



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

Office of the
Provost

Setting up an anti-racist classroom



In the vibrant, multicultural landscape of the University of Melbourne, a world-class education relies on every student feeling safe, seen, and valued. Racism, particularly in the form of subtle but persistent microaggressions, creates a hostile environment that drains a student's cognitive resources and diminishes their sense of belonging. By proactively setting up an anti-racist environment, Teaching Staff can unlock the immense value that diverse perspectives bring to learning. These guidelines were co-designed by 17 students with lived experience of racism, to support Teaching Staff in creating a space where all students can thrive and learn without the burden of exclusion.

Examples of Everyday Racism at the University

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'Teachers will ask international students for an English name when one is not given.'

'Course outlines and syllabi are often Eurocentric; non-Western knowledge is frequently treated as the 'other' option rather than being integrated into the core curriculum.'

'Sometimes I would be asked for my input just to include the "Blak" experience.'

'White people seem to expect that I will bring a specific cultural background to tute discussions, when in reality I am quite estranged from my culture.'

'I have seen Teaching Staff put absolutely minimal effort into communicating with Chinese students because their English is not as good. This doesn't only come from Teaching Staff – often it's students as well.'

Preventing everyday racism in teaching and learning settings

1

Classroom contract: After introductions, engage students in the development of a classroom contract for respectful engagement (or equivalent).

- Brainstorm what constitutes respectful engagement, encouraging students to consider what constitutes inclusive participation. Once students have come up with a list (can be written on the board), every student can sign it and take a photo for future reference.
- Many of the tips in these guidelines can be incorporated into the class contract.

2

Names are an important part of our identity, and to use someone's name shows respect. If you didn't catch someone's name or are having trouble pronouncing their name, it's okay to ask! Strategies to ensure names are respected include:

- Asking for preferred names and correct pronunciation during the first class.
- Asking for clarification on name/preferred name/pronunciation.
- If you have trouble remembering names, have each student say their name before they respond to a question.
- If a student has a name you are not familiar with, and hasn't stated that they have a different preferred or English name, don't ask for one.

3

Bias in course content: Outdated materials, or materials that don't reflect the diversity of the class or the broader population can be alienating for some students. Strategies to manage this include:

- Audit materials for bias and relevance to the cohort (insert link).
- Where change to materials is impossible, acknowledge and discuss the bias in class.
- Provide supplementary materials or guidance for additional reading where feasible.

4

Local knowledge and colloquial language: Assessment shouldn't rely on knowledge or understanding that is only available to local students and/or native English speakers.

- Provide transcripts for tasks involving audio, particularly if it uses colloquial language.
- If students are required to respond to a text in an exam or assignment, provide options that are not focused on assumed local knowledge.

5

Assumptions about knowledge or lack of knowledge: Don't assume knowledge based on background!

- Flag at the start of semester that everyone is there to learn – don't assume knowledge based on cultural background.
- Encourage people to speak only when they feel comfortable.
- If background is raised, the purpose and relevance of the topic should be explained, and should focus on the enrichment of discussions and respectful and inclusive exchange of ideas.
- Do not target students to share their personal experiences.

6

Student feedback: Feedback should be transparent and equitable.

- At the beginning of semester, establish what level of feedback every student can expect

7

Perceived bias against international students: There is a perception, amongst international students themselves, that Teaching Staff and other students would prefer not to converse with them, and/or that assumptions are made about their communication skills. There are a range of reasons why both International and local students might require more time and care in order to be heard.

- Create a safe learning environment by placing emphasis on ideas, rather than confidence and perfect spoken English.
- Provide a few minutes after class for students to ask questions one-on-one – this will allow students who don't feel comfortable speaking during class gather information, and will also provide you with insights into their level of understanding and engagement.
- Model careful listening, allowing everyone time to think as they are speaking.

To access support, report an incident of racism, or learn more about the University's ongoing anti-racism initiatives and the Anti-racism Action Plan (ARAP), please visit our Anti-Racism page: go.unimelb.edu.au/yue2.