

LGBTQ+ Considerations for Online Teaching in Response to COVID-19

Due to the coronavirus, faculty in higher education across the country and the world are beginning to transition their teaching to online formats. This worldwide shift to online teaching has raised important concerns from students regarding their capacity to fully participate in virtual classes. In a similar vein, faculty also have their own concerns about their ability to create an engaging and inclusive online learning environment.

As a student affairs professional who works to support LGBTQ+ students in their curricular and co-curricular experiences, I am becoming increasingly aware of students' questions and fears of engaging the next academic semester, predominantly or completely online. It's clear that [LGBTQ+ students will be impacted differently in their online participation](#), particularly if professors are unable to adapt their pedagogy for this new virtual environment.

In my professional work at the Spectrum Center in the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor (UM), I have had the opportunity to consult with faculty around their teaching practices. My advice to faculty leans heavily on my own experience as an educator and an adjunct lecturer. I will be lecturing my first online course this coming semester, and I want to offer some considerations for faculty as they develop and refine their online classes. These considerations build upon inclusive teaching strategies, such as DiPietro's (2012) [Seven Learning Principles](#), and will specifically help to further inclusion for LGBTQ+ students in your online classroom.

Understand Software Options for Names and Pronouns: Your institution may be affiliated with a specific video platform (BlueJeans, Zoom, Moodle, etc.) for online classes. What are the options within those platforms for students to use their preferred names and share their pronouns? For example, Zoom can pull names from our campus preferred name system, but this is only effective if students' are able to update their name in this highly utilized system. Additionally, [LGBTQ+ students may not be able to use their correct names and pronouns](#) if they're accessing your class from an unsafe setting. Be explicit at the beginning of your class regarding the options for students' names and pronouns, establish norms where students can fully express themselves in your class and recognize how students may use different names and pronouns throughout the class term.

Present Different Options for Class Participation: There exists a prevalent and pernicious idea that students must show their video in order to fully participate in an online classroom. This idea ignores the ways that forced video may [heighten dysphoria, particularly for transgender and non-binary students](#). As an educator, it's important to be clear about your expectations for online participation. Offer various options for students to participate in synchronous class discussions without expecting them to justify why they would prefer not to have their video on during class discussions.

Respect Privacy Concerns: In addition, mandating specific formats for students to participate in your online classroom ignores serious privacy concerns. Some students may be in non-affirming home environments and may not be able to fully express their thoughts without fear of discomfort or perhaps even queerphobic and transphobic violence. Barret-Fox (2020) lists [specific examples](#) where mandating explicit methods of participation in online classroom spaces can put students' livelihoods at risk. Consider incorporating multiple methods for class engagement that do not rely on real-time audiovisual participation, such as chat features and asynchronous reflection.

Know the Impact of LGBTQ+ Topics in the Classroom: Incorporating LGBTQ+ specific curriculum in the classroom is [key for LGBTQ+ student thriving](#), and should be a priority for all educators. However, for various reasons relating to privacy and potential harm, students may not be able to fully participate in online discussions on LGBTQ+ topics. In the first week of your course, consider incorporating an anonymous way for students to share their concerns for online participation during the class term.

Acknowledge and Address Online Microaggressions: Online classrooms and virtual spaces are not free of bias or harm, and these virtual platforms are likely to engender homophobic, biphobic and transphobic microaggressions in online conversations and discussion board posts. Reflect on how you may interrupt and address microaggressions through a virtual platform and incorporate the [NAME approach](#) by McInroy, Byers and Kattari (2019) when those microaggressions occur.

As faculty prepare to remotely teach this coming fall term, it's important to incorporate these considerations and look to LGBTQ youth resources online, such as this [distance learning](#)

[checklist for LGBTQ+ inclusion](#). Additionally, faculty can explore institutional resources regarding online teaching, such as these from [gender inclusive teaching practices](#) from UM's Center for Research on Learning and Teaching (CRLT). While this blog was written with LGBTQ+ students in mind, the considerations listed also impact students across a range of identities and backgrounds. As faculty and students alike have to contend with rapid changes to the learning environment and transitions their college experience to online platforms, it is important for all educators to keep in mind the importance and power in creating inclusive teaching environments online.

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