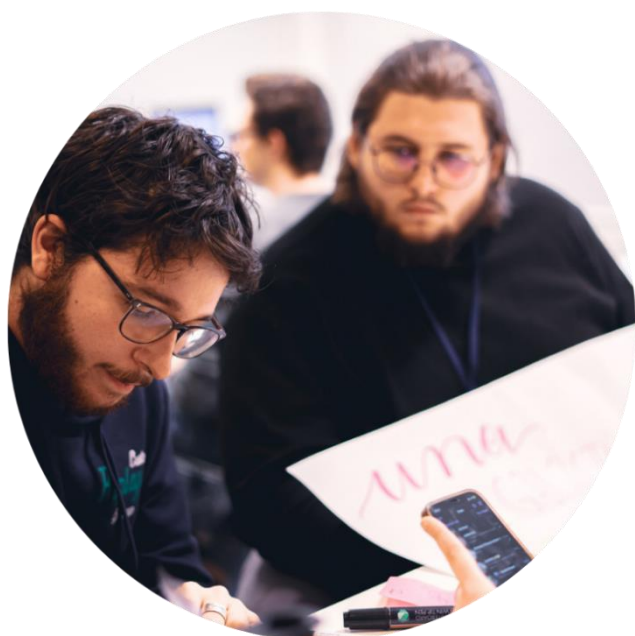# Toolkit for diversity and inclusion in teaching, curriculum, and material

Una Europa Diversity Council

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If you have any questions or comments relating to this publication, please contact authors. This toolkit is a living document and can be updated when necessary.

About Una Europa Diversity Council

Una Europa's Diversity Council has been established as a permanent entity dedicated to supporting Una Europa in its mission to embed diversity in every aspect of its collaborative efforts. The Diversity Council plays both a consultative and operational role, ensuring that diversity and inclusion are integral to all levels of decision-making and activities within Una Europa.

The Council is composed of professionals from both academic and administrative fields, representing the diverse perspectives and expertise of Una Europa's 11 universities. The primary goal of the Diversity Council is to promote equity and social justice for all, with a special focus on minoritised groups. The Diversity Council is working towards creating a diverse and supportive environment that upholds the values of Una Europa.

Purpose and scope of the toolkit

This toolkit emphasizes the importance of embedding diversity, equity and inclusion[1] in the curriculum, teaching methods and material, to create a more inclusive and equitable educational environment. A diversity toolkit is vital for fostering learning spaces that are welcoming and supportive, particularly for students from minoritized backgrounds and in vulnerable conditions. It equips the university community, teachers and training staff, researchers, and administrative staff to recognize and mitigate inequalities and lack of diverse representation, to enhance the quality of education by preparing students and supporting their well-being. This approach not only improves educational outcomes but also promotes a respectful and equitable academic space.

The toolkit aims to dismantle systemic barriers and promote equitable representation within educational materials. It encourages critical thinking about the construction and value of knowledge. The objective is that this toolkit would challenge systemic inequalities across various dimensions, such as acknowledging differences structured by social categories such as race, ethnicity, gender and LGBTQI+ identities, social class, ableism, people with disability and a specific support need, sexuality, religion, and age.

To achieve this, the curriculum should include materials that reflect a broad range of experiences and challenge dominant narratives and representations. Teaching methods should emphasize strategies for creating safe and inclusive environments, both in-person and online. Assessment approaches should be equitable, recognizing diversity, and providing fair opportunities for all students to succeed. Ultimately, this toolkit seeks to enhance representation and actively promote an intersectional approach, contributing to a more just and inclusive educational experience for everyone involved.

Who is this toolkit for?

The toolkit is designed for a diverse audience within the university community, including faculty members, teachers, trainers, researchers, and administrative staff. Its primary users will be those involved in teaching, training, or supporting educational initiatives, aiming to promote diversity, equity and inclusion in their roles.

This is not an exhaustive list, but it highlights key elements that contribute to more diverse and inclusive teaching methods and materials. The purpose is to provide direction and inspire critical thinking about these important matters. Often, amid the demands of busy schedules, such considerations can unintentionally be overlooked. By reflecting on these points, you can better integrate practices that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in teaching, ensuring a more enriching and representative learning environment for all students.

