

# Aligning Your Syllabus with a Culture of Caring

---

Dr. De Misty Bellinger-DeIfeld

Dr. Katy Covino

Dr. Kisha Tracy

Dr. Heather Urbanski

Panelists will discuss creating a more inclusive syllabus and an environment of caring. Will offer quick fixes and long-term goals of creating syllabi and, in turn, classrooms that are more diverse, inclusive, and caring. Will present clear practices and takeaways for creating an inclusive syllabus and encourage a caring classroom for our students to learn and grow. Finally, participants will complete a 10-minute activity about syllabus language.

# Inclusive Language

---

# Foundational Premise

- The words we use have great power.
- With great power comes great responsibility.
- Therefore, we have to write and teach responsibly.



# Do No Harm

- These are the “core ideas” underlying out of control “PC culture,” according to David Perry:
  - **“Be kind to others.**
  - **Recognize that words and images have power and try to use better ones that do the least damage.**
  - **Listen to others.**
  - **Listen especially to people who are rarely listened to.”**
  - Perry, David. “The Core of PC: Be Kind.” *ThisMess.net*. 12 Sept. 2017.

# Dynamic Language (CW: Ableist, homophobic, and other offensive slurs)

- What we don't accept anymore
  - Retarded.
  - Trannie.
  - Homo.
  - Cripple/Crip.
  - Gay (as insult).
- What's in process of no longer being acceptable (sample):
  - Crazy.
  - Dumb.
  - Insane.
  - Gypsy and Gyp.
  - No can do.
  - Sold down the river.
  - Long time no see.

# Do No Harm

## Guiding Questions:

- What do we do when we learn a word/phrase has a harmful and/or troubling history?
- How do we avoid perpetuating harmful stereotypes and oppressive structures through our language use?
- How do we react as writers when we learn a word or phrase causes harm?  
When we learn our words are causing harm?

# Now What?

Language is decentralized and dynamic.

- How/where do we participate?
- How/where can we influence its trajectory to compensate for past harms?



# Now What?

How I've chosen to act:

- Read/listen to those whose experiences are different than mine when they are generous enough to share them.
  - Seek out resources such as “GLAAD Media Reference Guide” and QMUNITY: BC’s Queer, Trans, and Two-Spirit Resource Center.
- Change my own writing and speaking to remove harmful phrases.
- Classroom discussions and exercises with my students.

# Now What?

## When greeting others

Avoid:

**ladies gentlemen ma'am sir girls guys** etc.

Consider using instead:

“Thanks, **friends**.  
Have a great  
night.”

“Good morning,  
**folks!**”

“Hi, **everyone!**”

“And for **you?**”

“Can I get  
you **all**  
something?”

**Why?**

Shifting to gender-inclusive language respects and acknowledges the gender identities of all people and removes assumption.

## Be mindful of language

# Now What?

## Rosters & Learning Names

Benefits to not “calling roll” at first class meeting:

1. Doesn't force students who use a different name than their “official” one to publicly disclose.
2. Reduces “otherness” for names I have trouble pronouncing.
3. Helps me learn student names as individuals, rather than group.

# How I do this...

Multi-step process on first day of class:

1. Introduce myself on a slide with my name, pronouns, and some images.
1. Ask students to complete demographic information cards and surveys about their writing experiences.

# This is me...

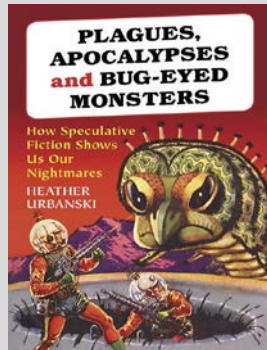
Dr. Heather Urbanski (She/her)

Office: Miller 210

Office Hours:

- Tuesday 2 to 3:15pm & Wednesday 12 to 1:30pm
- Email: [hurbansk@fitchburgstate.edu](mailto:hurbansk@fitchburgstate.edu)

**"NOT A MORNING PERSON"  
DOES NOT EVEN BEGIN  
TO DESCRIBE IT.** © 11/00 © JAMES M. HURBANSKI 3 0471



# Who are you?

Please complete information cards for me:

- Name
- Preferred Name & Pronouns
- Hometown
- Dorm/Commuter?
- Major (if you're undeclared, where are you leaning?)
- Extracurriculars (Sports, Clubs, Work, etc.)
- Anything else I need to know?

