

Getting Started with Equity

A Discipline Brief for
Equity in Psychology:
Susanna M. Gallor, Ph.D.



Contents

Author	3
About the Supporting Organizations	3
Summary of equity-related areas of concern	4
Suggestions for change	5
Further reading	7
References & notes	10

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About the Supporting Organizations



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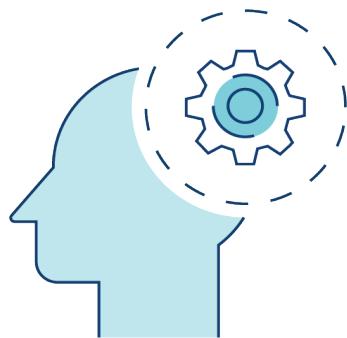
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Discipline Brief: Equity in Psychology

Susanna M. Gallor, Ph.D., a Senior Lecturer for the Department of Psychology at the University of Massachusetts Boston, discusses how representation and relevant content can help to engage and empower historically minoritized and oppressed groups and reduce bias in psychology.

Summary of equity-related areas of concern

Across the globe, political, social, cultural, and demographic changes have slowly but consistently contributed to a more diverse student body in higher education. Today's college campuses play host to individuals from many cultural backgrounds and with vastly diverse experiences. Students are intricately intertwined with their social context, and psychology as a discipline cannot be learned without the examination of knowledge within a historical, political, cultural, and social context.



For decades, many psychology graduate programs, particularly in clinical and counseling psychology, have developed and integrated many pedagogical and practical frameworks and strategies for providing more inclusive, relevant, and multiculturally-oriented education and training. Scholars and researchers have identified principles and ideals underlying social justice education that can be applied to graduate education and training in order to prepare students to work as psychology professionals more inclusively and equitably in the increasingly diverse society.

The field of psychology more generally can apply many of these same concepts, principles, and strategies, particularly from such pedagogies and frameworks as multicultural education, social justice education, liberation psychology, and feminist psychology. Approaching undergraduate psychology education from these perspectives, especially a social justice perspective, involves action and interaction, critical inquiry, and personal commitment. Being social justice-oriented means that one is approaching pedagogy and assessment with the primary goal of reaching, including, more deeply understanding, and advocating for historically minoritized and oppressed groups.

Suggestions for change

Representation and Relevance

One prominent theme in the literature around how to make psychology education more inclusive, accessible, and generalizable is the critical importance of making curriculum more relevant to and representative of minoritized students.

- Make course content inclusive by incorporating textbooks, materials, and sources that address a diversity of perspectives, worldviews, and research findings.
- Move away from entirely text-based course materials and consider using other sources, such as articles from peer-reviewed journals, summaries of research, interviews with prominent scholars and authors, videos and documentaries, and interactive digital sources and websites.
- Help students see themselves in relation to broader sociocultural influences in addition to their own context.
- Connect the curriculum to current issues and events. Seek out new connections that relate course topics to issues of societal and cultural importance.
- Utilize an intersectional approach by recognizing and teaching that individuals are members of multiple groups whose overlapping identities influence their development, social relationships, and worldviews.
- Intentionally integrate the diverse perspectives of those whose experiences have been historically marginalized or ignored. For example:
 - How does a lack of safe neighborhoods affect children's well-being? (Developmental Psychology)
 - What are the effects of gender-based pay inequities on corporate climate? (Industrial/Organizational Psychology)
 - How does social class shape access to psychological and psychiatric services? (Abnormal Psychology)
 - How can principles of operant and classical conditioning be used to change attitudes toward members of ostracized groups? (Learning/Cognitive Psychology)
 - Why were lobotomies performed disproportionately on women? (Biopsychology)
 - Are the Big Five personality dimensions universal given the role of gender and culture in identity formation? (Personality) (Meyers, 2007)

Engaging Students

Another important aspect of having a social justice orientation to teaching is to consider one's process and practice of teaching, not just the content of what is being taught. Ideas for pedagogy and experiential learning that empower students might include:

- Empower learners and create a classroom climate that emphasizes participative and interactive learning by encouraging students, research assistants, teaching assistants, and others to co-create, co-facilitate, and co-participate in all academic and scholarly endeavors.
- Use community experiences to augment in-class learning. Students can engage with others who offer different perspectives and worldviews through interview assignments.
- Empower students to draw on prior out-of-class or in-class community experiences to increase student understanding.
- Create campus-based, action-oriented assignments to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- Ask students to develop and/or engage in social action projects. It is increasingly important for psychology students to understand the connections between research, practice, and public policy.
- Explore opportunities to think critically and creatively about how to best understand and serve a wide range of individuals and communities. Teach and apply critical thinking skills and strategies.
- Utilize multiple methods of assessment and evaluation of student performance to promote equity in the classroom.

Empowering Students

To create an inclusive and equitable classroom, it is important to have processes for collaboration that encourage shared language, shared talking spaces, and the recognition of the value of all members of a community.

- Identify common ground and procedures for sharing power and resolving conflict. Consider questioning conventional notions of authority in college classrooms because it may parallel or reinforce how power is exercised more broadly in society.
- Employ an egalitarian approach to course development in which students have greater input and control. This underscores the importance of students' values, priorities, and beliefs in the teaching and learning process. On a practical note, Enns and Sinacore (2005) recommend using:
 - **Responsive goal-setting**, to provide students with a voice in deciding which topics are emphasized within the course.
 - **Cooperative learning**, to encourage students to interact with others (especially those who have a different background in terms of race, ethnicity, social class, age, gender, or sexual

A Discipline Brief for Equity in Psychology

orientation) through problem-based learning, laboratory exercises, and group activities.