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[1] See the Diversity Council's definitions on diversity, equity and inclusion Engaging with Diversity in European Universities - The Diversity Council of Una Europa

Guidelines to incorporate diverse perspectives and materials

- **Representation of multiple voices and incorporating diverse perspectives.**
  Example: Ensure that the curriculum features authors, thinkers, and case studies from various backgrounds (race, gender, nationalities, person with disability and a specific support need, etc.)

- **Challenge dominant paradigms and perspectives within your discipline to critique biases.**
  Example: Think of the terms your discipline utilizes e.g. using developing vs. developed countries. Using terms like "third-world countries", "developing" and "developed" countries is problematic because it reinforces a simplistic and hierarchical worldview that implies all nations must follow the same path toward Western-style development. These labels obscure complex realities within nations, stigmatize "developing" countries by framing them as deficit, and ignore historical contexts like colonialism that have shaped global inequalities.
  Instead – Use Global South and Global North or it is even better to specify regional and socioeconomic contexts, e.g., low-income countries or economies in transition.

  Another example of problematic wording could be the use of the term normal. For example, normal way of behaviour in general or in class. This is problematic because it implies that anything outside of "normal" is undesirable and deficit. It also raises the question of who defines the norm and what criteria are used to determine what is considered normal.

- **Avoid using deficit-based language and actively challenge its presence in the curriculum.**
  Avoiding deficit-based language means reframing the discussions about minoritized people towards highlighting their strengths, contributions and agency rather than portraying them as people who lack something. A deficit-based language focuses on identifying the limitations of people or groups, instead of examining wider societal issues. **Example:** The table below offers a few examples; we encourage reflecting on additional examples that could be included:

Problematic term	Reason	Alternative
At risk students / Underprivileged students	Such terms place the burden on students rather that addressing systematic inequalities	students facing systematic barriers or students from minoritized communities and background
Low achieving students	This reinforces negative stereotypes about students, potentially leading to lowered expectations regarding their abilities. It also assumes that they are not putting in enough effort. Students from minoritized groups are particularly the ones to be affected by this misconception.	Students needing additional support or students working toward proficiency. This allows more space to acknowledge the context and background.
Disabled	Reduces ability and identity to a perceived limitation	Students with disabilities or students requiring additional support
Poor communities	It relates identity to economic status that perpetuates stereotypes especially if the community belongs to a minoritized group.	Communities experiencing economic hardship or challenges
Refugee crisis / flow of refugees	Frames refugees as a problem rather than focusing on systematic and political causes or effects	Forced displacement due to war/conflict/climate change

Non-native/native speakers	Centres a specific language as the norm and frames linguistic diversity as a deficit. It can also act as a barrier to opportunities even if the person speaks the language fluently.	Fluent speaker in [name of language] / multilingual / bilingual

- **Reflect on how white your curriculum is?[2]**
  This involves critically examining the content, perspectives, and voices that dominate educational materials to identify if they primarily centre on Eurocentric, white-dominant narratives while marginalizing or excluding others.
  Example: Review your curriculum to assess how Black, Indigenous, People of Colour (BIPOC) and minority groups are portrayed. Are they only presented in the context of oppression, marginalization, or conflict? Whose histories, knowledge systems, and contributions are prioritized or ignored?

  Regularly update and revise teaching materials to ensure they are responsive to current issues of inequalities and structural racism. By doing so, you demonstrate a commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion, and to recognizing the evolving experiences of students from diverse backgrounds.

  Example: Diversify the authors and scholars when assigning reading materials. Include BIPOC scholars from both within and outside Europe. This can be applied to various disciplines such as sociology, political science, educational sciences as well as scientific disciplines. Incorporate works, histories, and contributions from minoritized groups (e.g., racial minorities, people with disabilities, LGBTQ+ communities) into all subjects.

- **Effectively acknowledge structural racism in teaching materials that should go beyond surface-level mentions and critically engage with the systemic nature of racism in both historical and contemporary contexts.**
  Example: Address the realities of structural racism by clearly outlining how racism is embedded in institutions, laws, and social practices, rather than treating it as individual acts of prejudice and/or not mentioning it at all. Use examples from different sectors—such as education, healthcare, housing, and criminal justice—to demonstrate the pervasive nature of systemic inequality. This helps students who face racism see their experiences reflected in larger societal patterns, giving them a sense of belonging and being understood within an academic context.

