Examples of Microaggressions in the Classroom

Microaggressions: everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership.

- Derald Wing Sue, Ph.D.

Microaggressions may be based on socioeconomic status, disability, gender, gender expression or identify, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, nationality, or religion. These insults or insensitivities may be exhibited by students or adults within the school community – keep that in mind when considering each example. *As reported and documented by students*, the following are offered as examples for reflection in an effort to raise awareness and sensitivity toward creating more inclusive and supportive classroom and school environments.

- ☐ Failing to learn to pronounce or continuing to mispronounce the names of students after they have corrected you.
- ☐ Scheduling tests and project due dates on religious or cultural holidays.
- ☐ Disregarding religious traditions or their details. (Ex. Impacts of fasting)
- ☐ Setting low expectations for students from particular groups, neighborhoods, or feeder patterns.
- ☐ Calling on, engaging and validating one gender, class, or race of students while ignoring other students during class.
- ☐ Assigning student tasks or roles that reinforce particular gender roles or don't allow all students flexibility across roles and responses.
- ☐ Anticipating students' emotional responses based on gender, sexual orientation, race or ethnicity.
- ☐ Using inappropriate humor in class that degrades students from different groups.
- ☐ Expressing racially charged political opinions in class assuming that the targets of those opinions do not exist in class.
- ☐ Using the term "illegals" to reference undocumented students.
- ☐ Hosting debates in class that place students from groups who may represent a minority opinion in class in a difficult position.
- ☐ Singling students out in class because of their backgrounds.
- ☐ Expecting students of any particular group to 'represent' the perspectives of others of their race, gender, etc. in class discussions or debates.
- ☐ Denying the experiences of students by questioning the credibility and validity of their stories.
- ☐ Assigning class projects or creating classroom or school procedures that are heterosexist, sexist, racist, or promote other oppressions, even inadvertently.
- ☐ Using sexist language.
- ☐ Using heteronormative metaphors or examples in class.
- ☐ Assuming the gender of any student.
- ☐ Continuing to misuse pronouns even after a student, transgender or not, indicates their preferred gender pronoun.

- Assigning projects that ignore differences in socioeconomic class status and inadvertently penalize students with fewer financial resources.
- Excluding students from accessing student activities due to high financial costs.
- Assuming all students have access to and are proficient in the use of computers and applications for communications about school activities and academic work.
- Assuming that students of particular ethnicities must speak another language or must not speak English.
- Complimenting non-white students on their use of "good English."
- Discouraging students from working on projects that explore their own social identities.
- Asking people with hidden disabilities to identify themselves in class.
- Forcing students with non-obvious disabilities to "out" themselves or discuss them publically.
- Ignoring student-to-student microaggressions, even when the interaction is not course-related.
- Making assumptions about students and their backgrounds.
- Featuring pictures of students of only one ethnicity or gender on the school website.
- Having students engage in required reading where the protagonists are always white.

Most examples taken, with slight adaptations, from *Microaggressions in the Classroom*
University of Denver, Center for Multicultural Excellence,
by former students Joel Portman, Tuyen Trisa Bui and Javier Ogaz; and Dr Jesús Treviño, former Associate Provost for Multicultural Excellence

Additional examples from recommended resource:
Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation,
by Derald Wing Sue, Ph.D.

Inclusion By Design:
Survey Your Syllabus and Course Design
A Worksheet

Ed Brantmeier, Center for Faculty Innovation and College of Education, JMU
Andreas Broscheid, Department of Political Science, JMU
Carl S. Moore, Research Academy for Integrated Learning, UDC

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, 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?

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   Appeal to a
type of student   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   Objectives cover
belong to one   various domains
domain

     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-   All objectives
related 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				The material presents a wide variety of perspectives
1	2	3	4	5

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

The material presents one voice				The material presents a wide variety of voices
1	2	3	4	5

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

Content requires common pace				Content permits for multiple speeds
1	2	3	4	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				Multiple formats
1	2	3	4	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				All course materials are accessible
1	2	3	4	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 determines 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?

References

Banks, J.A. (1999). *An Introduction to Multicultural Education* (2nd ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon. Summary of four approaches to multicultural curriculum available at http://www.intime.uni.edu/multiculture/curriculum/approachs.htm

Burgstahler, Sheryl. 2012. "Universal Design of Instruction (UDI): Definition, Principles, Guidelines, and Examples." http://www.washington.edu/doit/Brochures/Academics/instruction.html.

"Culturally Responsive Teaching | Teaching Diverse Learners." 2014. Accessed May 12. http://www.brown.edu/academics/education-alliance/teaching-diverse-learners/strategies-0/culturally-responsive-teaching-0.

Fink, D.L. (2003). *Creating significant learning experiences: An integrated approach to designing college courses.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Palmer, M. S., Bach, D. J., & Streifer, A. C. (2014). Measuring the promise: A learning-focused syllabus rubric. *To improve the academy: A journal of educational development, 33 (1),* 14-36.

Padron, Y. N., Waxman, H. C., and Rivera, H. H. (2002). Educating Hispanic students: Effective instructional practices (Practitioner Brief #5). Available at: http://www.cal.org/crede/Pubs/PracBrief5.htm.