

## Ways to Create an Inclusive Classroom Environment

1. Include a nondiscrimination policy on your syllabi: It is helpful to include on your syllabi either a description of your classroom environment or a copy of a nondiscrimination policy. Including such statements will let students know what kind of behavior/comments are considered inappropriate and will not be tolerated. You can copy UA's nondiscrimination policy (available online at <http://eop.ua.edu/law.html>) and/or you can copy the sample classroom environment policy included on the Preventing and Dealing with Homophobia in the Classroom handout. It is also helpful to invite students to talk to you if any comments made in your classroom cause them to feel uncomfortable; this will allow you to address such comments should they come up again.
2. Be familiar with and comfortable using the common terms that LGBTQ students use to self-identify themselves in terms of sexual orientation and gender identity or expression: LGBTQ students make up a diverse group and use a variety of terms to self-identify themselves. Listen to the way your students self-identify and use the same language they do.
3. Assume that in every class you will have students who self-identify as LGBTQ: In any given class you are likely to have at least one student who self-identifies as LGBTQ, who has a family member who self-identifies as LGBTQ, and/or who has a friend who self-identifies as LGBTQ. If you keep this fact in mind, it will help you remember to avoid using language or examples that are heterosexist or non-inclusive (see 4 and 5 below).
4. Use inclusive language at all times: Using inclusive language means talking in a way that does not specify a gender, sex, or sexual orientation. For example, instead of using terms such as "boyfriend," "girlfriend," "husband," "wife," or "spouse," you can use "partner" or "significant other." Or, instead of using terms such as "mom and dad," you can use "family," which would be inclusive of students who have single parents, stepparents, LGBTQ parents, or any alternate family structure. Also, use "sexual orientation" rather than "sexual preference" or "lifestyle."
5. Use an inclusive curriculum: It is important to use examples and course materials that a wide range of students can relate to. It is just as important to use examples and course materials that expose students to ideas and values that differ from their own. Students will leave college and enter a multicultural working world. It is important to prepare them to respect and work with a diverse range of people and ideas. Whenever possible, select texts and readings whose language is gender-neutral and free of stereotypes, or cite the shortcomings of material that does not meet these criteria so that students are aware of it. Think carefully about assignments that ask students to describe their personal lives, either in writing or during class discussion; you do not want to create a situation where students feel forced to come out or to pretend to be heterosexual out of fear of how you or the other students in the class might react.
6. Confront comments that are heterosexist, homophobic, or biased in terms of gender identity or expression: It is important to respond to comments that use non-inclusive or derogatory language or that rely on stereotypes or assumptions, especially comments made in the classroom. When inappropriate comments are made, all eyes will be on you. How you respond to such comments sends an important message, not just to LGBTQ students but to all students in your classroom.
7. Make sure you never disclose a person's sexual orientation or gender identity without their permission: You may have students who reveal their sexual orientation or gender identity to you as part of written assignments or in the course of conversations. This information should be considered confidential, and you should not reveal it to anyone else unless the student has given you permission to do so.
8. Include LGBTQ-themed flyers, posters, and publications in your office space: When you include LGBTQ-related materials (posters, flyers, etc.) in your office space without drawing attention to them, you help to create an atmosphere where LGBTQ students feel welcome/safe without feeling singled out for their sexual orientation or gender identity/expression.