- **Include Local and Global Case Studies.**
  Example: Use examples from students' own social contexts, such as local instances of racial inequality, alongside global ones. In an EU context, for example, case studies could focus on discrimination in labour markets or the racial profiling of migrants (or other examples depending on the discipline). This ensures that students from minoritized groups see the challenges they face represented as part of the curriculum.

- **Ensure that students actively engage in countering stereotypes while also learning from diverse perspectives.**
  Examples: Allow students to share their experiences and perspectives, fostering peer learning and empathy. Encourage students to work on projects that analyze issues related to diversity and propose solutions to inequalities in their communities.
  Encourage students to seek diverse disciplinary insights, enriching their knowledge with global and inclusive viewpoints.

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[2] Peters, M. A. (2015). Why is My Curriculum White? Educational Philosophy and Theory, 47(7), 641–646. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2015.1037227

Allow students to critically analyze stereotypes and identify biases in content. Ask: What changes would you like to see in the curriculum to better represent diverse identities?

Creating safer space & brave space strategies in classroom

Incorporating diverse perspectives and materials into education requires creating a safer and brave space where students feel supported in engaging with complex and sometimes uncomfortable topics. Creating a safer space is essential for critical discussion and to facilitate discussions that encourage students to reflect on and challenge critical topics.

A **safer space** fosters mutual respect, minimizing harm and exclusion. A safe space is an environment where individuals feel respected, psychologically safe, and comfortable to be themselves without fear of judgment or discomfort. While essential for fostering inclusion and emotional well-being, safe spaces may not always promote active learning or critical engagement, as they prioritize comfort over challenging conversations or growth.

While a **brave space**[3] encourages participants to step out of their comfort zones to confront biases, challenge inequities, and engage in meaningful dialogue. It also aims to meet the specific needs of people who face inequalities, racism, and discrimination with everyone responsible for upholding same values. These environments are crucial because they empower minoritized voices, ensure a sense of belonging, and enable critical reflection and growth. Without such spaces, efforts to diversify educational materials risk perpetuating tokenism or alienating participants, undermining the goal of fostering equity and inclusion.

Examples for creating a safer space environment in classroom:

Example 1:

- Creating a shared agreement. Depending on the group size, this can be done individually or in small groups on the first day. The idea is to allow each person or a group to share their thoughts on what creates a safer space and together compile these ideas in a collective agreement. This agreement can be displayed in the room as a visible reminder or revisited regularly. Encourage students to amend or add to the agreement as needed if new issues arise that may impact the feeling of safety of the space.
- In the final session of the course, revisit the safer space agreement for reflection and discussion. Encourage students to share whether the agreement was upheld, which parts may have been broken, and how the space can be improved into a safer space. This is also an opportunity to identify any additional considerations for creating a safer space in the future, ensuring that the lessons learned are applied also into other environments.
- Remind students that if they feel uncomfortable sharing certain incidents or feedback in the group setting, especially if the situation was sensitive or difficult, they can approach certain offices on campus that handle matters regarding discrimination and racism.

Example 2:

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[3] The term brave space was popularized by Brian Arao and Kristi Clemens (2013) in their chapter: from safe spaces to brave spaces: a new way to frame dialogue around diversity and social justice.

- If you are facilitating a one-day workshop/teaching session: Begin the session by distributing post-its to each student. Ask them to write down two points on one post-it about what makes them feel safe in a space, and on another post-it, what makes them feel unsafe. Give them a few minutes for reflection, then have them share their thoughts with the person next to them. Afterward, ask students to stick their post-its on the wall, grouping the "safe space" notes together and the "unsafe space" notes together. As the facilitator, take a few minutes to review the points and keep them in mind throughout the session, offering gentle reminders as needed throughout the session.

