

# Diversity & inclusion syllabus checklist

## WHAT IS THIS RESOURCE?

A syllabus checklist that can be utilized as a tool for course review using the lens of diversity and inclusion. The listed items are highly recommended for inclusion in course syllabi and/or courses, as best practices and in support of diversity and inclusion to the benefit of all students. Many of the items are also elements of Universal Design for Learning (UDL).

## HOW DO I USE IT?

This resource can be a self-reflective tool and/or a conversation starter with colleagues. Review committees may wish to use this checklist and add school-specific items to it when updating a single course or all courses in a program. The assumption is made that syllabi being reviewed already adhere to the [USC Syllabus Template](https://cet.usc.edu/teaching-resources/syllabus-template/). For assistance, please [contact CET](https://cet.usc.edu/contact-us/).

### Considerations

When preparing a syllabus to be inclusive of all students, consider the following questions:

* What are your discipline’s norms and assumptions? How might students with varying backgrounds respond to them?
* What do you want students to know about your expectations regarding creating and maintaining a space where differences are respected and valued?
* Is your syllabus inclusive of different types of diversity, including, but not limited to race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, socioeconomic status, religion, and ability?
* What kind of classroom environment and conversational tone do you expect from students? How might this be conveyed to students?
* What campus resources could be shared with students to assist them in their educational journey?

### Six Principles of Inclusive Course Syllabi

1. Focus on Student Learning,
   * State learning [objectives](https://cet.usc.edu/teaching-resources/blooms-taxonomy/) which address different levels of cognitive, behavioral, and affective learning.
   * Align learning objectives with course assignments.
   * Create assignment descriptions and rubrics which clearly communicate assignment expectations.
   * Communicate in the syllabus how your course space will be a supportive and motivating learning environment.
   * Provide [formative and summative feedback](https://cet.usc.edu/teaching-resources/effective-instructor-feedback/) to students throughout a term. Formative feedback gives the learner information that will help them to perform better in the future. Summative feedback identifies the next level of mastery achieved by the learner, typically in the form of grades.
2. Course Design around Big Themes and Essential Questions,
   * Identify the essential course questions, ideas, and themes through backward [design of a course](https://cet.usc.edu/teaching-resources/steps-to-plan-design-and-develop-your-course/).
   * Frame syllabi to motivate students with a sense of curiosity and how this course will be relevant and meaningful to them.
3. Application of [Universal Design for Learning (UDL)](https://cet.usc.edu/teaching-resources/universal-design-for-learning-udl/) Principles,
   * Set clear goals,
   * Use variable instructional methods based on learner variability,
   * Include learning-supportive materials in various formats,
   * Monitor student progress through timely assessments.
4. Tone and Rhetoric – Inclusive and Motivating Language,
   * Write syllabi and other course materials in friendly, enthusiastic, tones that evoke anticipation of student success.
   * Foster language that promotes positive motivation and envisions students as competent and engaged learners. This may include using personal pronouns or less formal language that is unambiguous.
5. Supportive Course Policies,
   * Include language on the use and rationale of policies such as attendance, academic honesty, classroom etiquette, technology, and accommodations.
   * Share University and community resources and help normalize their use.
6. Accessible Design.
   * Ensure that syllabi and other material are accessible to screen readers and easy to navigate.
   * Include visual representations (alt-text) of images, logos, and other content.
   * When possible, consider including Open Educational Resources (OER’s), free and openly licensed course content to replace or supplement for-purchase content, such as an e-textbook. For more information, visit [USC Libraries OER Guide](https://libguides.usc.edu/oer)

### USC resources to consider

USC [**Faculty Decision Guide**](https://cet.usc.edu/teaching-resources/faculty-decision-guide/)

**SCampus:** SCampus The USC Student Handbook Part D, Section 1: [Free Expression and Dissent](https://policy.usc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/SCampus-Part-D.pdf)

**USC Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion:** [USC Principles of Community](https://diversity.usc.edu/usc-principles-of-community/)

**USC Diversity Resources for Students:** Comprehensive [list of student resources](https://diversity.usc.edu/student-advocacy-groups-and-resources/) from the USC diversity website.

[**USC Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS)**](https://osas.usc.edu/)**.**

**USC Office of Religious Life:** [Policy on absence for observance of religious holy days](https://orsl.usc.edu/life/calendar/absences/) and best efforts not to schedule. Major exams and due dates on holy days of observation

**Center for Excellence in Teaching (CET):** [Course design, instruction, and evaluation](http://cet.usc.edu/)

### References

Kumar, R. & Refaei. B. (2021). [Equity and Inclusion in Higher Education: Strategies for Teaching](https://web-s-ebscohost-com.libproxy1.usc.edu/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook?sid=eda9b816-4db9-485f-b890-8bec2d004746%40redis&vid=0&format=EK). University of Cincinnati Press.