to remind me of forms of address and vocabulary I could use to be more inclusive in our sessions; and to recommend them (successfully) for a prestigious program that would promote advancement for them in a field that traditionally has not been very diverse. Such acts which promote equity of identity and experience are ones which I would, on principle and by conscious effort, extend to every student who comes under my care.

Though opportunities to directly mentor students in their academic work have been rare in my time as a graduate student, I have been honored to continue to be in touch with students who, among other things, have been students of color who are seeking to bring new perspectives to the teaching and learning of STEM topics; and to recommend multiple students of color or of self-identified minority identities for prestigious programs, jobs, and scholarships. All of these approaches to inclusion and equity reinforce and build upon each other, with their final impact being the conscious creation of an instructor and a classroom which seeks to lift up all students, and in which students and instructor trust each other to be compassionate and accommodating as well as academically rigorous. The capacity to learn improves by every metric that I have experience of when such an environment and such respectful relationships are established.