

USING A TOOL TO SUPPORT INCLUSIVE TEACHING

[The form helps instructors by][b]eing more aware of the population of students they are teaching any how to better implement class content based on this. It allowed my professor to get to know me, and it may make students feel more comfortable going to that professor for help during office hours or even in class. I liked it because it made me feel like my professor knew me for me and not just as another number.

—Student feedback on “Who’s in Class?” form

By now we hope you have a sense of what inclusive instructors do with regard to designing their course syllabi, fostering a welcoming learning environment, and choosing which teaching approaches to implement. In this chapter we describe the “Who’s in Class?” form, a tool that can support inclusive instructors in designing equitable courses (see Figure 6.1). In our experience the majority of students have appreciated when their instructors implement the form, and the instrument serves as an excellent starting point for instructors teaching for the first time or those who have been teaching for many years, as information pertains to the students in each unique class.

As touched on in various parts of the book, starting in chapter 1, inclusive instructors recognize the critical importance of understanding who their learners are with regard to the social identities, equity and inclusion challenges, perspectives, and other attributes that they bring to the course. A major initial challenge that inclusive instructors face in learning these aspects about their students is that diversity can be both visible and invisible, and they do not want to make assumptions about their learners. To address this concern, they provide opportunities for students to share their diverse attributes. The “Who’s in Class?” form is such a tool that provides a venue for students to voluntarily and anonymously describe aspects about themselves that can impact how they learn in a course.

Figure 6.1. The “Who’s in Class?” form.

This form gives you the opportunity to share aspects of your social identity and other attributes that can help your instructor know how to better support overall learning in this course. Please be aware that you are *not* obligated to complete this form. The information collected will be aggregated, held anonymous, and used to help foster an inclusive and equitable classroom.

Course name: _____

Instructor’s last name: _____

Semester (e.g., Spring 2025): _____

Please answer the questions that follow. As a reminder, you are not obligated to answer any of the questions. The goal of this questionnaire is to help me understand who is in class so that I can support your success.

Section I. Select all that apply.

Y N

- I work on or off campus. The number of hours that I work per week is _____.
- I play on a varsity athletics team at this institution.
- I live off campus. My commute time is _____.
- I am over 25 years of age.
- I am on active duty or a veteran.

Section II. Select all that apply.

Y N

- I have a mobile device with Wi-Fi capability.
- I have a laptop or desktop computer that I can use for classwork.
- I am financially capable of purchasing all of the materials needed for this class (e.g., textbooks) without hardship.
- I am Pell eligible, meaning that my family income level allows me to qualify for federal Pell grants.
- I receive other forms of financial aid in significant amounts.

(continues)

Figure 6.1. (continued)**Section III. Select all that apply.**

Y N

- I have a disability, either invisible or visible. Here is more information that I would like to share about my disability: _____
- Other health concerns that I would like to share are _____.
- I am a “quiet” student, meaning that I reenergize from having time alone.
- I engage in religious or spiritual practices that may impact my ability to attend class. More specifically, I would like to share _____.
- I engage in religious or spiritual practices that may impact my performance in class. More specifically, I would like to share _____
- I have dependents I take care of outside of school.
- My preference for class assignments is to complete them by typing rather than handwriting.
- Other factors that may impact my experiences in this class are _____
_____.

Section IV. Select all that apply.

Y N

- I am a first-generation student (i.e., neither of my parents obtained a bachelor’s degree at a 4-year institution).
- One of my parents obtained a bachelor’s degree at a 4-year institution.
- Both of my parents obtained a bachelor’s degree at a 4-year institution.
- I have a sibling who has or is currently attending a 4-year institution.

Section V. Answer the questions that follow.

My racial/ethnic background is _____.

My gender identity is _____.

My sexuality is _____.

The pronouns I use are _____.

My nationality/country of origin is _____.

English is not my first language. My proficiency level is (e.g., beginning/intermediate/advanced for listening/speaking/writing/reading) _____.

