A diversity statement is a paragraph or section in institutional, department, or course language that welcomes the range of student identities, experiences, and perspectives, particularly those that have been traditionally marginalized. Instructors can use the diversity statement to welcome diverse perspectives, set expectations for civil discourse, and communicate standards of engagement both within a course or discipline and surrounding controversial events. The diversity statement signals belief that all students belong, have value, and bring unique perspectives worthy of consideration.

Research into the impact of syllabus diversity statements on classroom behavior remains slim, but the practice is widely accepted and deemed advantageous. Diverse student populations have been shown to connect course material to daily life in different ways (Packard, 2013), a factor that instructors might recognize when crafting statements. By demonstrating respect for differences in intellectual exchange, diversity statements support different student approaches to learning and avoid students feeling marginalized. These statements signal instructor awareness of potentially volatile campus conversations and
encourage free exchange of earnest dialogue across a range of issues. The diversity statement is a helpful way to signal care and attention to the diversity of students' ideas and backgrounds to support their sense of belonging. This can be used as a starting point to establishing a sense of community in the classroom and employing inclusive teaching practices.

Diversity Statement Samples

Below are some sample diversity statements used in syllabi by fellow Yale instructors as well as colleagues at other institutions:

- **Yale University - Dr. Carolyn Roberts, Assistant Professor, History of Science & History of Medicine, and African American Studies:** “Our goal as a learning community is to create a safe environment that fosters open and honest dialogue. We are all expected to contribute to creating a respectful, welcoming, and inclusive environment. To this end, classroom discussions should always be conducted in a way that shows honor, respect, and dignity to all members of the class. Moreover, disagreements should be pursued without personal attack and aggression, and instead, should be handled with grace and care. This will allow for rigorous intellectual engagement and a deeper learning experience for all. Lastly, please remember to practice self-care, which, according to Audre Lorde ‘is not an act of self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.’”

- **Yale University - Dr. Rona Ramos, Lecturer and Graduate Services Coordinator in Physics:** “This class strives to be an inclusive community, learning from the many perspectives that come from having differing backgrounds and beliefs. As a community, we aim to be respectful to all. We reject all forms of prejudice and discrimination, including but not limited to those based on age, color, disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, and veteran status. Faculty and students are expected to commit to creating an environment that facilitates inquiry and self-
expression, while also demonstrating diligence in understanding how others’ viewpoints may be different from their own.”

• **University of Pennsylvania - Dr. Zahra Fakhraai, Associate Professor of Chemistry:** “Please remember that groups are only effective if everyone treats each other with respect. You are encouraged to communicate your thoughts, but please also allow others in your group to also express their thoughts. You will be surprised how much you can learn by mutual respect of each other’s ideas, even if you are knowledgeable about a subject. Remember that you learn best by teaching a subject. Try to be receptive to constructive criticism, and open about accepting mistakes. Please come to the class prepared and take ownership of your group’s success.”

• **Brown University - Department of Sociology:** “The Department of Sociology embraces a notion of intellectual community enriched and enhanced by diversity along a number of dimensions, including race, ethnicity and national origins, gender and gender identity, sexuality, class and religion. We are especially committed to increasing the representation of those populations that have been historically excluded from participation in U.S. higher education.”

• **University of Iowa - College of Education:** “Respect for Diversity: It is my intent that students from all diverse backgrounds and perspectives be well served by this course, that students’ learning needs be addressed both in and out of class, and that the diversity that students bring to this class be viewed as a resource, strength and benefit. It is my intent to present materials and activities that are respectful of diversity: gender, sexuality, disability, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, and culture. Your suggestions are encouraged and appreciated. Please let me know ways to improve the effectiveness of the course for you personally or for other students or student groups. In addition, if any of our class meetings conflict with your religious events, please let me know so that we can make arrangements for you.”

• **Brown University, Sheridan Center for Teaching and Learning:** “The Sheridan Center supports an inclusive
learning environment where diverse perspectives are recognized, respected, and seen as a source of strength. Certificate II seeks to present a variety of diverse perspectives within the scholarship of teaching and learning (SOTL) and through our seminar discussions. The seminar will address diversity considerations for course design and student engagement along a number of dimensions, including race, ethnicity and national origins, gender and gender identity, sexuality, socio-economic class, age, religion, and disability. Seminar participants who have a disability or other condition necessitating accommodation are encouraged to discuss their needs with the instructor.

In addition, the diversity statement can provide a precedent for diversity practices throughout term:

- Explaining why certain authors from marginalized backgrounds or identities are present or lacking on the syllabus reading list.
- Providing personal stories of how the instructor has been affected by the lack of diversity in their field.
- Giving examples of how the instructor struggled with the course material as a student because of challenges tied to background or identity.
- Acknowledging the history of exclusion of people with diverse identities, backgrounds, or ideologies from the field.
- Providing norms and expectations or inviting students to co-create norms for discussing hot topics, such as national politics or campus controversies.
- Explaining how teaching practices are meant to address the learning needs of diverse students.

**Recommendations**

- **Practice Introspection** - Writing a diversity statement is like writing a teaching philosophy statement in that it requires a self-reflective process. Instructors might consider their own background and perspectives when crafting statements that will represent their philosophical and ethical viewpoints for
Consider Models - In addition to the examples above, instructors can consider the larger structure and tone of the syllabus to imagine how a diversity statement may be positioned for a syllabus’ tone and impact.

Consider Disciplinary Context - Every discipline has developed conventions and assumptions over decades and centuries of practice. These conventions and assumptions often lead to jargon and shared vocabularies that can be initially opaque for students. Instructors might consider how students with varying backgrounds could respond.

Integrate Teaching Philosophy - Engaging with diversity in the classroom is often an extension of the instructor’s own teaching philosophy. Research indicates that students often respond positively to transparent indications of teaching strategy and philosophy (Ambrose et al., 2010), so instructors can consider sharing the reasons behind their classroom policies.

Modeling Respect - Research suggests that the design and tone of the syllabus can positively impact student engagement with and perception of the instructor (Ludy et al. 2016, Gurung et al. 2021). The diversity statement helps set an initial impression, which instructors should uphold throughout term through personal treatment of students, facilitation of dialogue, and consistency in policies for grading, attendance, participation, and excuse.

Establish Expectations - Instructors can use the diversity statement to lay out expectations for student behavior, and invite students to become active agents in establishing and maintaining classroom tone.

Campus Resources - Instructors can use the diversity statement as an opportunity to direct students toward campus resources that facilitate and support diversity
initiatives. Yale’s Office of Diversity and Inclusion, Belonging at Yale Initiative, Office of Institutional Equity & Accessibility, and Cultural Centers provide resources, events, and support for the range of faculty, student, and staff representations.

References


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routinely supports members of the Yale community with individual instructional consultations and classroom observations.