



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

Office of the
Provost

Responding to Racism in our learning spaces



Effectively responding to racism within our learning spaces is a core competency that is essential for providing equitable education. When microaggressions and overt racism go unchallenged, they inflict significant psychological harm and suggest that safety is a privilege rather than a right for all students. Student success is only possible when diversity is protected through informed intervention that validates the experiences of marginalised students. Co-designed by 17 students with lived experience of racism, these guidelines provide Teaching Staff with the necessary framework to intervene effectively and maintain a truly inclusive learning environment.

Examples of Everyday Racism at the University

The following examples are taken from the UMSU Racism at the University of Melbourne report, 2023

‘Teachers have not attempted to learn the pronunciation of our names, asking for “English” names or nicknames.’

White students have said that African, Asian and Australian Indigenous cultures are lesser and that their people pre-colonisation were primitive and less developed than European counterparts.’

‘Some of the white/domestic students I tutored did not want to work with Asian/International students as they assumed they would perform worse during group assignments.’

‘We were talking about the nature of science in a science communication class, and several of my classmates started saying science was a purely “western” invention.’

‘I encountered students who were dismissive of Indigenous perspectives being included in course content. The same students made comments dismissing Indigenous law and jurisprudence.’

‘Teaching Staff and other students have made the assumption that I am knowledgeable about the African continent and should be looked to as some form of continental expert, purely because of my cultural background.’

Responding to incidents of everyday racism in teaching and learning settings

1

Names are an important part of our identity, and to use someone's name shows respect. If you mispronounce someone's name, or feel you are unable to pronounce it, you can:

- Apologise and ask again! If you didn't catch someone's name, or are having trouble pronouncing it, it is okay to be honest about this.
- **Do not ask** for an English name. **Do give** the entire class the opportunity to provide a preferred name, and to clarify the pronunciation of their name.

2

Spoken English: Students who are less confident speaking in class, whether it be because English is not their first language, cultural differences, neurodivergence or disability, should be provided with opportunities to express their ideas. Consider the following:

- Having students speak to a partner before sharing ideas with the class.
- Options to share ideas in writing (eg online chat, message board, kahoot, mentimeter – check that the tools you use meet the **accessibility requirements** of all members of the class)
- In your teaching, model careful listening (ie give students the opportunity to think things through), and spend time thinking through what you will say.
- Class presentations as a way of structuring discussion.
- Prioritise the substance of an argument over the delivery of a student.

3

Group work: There is a perception, held by many international students, that domestic students don't want to do group work with them. While there are circumstances in which students can work with friends without issue, there are also times when domestic students are quite overt in their lack of interest in working with an international student, based on assumptions (not knowledge) about their English ability. Some possible approaches include:

- Assigning groups based on clear criteria (i.e., randomising groups by numbering students off, or sorting alphabetically). Be transparent about why you are doing it.
- Assigning a role to everyone in the group, even when groups are not assigned, and rotating spokespeople.
- Allowing students to form groups based on shared interest in a topic, rather than social connections or random assignment.
- Anonymous evaluation form for group members to provide feedback on each other (to be used with care).

4

Curriculum: Students have reported that peers reject curriculum designed to incorporate Indigenous knowledges, and other knowledge drawn from non-Western cultures. Ways to address this include:

- Ensuring that Indigenous perspectives are incorporated into multiple topics (if not all), and include readings in the curriculum that support Indigenous perspectives, avoiding tokenism.
- Be prepared to intervene - make sure you are equipped with the knowledge to address and correct misinformation. If you don't have that knowledge, be transparent about it, and follow up.
- Encourage students to challenge views that stereotype cultures.
- Incorporate globally diverse examples and/or case studies where appropriate.
- Share your knowledge about the author's positionality and worldview, supporting students to engage critically with the way knowledge is produced and certain voices are centred.

5

Assumptions about knowledge: Students have reported being called upon, by Teaching Staff or other students, to represent their entire culture, in circumstances where that culture is a non-Western one. The intention here might to be inclusive, but the impact can be negative – it is othering, and can make students feel isolated.

- Be aware that everyone is here to learn, and that nobody's knowledge can be assumed, and remind students of this fact.
- Make sure everyone is subject to the same expectations regarding if and when they are required to speak. Ask: "Does anyone with experience or knowledge of this context wish to contribute?"

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.