For classrooms that have a big number of students, you can still use a simple approach that is time-efficient and ensures the concept of safer spaces is introduced meaningfully, even in a large classroom. It sets the tone for respect and inclusivity without requiring extensive activities:

Example 3:

In a large classroom setting with around 100 students and limited time to cover the material, dedicate a few minutes at the beginning of the session to acknowledge the importance of creating a safer space. Briefly explain what a safer space entails and its significance in fostering respect and inclusivity. Share a single slide with practical examples to help students understand what it means in practice and how they can contribute to maintaining such an environment throughout the course. Here are some practical suggestions, you can choose to follow all of them or just a few:

- Briefly explain the importance of safer spaces (2-3 minutes).
- Share why safer spaces matter in a learning environment. For example:
  Feeling respected and valued in a classroom can enhance learning. A safer space means everyone feels they can share ideas without fear of judgment. It is not about avoiding challenges but creating a respectful and inclusive environment where we can grow together.
- Propose a simple guideline (2 minutes):
  Offer one clear and actionable classroom guideline, such as:
  One way we can contribute to a safer space is by listening actively when others speak. That means refraining from interruptions and being open to different perspectives.
- Ask for a quick show of hands or nods to agree on this as a shared goal for the class.
- Explain to your students what constitutes a non-safe space, emphasizing environments where people may feel excluded, silenced, or judged.

Even with the best intentions, it's possible to create an unsafe environment without realizing it. Here are common behaviours to be mindful of which you can share with your students. This is also a good reflection process for you:
- Silencing others. Dismissing or blocking someone's thoughts or contributions can make them feel unheard and excluded.
- Inappropriate jokes. Be cautious about humour, jokes can reinforce stereotypes or target sensitive issues, often without awareness of the harm they cause.
- Unconscious judgment. Passing judgment, even unintentionally or unconsciously, can make people feel scrutinized or devalued.
- Reinforcing cultural norms. Referring to certain practices or behaviours as "normal" upholds cultural hegemony and reinforces dominant power structures, that marginalizes those who don't fit the mold.
- Making assumptions. Be aware of assumptions based on race, gender, culture, or background. Assumptions, no matter how subtle, can perpetuate bias and exclusion.
- Taking up space. When only a few students regularly engage in discussions, it can discourage quieter or minoritized participants from sharing their perspectives. This leads to a less diverse exchange of ideas, and some viewpoints may never surface, limiting the learning experience for everyone.
- Being conscious of how often you speak can help create a more balanced and inclusive environment. You can practice this by:

- o   Pausing after making a point to invite others to contribute.
  - o   Encouraging quieter students by directly asking for their input in a supportive way.
  - o   Being open to different communication styles, including those who might take more time to reflect before speaking.
  - o   Facilitators can also help by actively ensuring a range of voices are heard. This could include rotating who gets to speak first, using small group activities to encourage more participation, or setting guidelines that remind everyone to be aware of how much space they are taking up.
- Be mindful and recognize emotional labour and that discussions on racism can be emotionally heavy, especially for students from minoritized groups. Be mindful of this and offer support, whether through classroom policies, content warnings, or creating spaces for reflection, so that students who face racism and discrimination feel seen and respected without being burdened by the responsibility of educating others.

Support and Adaptation guidelines for Inclusive Academic Achievement and Well-Being

In addition to the earlier mentioned points, the goal is to ensure equal opportunities by identifying and designing the types of support and adaptations to teaching activities needed to each student with disabilities, specific learning abilities, or who find themselves in situations of personal distress, so that they may perform successfully in their studies as well as in their academic life.

The support should be based on some general principle such as:

- Continuity: access, information and mediation should be guaranteed on a regular basis.
- Participation: active involvement of students in defining the offered help and monitoring its quality.
- Autonomy: promoting as much as possible the autonomy of students both in activities related to their education and in the academic life.
- Customization: the help should be personalised according to each student's personal needs and characteristics.
- Before taking any personal initiatives, check with the appointed offices for professional advice and recommendation to ensure the best possible help.

Students with disabilities or specific support needs have the right to receive special accommodations for exams, as well as support to encourage their participation and inclusion in university life. Several in course supports can be considered to help a student access their studies:

- **Flexibility with assignment deadlines:**
  For the upcoming assessment, students may benefit from greater flexibility regarding assignment deadlines. This consideration would support students needing additional time to complete certain aspects of in-course assessments and examinations, particularly in cases of ill health or other extenuating circumstances.

