

DEDI PART 2: EQUITY IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

What it is and how to work with it in practice |
Teaching Commons

YORK 



What is it?

Equity, as defined in the York University DEDI Strategy, encompasses “fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement” (York University Decolonizing, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2023-2028, p. 9) for all members of the university community. It involves identifying and addressing systemic barriers that can hinder the success of individuals from underserved and underrepresented populations. The DEDI Strategy emphasizes the importance of promoting equity by ensuring equal access to resources, opportunities, and support, and by challenging systems, structures, and practices that perpetuate inequities.

Why is this important?

By actively confronting inequities in the learning process, we can support the kind of inclusive and just learning environment that will positively impact student engagement, retention, and well-being. When we make these efforts transparent to students—by engaging them in conversations about equity and providing them also with the necessary tools to recognize and challenge systemic inequities—we can cultivate a collective commitment to equity that will have an impact not only in the classroom but beyond. This work benefits all members of the university community by supporting learning and work environments grounded in individual and institutional accountability.

How can instructors support equity in their classrooms?

1. **Identify and address unconscious bias:** We all have unconscious biases, and the impacts of these biases are amplified when we hold authority and power over others (i.e., in assessment, supervision, etc.). By taking time to actively learn and reflect on [how biases can impact our work and interactions](#), and by providing students opportunities to do the same, educators can engage and support work in identifying and challenging harmful assumptions.
2. **Recognize barriers and offer resources:** An equity-informed lens acknowledges that students face different barriers inside and outside of the classroom. While external factors may fall outside the faculty's purview, you can support students, and particularly marginalized and vulnerable students, by being familiar with the [wide range of university supports and resources](#) available and raising awareness of these resources for your students. For example, including these resources on your syllabus, and posting them on eClass can ensure your students can readily access them at any time.
3. **Acknowledge power and privilege:** Systems are made up of individuals. When we take time to reflect on our own positioning and the [intersections between the forms of power and privilege we hold](#) (both in terms of our formal roles and our social locations) we are better equipped to disrupt harmful power dynamics and be allies to those with less power.

4. **Understand and challenge microaggressions:** Microaggressions are subtle actions that communicate bias or prejudice towards historically marginalized groups. By taking time to [learn more about microaggressions](#) you can better understand their impact on the learning environment. And by [learning more about microinterventions](#) (strategies to challenge microaggressions) you can better prepare yourself to challenge prejudice when it occurs.
5. **Support systemic change:** While supporting equity at the classroom and interpersonal levels, we should acknowledge that many inequities are perpetuated by policies and procedures that are embedded on an institutional level. The task of changing systems can be overwhelming, but we can support this work by taking advantage of opportunities to impact change when they arise. While this can happen through active institutional engagement (i.e., through committee work, course and program design, etc.) we can also look for more everyday ways to support and build capacity for change (i.e., providing feedback on institutional systems and practices, joining Communities of Practice, building ongoing networks, etc.).

Additional Resources

Ahenkora, E. (2020). Safe and brave spaces don't work (and what you can do instead).

Medium. <https://medium.com/@elise.k.ahen/safe-and-brave-spaces-dont-work-and-what-you-can-do-instead-f265aa339aff>

Center for Innovation in Campus Mental Health. (2020). Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Toolkit. <https://campusmentalhealth.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/CICMH-Equity-Diversity-Inclusion-Toolkit-EN.pdf>

Center for Research on Learning and Teaching, University of Michigan. (2021). Equity-focused teaching: Principles, strategies, resources. *University of Michigan*.

<https://crlt.umich.edu/equity-focused-teaching/principles-strategies-resources>

Experiential Learning Hub, Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning. (2022). *Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in Practice*. Toronto Metropolitan University.

<https://pressbooks.library.torontomu.ca/ediinpractice/front-matter/introduction/>

Kumar, R., & Refaei, B. (2021). *Equity and inclusion in higher education: Strategies for teaching*. The University of Chicago Press.

Rolón-Dow, R. (2019). Stories of microaggressions and microaffirmation: A framework for understanding campus racial climate. *NCID Currents*, 1(1).

<https://doi.org/10.3998/currents.17387731.0001.106>

Sue, D. W. (2021). Microintervention Toolkit (Part 1): Individual Actions and Best Practices to Disarm and Neutralize Microaggressions. https://priceschool.usc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/microintervention.toolkit.brochure_part_1.pdf

Sue, D. W., Alsaidi, S., Awad, M. N., Glaeser, E., Calle, C. Z., & Mendez, N. (2019). Disarming racial microaggressions: Microintervention strategies for targets, white allies, and bystanders. *American Psychologist*, 74(1). <https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000296>

The Indigenous Framework for York University: A Guide to Action.
<https://www.yorku.ca/indigenous-landing/wp-content/uploads/sites/817/2025/08/Indigenous-Framework-for-York-University-A-Guide-to-Action.pdf>

York University Addressing Anti-Black Racism: A Framework and Action Plan on Black Inclusion. <https://www.yorku.ca/abr/>

York University Centre for Human Rights, Equity and Inclusion.
<https://www.yorku.ca/services/rights/>

York University Decolonizing, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2023-2028.
https://www.yorku.ca/vpepc/wp-content/uploads/sites/310/2023/03/22-201_DEDI-Strategy-2023-28_EN_r3.pdf

York University Indigenous Framework Six-Year Review: Looking Back to Inform our Path Forward. (2024, August). https://www.yorku.ca/vpepc/indigenous-initiativesdev/wp-content/uploads/sites/950/2024/12/IFR-Report-2024_EN_r4.pdf

York University Supports for Student Well-being. <https://www.yorku.ca/well-being/resources/students/>



This guide is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>) which permits sharing and adapting of the material, provided the original work is properly attributed, any changes are clearly indicated, the material is not used for commercial purposes, and the new version distributes the new contributions under the same license as the original.