# How I do this...

3. Move students into random groups to introduce themselves to each other and review the syllabus. I collect the name cards while they're working.
  - I only ever use the “preferred name” and the pronouns listed on the card.
  - If preferred name is different from the “official” roster, only I and the student know that.
  - If I'm not sure how to pronounce a name, I ask them to do it first and then I repeat.
  - Subtly model for the class how to respectfully learn names of those they've just met.

# Other Course Features

- Include my pronouns in Blackboard Faculty page and email signature.
- Provide pronouns for the authors we read, both on class slides and in the syllabus/course schedule.
- Provide pronouns for student authors when sharing their writing as feature of our class work.
- Asking students to post their pronouns after their names on any Blackboard post available to all (to be added).
- Looking for pronoun button/pin.



# Discussion

Heather and DeMisty have offered suggestions for ways to be more inclusive in the formation of a course syllabus – in terms of language as well as course materials.

Their suggestions are valid, and I applaud and support them.

BUT

I would like to spent just a little bit of time exploring some dynamic tensions that arise when we try to entwine a culture of care into the creation and implementation of course syllabi.

# Discussion

Our exploration will come in the form of an interactive discussion.

Looking back at my own struggles, I have put together some questions to guide our discussion.

Through my question posing, I hope to identify and begin to unpack some fraught issues, concerns, or problems in creating and maintaining a culture of care in the college classroom.

# Discussion - First Issue: Inclusive Language

- How do we use language (which may not be natural or 'normal' for us) in front of our students?
- What happens when we make a mistake?
- What happens when they make a mistake?
- What happens when it's not a mistake?
- How do we negotiate tensions arising from inclusive language?

# Discussion - Second Issue: Inclusive Readings and Course Materials

- How do we identify readings and course materials by underrepresented authors?
- How can we avoid tokenism?
- How do we negotiate tensions arising from our attempts to create a diversified and inclusive syllabus?

# Discussion - Third Issue: Inclusive Classroom Practices

- How do we maintain high expectations while also striving to create a culture of care?
- How do we establish and maintain attendance policies in light of student needs?

# Discussion

- Other issues to be explored?

# Workshop

Think about these questions on your own and jot down some notes. With a partner, share your thoughts and discuss.

- What role does your respect for and engagement with diversity in the classroom play in your personal teaching philosophy?
- What positive learning outcomes can come from respecting difference in the classroom? How can you highlight these?
- What do you want your students to know about your expectations regarding creating and maintaining a classroom space where differences are respected and valued?

## **DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION STATEMENT: Monica Linden, Neuroscience, Brown University**

In an ideal world, science would be objective. However, much of science is subjective and is historically built on a small subset of privileged voices. I acknowledge that the readings for this course, including the course reader and BCP were authored by white men. Furthermore, the course often focuses on historically important neuroscience experiments which were mostly conducted by white men. Recent edits to the course reader were undertaken by both myself and some students who do not identify as white men. However, I acknowledge that it is possible that there may be both overt and covert biases in the material due to the lens with which it was written, even though the material is primarily of a scientific nature. Integrating a diverse set of experiences is important for a more comprehensive understanding of science. Please contact me (in person or electronically) or submit anonymous feedback if you have any suggestions to improve the quality of the course materials.

Furthermore, I would like to create a learning environment for my students that supports a diversity of thoughts, perspectives and experiences, and honors your identities (including race, gender, class, sexuality, religion, ability, etc.) To help accomplish this:

If you have a name and/or set of pronouns that differ from those that appear in your official Brown records, please let me know!

If you feel like your performance in the class is being impacted by your experiences outside of class, please don't hesitate to come and talk with me. I want to be a resource for you. Remember that you can also submit anonymous feedback (which will lead to me making a general announcement to the class, if necessary to address your concerns). If you prefer to speak with someone outside of the course, Dean Bhattacharyya, Associate Dean of the College for Diversity Programs, is an excellent resource.

I (like many people) am still in the process of learning about diverse perspectives and identities. If something was said in class (by anyone) that made you feel uncomfortable, please talk to me about it. (Again, anonymous feedback is always an option).



# Workshop - Drafting a Syllabus Statement

- Draft a syllabus statement on inclusion (this might include your responses to the previous questions).
- Share your syllabus statement with a partner. In looking at your partner's statement, think about these questions in particular:
  - Is the statement inclusive of different types of diversity, including, but not limited to: race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, socioeconomic status, religion, and disability?
  - Does it direct students to campus resources?
  - What classroom environment would it create?