- **Advance access to lecture notes/slides:**
  Providing lecture notes or slides in advance, especially when they are not readily available on Canvas/Moodle/Teams, can greatly benefit students. Early access allows them to better prepare for and

engage with the material in class, particularly if their focus or concentration is affected by an impairment or condition.

- **Permission to record lectures and tutorials**:
  For students whose ability to take notes or absorb information is affected, recording lectures can be an essential tool for capturing key information. Students are reminded that all recordings remain the property of the university and are strictly for personal use. Failure to comply with these conditions may result in disciplinary action under the University's conduct regulations. In instances where recording is inappropriate—such as when personal or sensitive information is discussed—teaching staff/teachers will coordinate with recording students to agree upon suitable alternative accommodations.

- **Consideration for handwriting:**
  In cases where a student has an injury or condition affecting their arm or hand, marking accommodations may be necessary to account for challenges with handwriting.
- On the other hand, the university is committed to upholding examination procedures that effectively assess students' knowledge and abilities while maintaining academic standards. To support students with impairments or specific support needs, a range of special examination accommodations and supports should be available, tailored to meet individual requirements and ensure fair assessment conditions.

- **Rest breaks – up to 15 minutes per hour:**
  Supervised rest breaks of up to 15 minutes per hour may be provided as needed. These breaks can support students requiring time for pain management, medical treatment, or other health needs during an examination. Additionally, students experiencing symptoms of anxiety, even if not formally diagnosed, may benefit from rest breaks to help manage their well-being and focus.

- **Extra exam time – typically 25%:**
  Additional exam time, generally up to 25%, may be granted based on individual needs. Students may require extra time due to conditions that lead to fatigue, limited strength, reduced mobility, or impaired dexterity. This support may also benefit students whose concentration or attention may be affected by pain, or by mental health challenges, even if not formally diagnosed.

- **Change of venue (individual room/smaller room):**
  Some students may require an alternative examination venue due to injury or impairment. A change of venue can also be arranged to facilitate accommodation such as extra time or supervised rest breaks, using designated spaces.

- **Use of PC/Laptop:**
  For students with injuries/disabilities affecting their ability to write, using a PC or laptop may be the most effective way to complete an examination.

- **Proximity to bathroom facilities**:
  Some students may need access to a restroom close to the exam venue, depending on their condition.

- **Ergonomic supports:**
  To ensure comfort and accessibility, some students may require additional ergonomic supports in the exam venue, such as: specialist desk; footstool; back support; writing slope; document holder; specialist chair. Providing appropriate furniture can make the venue more comfortable and accommodating for all candidates, particularly those with specific needs due to injury or medical conditions.

Further Reading

Guide to Gender-Responsive Learning Material Development:
https://oasis.col.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/5ef92af3-fab6-416f-86ae-3db42065c0bb/content

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Guez, A., Ketan & Piacentini, M. (2024). Mapping Study for the Integration of Accommodations for Students with Special Education Needs (SEN) in PISA OECD. Education Working Paper No. 308.

Mamboleo G, Meyer L, Georgieva Z, Curtis R, Dong S, Stender LM. (2015). Students with Disabilities' Self-Report on Perceptions toward Disclosing Disability and Faculty's Willingness to Provide Accommodations. Rehabil Couns Educ 8(2):8-19.

Romme Ministerial Communiqué (2020). EHREA2020. Rome_Ministerial_Communique.pdf

Toutain, C. (2019). Barriers to Accommodations for Students with Disabilities in Higher Education: A Literature Review. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability*, 32(3); 297-310 297

United Nations (2026). Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) | Division for Inclusive Social Development (DISD).

Weis R, Waters EA and Hassler M (2022) Assessing academic impairment in college students with disabilities: A new measure to promote evidence-based accommodation granting. *Front. Educ.* 7:1014693. doi: 10.3389/feduc.2022.1014693

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1. W3C Recommendation 12 December 2024. https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG21/

This toolkit focused on diversity and inclusion in teaching and for a classroom setting. Please visit the Una Europa Diversity Council website for other toolkits.