

# Inclusion By Design: Survey Your Syllabus and Course Design

*A Worksheet*

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This survey tool was designed for you to examine a particular syllabus and course design to get a broader perspective on inclusion in your actual teaching practices. We have organized this worksheet in three sections: 1. The context and design of your course. 2. The “text” of your syllabus and course design. 3. And the subtext of your syllabus.

## 1. Inclusion and Course Context

Examine situational factors by writing short answers to these questions.

**A. People:** Who will most likely be in your class? (Consider student characteristics such as race and ethnicity, gender, class, ability, religion, language, geographic region, sexual orientation, ability/disability, first generation college, other invisible status, etc.)

**B. Content:** What different perspectives and viewpoints are included in the course content?

**C. Relevance:** What ways are there to connect the course topic and content to your students and the real world?

**D. Pedagogy:** What are the pedagogical choices available to you in your discipline and how diverse are they? (Examples: lecture, team-based learning, problem-based learning, socratic method, simulations, role-play, debate, service learning)

**E. Values:** What values do you intend to instill in this course? (Examples: Inquiry, community, discipline, deliberation, critical thinking, value of difference)

**F. Climate:** How will differences of positionality/opinion/thinking be handled in the classroom? How can you create safe spaces for both visible and invisible minority students?



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## 2. Inclusion and “Text”: Syllabus and Course Design

In this section, you summarize your thoughts quantitatively, using the five-point scales provided. In addition, you may want to write short explanatory notes for each question that provide examples and/or describe why you selected a particular score.

To create a summary score for how inclusive your syllabus and course design are, add the quantitative responses to all questions that you find relevant for your course, then divide the resulting number by the number of questions multiplied by five. A result close to ‘0’ means your course lacks inclusion; a result close to ‘1’ means your course is highly inclusive.

### Frame and Tone of the syllabus

**A. Tone:** What is the balance between inviting, friendly, and supportive sections and rules or prohibitions in your syllabus? Is the syllabus written in an inviting, friendly, and supportive tone, or is it mainly a list of rules and regulations?

Rules and regulations					Inviting
	1	2	3	4	5

**B. Perspectives:** Does the syllabus on the whole communicate openness to multiple perspectives and experiences, or is it mainly focused on one perspective?

One perspective					Multiple perspectives
	1	2	3	4	5

**C. Student appeal:** Does the course description/introduction appeal to a variety of students and perspectives or does it mainly target one type of student?

One type of student					Variety of students
	1	2	3	4	5

**D. Accessible syllabus:** How accessible is your syllabus as a document? (You may want to check [JMU’s ODS page](#) or the [Universal Design Validator at the Equity and Excellence in Higher Education](#) website to answer this question.)

Low level of accessibility					Accessible to all
	1	2	3	4	5

## Learning Objectives

**A. Clarity:** Are the learning goals and objectives clearly stated or mainly implied?

Mainly implied

Clearly stated

1

2

3

4

5

**B. Student interests:** To what extent do the objectives appeal to a range or variety of student interests? Do the objectives appeal to and reflect the interests and learning needs of different types/groups of students? (Consider student differences related to socio-demographic factors, first generation status, ability, sexual orientation etc.)

Appeal to one  
type of student

Appeal to a  
range of  
students

1

2

3

4

5

**C. Learning domains:** To what extent do the learning objectives appeal to the head, heart, and hand? In other words, do they cover cognitive, affective, and psycho-motor domains?

Objectives  
belong to one  
domain

Objectives cover  
various domains

1

2

3

4

5

**D. Levels:** To what extent do the cognitive learning objectives appeal to different levels/types of thinking? (Summary, evaluation, application, analysis, synthesis, etc.)

One level

Multiple levels

1

2

3

4

5

**E. Diversity:** To what extent do some of the learning objectives aim at diversity- or inclusion-related knowledge, skills, or attitudes?

No  
diversity-related  
objectives

All objectives  
relate to  
diversity

1

2

3

4

5

## Assessment

**A. Variety:** To what extent does the course employ a variety of assignments? Do the students have a variety of ways to show what they know? Or does the course rely on only few types of assignment?

