

GUIDE TO

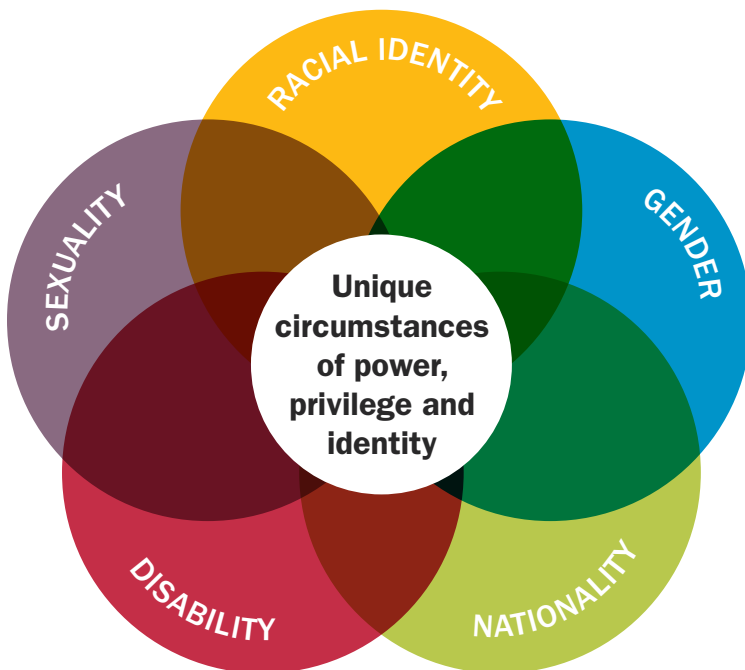
# Diversifying Course Content

Creating an inclusive learning environment includes consideration of the array of voices and perspectives represented in your course materials. Exposure to diverse content can provide a more comprehensive understanding of your subject matter, increase empathy, improve communication and teamwork skills, and validate your students' experiences. Below are guidelines for faculty who are interested in making course content more inclusive and/or diversifying course content.



## Thinking about Diversifying Course Content

- **Diversifying content does not mean sacrificing the quality of your materials.** The world is diverse and structured by unequal power relations based on a range of factors including: gender, sexuality, race, class, ability, age and religion. Content that reflects these realities provides a stronger platform for students to navigate and engage with their surroundings.
- **Your course likely already has significant content** and making changes to curricula can be daunting. Consider starting with smaller changes. Depending on what you learn from this process, you may or may not eventually make more substantive changes to the overall course.
- **Remember that this process is ongoing and imperfect.** Think of it as a journey you and your students are undertaking together. Model curious and open engagement with diverse content. Take time at the end of each semester to reflect on what went well and identify what could be improved.



## Reviewing Your Current Course Content

- **Reflect on why you select the content you do.** What perspectives are prioritized and what perspectives are missing? Is there a reason why certain groups or perspectives are not represented or underrepresented? Does your course content reflect any assumptions about who your students are?
- **Evaluate your current content in terms of representation.** Pay attention to both identity positions and topics germane to your course that might not be adequately represented. Consider using concepts, theories and/or techniques that represent a variety of identities, cultures and worldviews. For example, if you are currently using a Thermodynamics textbook written by a white man but you have the option of using a different textbook written by a woman of color, choose the latter to change up who is represented in your curriculum.
- **Consider building examples** of diversity and equity issues that are relevant to your subject into your course design.
- **Aim to use an asset or strengths-based model of education.** For example, when presenting equity data about a field, a strengths-based approach would focus on the skills, opportunities and value that an underrepresented group might contribute. Conversely, a deficit-based model would focus on the problems and weaknesses of the underrepresented group.
- **Consider assigning materials** that explicitly address diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) realities and efforts in your field. For example, you might include case studies of successful DEI efforts or you might focus on areas that need more attention.

## Tips for Diversifying Course Content

- **Review your content** for places where you might be able to find a source that accomplishes your main objectives while also enabling and representing more diverse perspectives and conversations.
- **Cast a wide net.** Check with your professional society and larger umbrella academic organizations. Look for sections on diversity on their websites to find resources. Check out your professional journals and higher education news source for articles on diversifying your curriculum. Ask your librarian for assistance. Talk with people in your field about best practices and/or missing perspectives. Search for syllabi examples on the internet.
- **Consider assigning popular content alongside your academic content.** Students often respond well, for example, to podcasts or long form journalism that addresses diversity, equity and inclusion issues.
- **If there is a diversity-related controversy in your field,** consider “teaching the controversy” by assigning multiple perspectives and analyses. Controversial topics can function as good entry points for introducing marginalized authors and perspectives. If you take this route, be sure to review MSU’s *Guide to Inclusive Teaching* and the *Guide to Facilitating Challenging Conversations*.
- **Remember that course content is a larger category than just assigned reading.** Consider inviting speakers who have expertise in your field about diversity-related matters. Invite or assign your students to contribute resources reflecting typically underrepresented views to the course. Use diverse audio/visual materials such as films and TEDx programs.
- **Consider including a diversity statement and/or an accessibility statement in your syllabus.** Learn more about diversity and inclusion syllabus statements at [Brown University’s Center for Teaching and Learning](#) website.
- **Once you’ve completed a round of changes to course content,** continue to look for potential resources. Keep a running list of notes and ideas that you can incorporate next time you teach the class.

# Commit to Ongoing Learning about Diversifying Course Content

**Take the time to learn about diverse perspectives in your field and about equity in general.** Developing more literacy about these issues will help you diversify your course content.

- Read “[A Syllabus Worth of Difference](#)” on the Poynter Institute for Media Studies site.
- Explore Tulane University’s [Accessible Syllabus](#) site.
- Explore the American Philosophical Association’s [Diversifying the Syllabus](#) site.
- Read Emily DeRuy’s 2016 article in the *Atlantic Monthly*, “[The Complicated Process of Adding Diversity to the College Syllabus](#).”