Instructor self-disclosure as appropriate, to model openness.

Bias and Stereotypes in Psychology

In addition to what is done in the classroom, educators must always consider how bias and stereotypes have shaped the psychology discipline. The field of psychology has a checkered human rights history, with theory, research, and practices reinforcing and lending credibility to discriminatory practices against historically minoritized groups. Furthermore, the history of psychology and many of the prominent psychological theories and concepts today are inadequate due to their fundamental reliance upon systems that are racist, sexist, heteronormative, ableist, restrictive of opportunities, and economically unjust. It is important for educators to engage in self-reflection to challenge their existing assumptions about the discipline.

Service Learning

One other clear theme and critical aspect of teaching psychology more inclusively is the integration of service learning with undergraduate education. Service learning can be defined as experiential education in which learning is enhanced through volunteer work and reflection. These activities and projects can enrich the learning objectives and outcomes in a course while also benefiting communities and organizations. Research has demonstrated that individual and group service learning exercises or projects reduce stereotypes, facilitate cultural and racial understanding, and enhance civic responsibility. (e.g., O'Brien et al., 2014) Service learning offers students opportunities to apply newly acquired information outside of classroom settings.

Conclusion

By working to incorporate some of these social justice-oriented principles and strategies, educators and their students can start to identify and shape a more socially relevant psychology. Infusing scholarship and practice relevant to diversity in both the process (e.g., experiential learning) and the content of education (i.e., curriculum) will make psychology a more inclusive discipline so that future psychology educators and professionals will be better equipped to work toward making society more generally inclusive and equitable.

Further reading

Keith, K.D. (2018). Culture across the curriculum. Cambridge, United Kingdom: University Printing House.

Culture Across the Curriculum provides a useful handbook for psychology teachers in the major subfields of the discipline. From introductory psychology to the foundations in such areas as social psychology, statistics, research methods, memory, cognition, personality, and development, to such

specialized courses as language, sexuality, and peace psychology, there is something here for virtually every teacher of psychology. In addition to discussions of the rationale for inclusion of cultural context in their areas of specialization, these experienced teachers also offer advice and ideas for teaching exercises and activities to support the teaching of a psychology of all people.

Kite, M.E., & Littleford, L.N. (2015). Teaching about diversity across the undergraduate psychology curriculum. In D.S. Dunn (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Undergraduate Psychology Education*. DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199933815.013.012

In this chapter, we discuss the importance of teaching about cultural diversity in the undergraduate psychology curriculum and describe successful models for doing so. We suggest faculty identify their goals for diversity education at both the department and the individual course level. We note the importance of offering stand-alone diversity courses and explain why cultural diversity also should be infused in all psychology courses. We review the necessary components of effective diversity education and explain why students benefit both directly and indirectly from learning about this topic. Because instructors need to evaluate their own self-awareness, knowledge, and skills related to this topic, we suggest ways to effectively do so, including developing strategies for understanding students' worldviews, expectations, and behaviors in the classroom and establishing a safe learning environment for what can be emotionally charged discussions. Finally, we note the methods available for effective multicultural education and offer advice about choosing the methods that meet instructors' identified goals.

Mena, J.A., & Quina, K. (2019). Integrating multiculturalism and intersectionality into the psychology curriculum: Strategies for instructors. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Multicultural and intersectional aspects of identity are crucial components of human psychology. Yet, properly teaching and accounting for these factors in psychology courses can be challenging. In this comprehensive volume, Jasmine A. Mena and Kathryn Quina provide instructors with practical guidance for incorporating multicultural perspectives into their courses and creating more inclusive classrooms. The contributors are experienced graduate and undergraduate instructors who present effective teaching strategies and activities that encourage students to communicate their viewpoints, learn from each other, challenge their own biases, and expand their worldviews. Authors examine specific sociocultural groups based on gender, ethnicity, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status. They discuss these topics using an intersectional approach, recognizing that individuals are members of multiple groups whose overlapping identities influence their development, social relationships, and worldviews. Chapters offer recommendations for integrating multiculturalism into core psychology courses, including introduction to psychology classes, which are most undergraduate students' only exposure to psychology.

Milton, A.F., Zelaya, D.G., & Madsen, J.W. (2021). Rethinking the course syllabus: Considerations for promoting equity, diversity, and inclusion. *Teaching of Psychology, 48*, 69-79.

Introduction: Equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) are receiving considerable attention in higher education. Within psychology, the American Psychological Association has highlighted the importance of cultural diversity in both undergraduate and graduate curricula and charged educators with facilitating the development of cultural competence among learners. Statement of the Problem: Many resources have been developed to help promote EDI within higher education. The resources developed have mainly focused on the curricula and pedagogical approaches, yet the syllabus remains overlooked with few guidelines available to educators. Literature Review: We offer several considerations informed by theoretical frameworks and best practices in the discipline and suggestions for the successful implementation of EDI in the syllabus. Teaching Implications: This article provides a comprehensive and useful guide for developing a syllabus that assists with the integration of EDI, as the syllabus is the first opportunity for faculty to communicate their philosophy, expectations, requirements, and other course information. Conclusion: Infusing EDI in the syllabus is essential for promoting an inclusive learning environment and is conducive to establishing goals related to cultural competence.

References & notes

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Watts, R.J. (2004). Integrating social justice and psychology. In *The Counseling Psychologist*, 32, 855-865.