(continues)

Figure 6.1. (continued)

Section VI. Additional social identities or personal attributes that are not included in the previous sections that I would like to share are as follows:

Section VII. Personal connections with the material that relate to my social identity or other personal attributes that I would like to share are as follows:

Section VIII. My expectations for inclusivity (an equitable, welcoming environment) in this course are as follows:

Tool Design

In the first phase of designing the tool, our research team, consisting of faculty as well as an educational developer, considered attributes related to equity and inclusion that can implicate students' ability to meet the learning outcomes of a course. We deliberated on the content and drafted a preliminary version of the tool. In the next phase, the team invited feedback from students, including those selected as peer advocates in an organization focused on social justice and diversity, equity, and inclusion, as well as staff in multicultural affairs offices and faculty. We used this next round of



feedback to further refine the tool. We next invited instructors to use the tool in various types of courses using particular guidelines, as indicated later in this chapter. Because this was part of a research investigation, institutional research approval was sought and the project considered exempt. The tool is designed for instructors who have a baseline understanding and appreciation for major principles in inclusive teaching, such as bias awareness, stereotype threat, and microaggressions, and seek to be more inclusive in their instruction. We recommend that before using this tool all instructors undergo such professional development so as not to reinforce bias.

Implementing the Tool

The “Who’s in Class?” form was initially administered in a survey software platform with controls set to anonymous and a link distributed to the instructor for administration in their course. The data were only provided to instructors in aggregate to minimize the chances of identifying students. The instructor was given a link to the report with the data that allowed them to monitor student responses in real time.

Instructors were asked to administer the form through correspondence to students in the first week of classes. They were welcome to send the initial correspondence prior to the start of classes and were asked to send at least one reminder email. The instructors were to indicate that the instrument was nonmandatory and anonymous and to explain the rationale behind why they were using it. Based on our experience, this worked fairly well, and we have further recommendations for usage. We encourage multiple modes for disseminating the invitation to complete the form through email and a LMS as well as allowing class time for explanation and completion of the form, if possible.

Interpreting Student Responses and Making Changes

As the information from this form is relevant to, and intended to enhance, the particular offering of the course it is implemented in, it is important that the analysis of its results occur early in the course timeline. At the end of the first week the instructors were encouraged to reflect on how they would make changes in their course based on their students’ responses. This discovery process proved to be a welcome new challenge for them. They created an action plan and met with staff from the center for teaching and learning to discuss the changes they would make to their courses given their newfound learning of the attributes their diverse learners bring to the course.

Feedback and Reflections During the Semester

Instructors were encouraged to explicitly let students know the changes they made to the course based on feedback received without revealing any information not appropriate to share with the class. Otherwise, students may not have been aware that there were changes made due to these factors to be inclusive of all learners. While teaching the course instructors were also encouraged to keep a digital or physical journal and record their perceptions of the impact of their inclusive teaching approaches on student learning. They were also encouraged to ask students for midsemester feedback using open-ended questions, similar to those described in chapter 4.

Case Applications

Following are scenarios that instructors may encounter in their classes after administering the form and examples of small modifications they can make in their course syllabi and teaching practices to foster inclusion. Please note that for simplicity, in many of the scenarios only one factor implicated is presented, but any combination of factors is more likely, given the intersecting identities and other attributes that diverse students bring to their classes. After the findings are introduced for a particular example, reflect on the changes you would make if presented with the scenario as the instructor of record and afterward review some sample actions.

Financial Hardship

Findings: There are students in the course who cannot easily purchase required materials and who are Pell eligible and recipients of financial aid. There are also students who do not have laptops. The instructor teaches a STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) course with a high-cost textbook that is a useful learning resource to help students meet their course objectives.