One type of  
assignment

Several types of  
assignment

1

2

3

4

5

**B. Formative assessment:** Is there a variety of formative assessments (assignments) that provide students with immediate feedback and opportunities to improve?

No formative  
assessment

Many formative  
assessments

1

2

3

4

5

**C. Alignment:** To what extent do the assessments measure student knowledge and skills that are taught in the class and correspond to learning objectives, or do they measure extraneous knowledge and skills?

Assessments test  
extraneous  
knowledge/skills

Assessments  
align with  
objectives and  
teaching

1

2

3

4

5

**D. Fixed and flexible options:** Is divergent, creative thinking rewarded or do assessments require students to conform to one common norm?

Assessments  
establish one  
norm

Assessments  
reward  
creativity

1

2

3

4

5

## Teaching and Learning Activities

**A. Culturally responsive teaching:** To what extent do teaching activities meet the needs of diverse learners, diverse learning styles, diverse ways of processing information, diverse performative styles? (Examples: Experiential learning, collaborative group work, individual activities, peer teaching/editing/sharing, one on one instructor time.)

Teaching  
requires one  
type of learning

Teaching  
supports  
diverse types of  
learning

1

2

3

4

5

**B. Flexibility/adaptation:** How much flexibility is there in the course design to modify and adjust to meet the learning opportunities that arise in the moment in the classroom?

No flexibility

High level of  
flexibility

1

2

3

4

5

**C. Alignment:** Are the teaching and learning activities aligned with the objectives? Or are they disconnected?

Activities do not  
align with  
objectives

Activities align  
with objectives

1

2

3

4

5

**D. Interaction patterns:** Do learning activities promote inclusive interactive patterns? Do students cooperatively learn together? Or is instruction based on one-directional information provision by the instructor?

Teaching as  
information  
provision

Learning through  
inclusive  
interaction

1

2

3

4

5

**E. Shared teaching:** Do students have shared responsibility in their (and their fellow students') learning? For example, do students lead discussion groups, reteach concepts, or otherwise contribute to the teaching?

Instructor alone  
is responsible for  
teaching

Students share  
responsibility  
for learning

1

2

3

4

5

**F. Engagement:** To what extent do you encourage students to interact with you and with each other?

I don't encourage  
interaction

Encourage  
interaction in a  
variety of ways

1

2

3

4

5

## Content

**A: Perspectives:** To what extent do the course materials, such as readings, provide a full spectrum of perspectives on topics?

The material presents one perspective

1

2

3

4

The material presents a wide variety of perspectives

5

**B. Voice:** To what extent does the course material represent a variety of voices?

The material presents one voice

1

2

3

4

The material presents a wide variety of voices

5

**C. Pace:** To what extent does the pace of the course content allow for multiple processing speeds?

Content requires common pace

1

2

3

4

Content permits for multiple speeds

5

**D. Course materials:** To what extent does the format of the course material respond to a broad range of learning preferences (reading written text, visual and audio media preferences, etc.)?

One format

1

2

3

4

Multiple formats

5

**E. Accessibility:** To what extent is the course material accessible to all students, including those with disabilities? (For example, do visual media have subtitles, can online readings be recognized by screen readers, etc.)

The material is not accessible

1

2

3

4

All course materials are accessible

5

### 3. Inclusion and Subtext

In this section, write short responses to explore the implicit assumptions, rules, and requirements of your course..

#### Hidden Curriculum

**A. Implicit rules:** What formal and informal rules, assumptions, values are important for the course but not stated in the syllabus?

**B. Implicit messages:**What unwritten messages does the syllabus convey about the course, content, and learning? Is there a “hidden curriculum” embedded in the syllabus?

**C. Hidden biases:** In which ways does the “hidden curriculum” potentially discriminate against some students? (For example, do you use only one type of assessment to determine grades, and does the disadvantage some of the students in ways unrelated to their learning?)

**D. Teaching philosophy:** What is your teaching philosophy (student-centered learning, teacher-centered information dissemination, cooperative learning, etc.) and how does the syllabus communicate it to students? Do you clearly communicate your teaching philosophy to avoid biases?

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