Modifications: Because there are students facing financial hardship, the instructor carefully brainstorms what they can do to make the course materials more accessible to all students. The instructor has a few copies of the textbook in their office. They decide to place them on reserve in the library and let the students know so that they can check them out. The instructor makes a long-term plan to investigate the use of an open access textbook. Because laptops are not required by all students at the institution, the instructor also ensures that any student-centered learning activities do not require all students to bring a laptop to class.



Learning Accommodations

Findings: An instructor discovers that a few students in the class have a fairly common learning accommodation that allows them to have extra time on assessments in a distraction-reduced environment. This information was actually obtained from the Office of Accessibility Services and confirmed on the “Who’s in Class?” form.

Modifications: The instructor ensures that there is ample time for the students to take all assessments with the amount of time needed. Additionally, the instructor decides to make one test a take-home exam to give students flexibility in completion. This take-home assessment is designed to still test conceptual understanding in a fair manner.

Cocurricular Involvement and Obligations

Findings: An instructor discovers that they have a large number of student athletes in a course who have time conflicts with office hours during certain times of the day because of practice or games.

Modifications: The instructor alters the office hours by extending time so that student athletes have the most likelihood of being able to attend. Additionally, the instructor, knowing students are parts of sports teams, applies various course concepts to a number of areas, including sports. At the institution there are also tutoring services for athletes and nonathletes for which the instructor makes the class aware. Lastly, for a final ethnography course project the instructor gives students the choice of which questions they can ask and the location where they can make their observations, as consistent with UDL. Some student athletes choose to make observations in their sports settings.

First-Generation Students

Findings: Based on the “Who’s in Class?” form, there are several first-generation students in a large enrollment course. Many of the students responding, in addition to not having a parent obtain a bachelor’s degree, also did not have siblings or other relatives.

Modifications: At the beginning of the course the instructor shares how they were a first-generation student and what they did to navigate through college. To build a welcoming classroom environment the instructor also invites previous students, some of whom are first-generation students,



on what they did to help them be successful in the course. The instructor ensures that all information on the course is explicitly explained and decides to provide even more opportunities for low-stakes assessments for students to be able to practice course quizzes and assessments. On the syllabus and verbally the instructor shares all resources available for first-generation students and all learners to support their academic success on campus.

Diverse Countries of Origin and English-Language Learners

Findings: The “Who’s in Class?” form reveals that there are students from diverse countries of origin in an online class. There are also several students whose native language is not English.

Modifications: After carefully reviewing the syllabus, the instructor decides to incorporate culturally responsive materials in the content of the course. The instructor also uses principles of UDL to give students the choice to apply class projects to their own cultures. The instructor ensures that there is closed captioning for all microlecture recordings so that all students can have a visual representation rather than only verbal representation.

Learners Who Self-Identify as Being Quiet

Findings: For a face-to-face discussion-based course, the instructor discovers that many students identify as being quiet students. The course topics at times can also be controversial.

Modifications: The instructor wants to ensure that quiet students find their voice in the classroom and carefully redefines what participation in the course means. The instructor decides to also give students the option to post to an online discussion board where quieter students may be more likely to contribute to give multiple options. The instructor also decides to use ample wait-time after asking questions, employs activities such as think-pair-share periodically to allow for active learning, in addition to smaller-scale interactions, has students respond in writing to prompts rather than verbally, and uses polling software that enables equitable participation.

Religious Observances

Findings: There are several students in the course who have religious observances that conflict with course activities and assessments.



Modifications: The institution has a nondiscrimination policy around students with religious observances. They are to let their instructor know of their conflicts within the first 2 weeks of the semester. In anticipation of this, the instructor carefully designed the course syllabus so that major assignments do not conflict with major religious observances. The instructor also tells the class that if any students do have a conflict due to a religious observance to let them know in advance. This policy is listed on the course syllabus. For these students, the instructor allows some flexibility in due dates and course obligations so that students can meet the learning goals of the course.

Learners From Groups Underrepresented in the Discipline

Findings: An instructor teaching in a discipline where there is underrepresentation of various racial and ethnic groups finds that there are a number of students with such social identities in their class.

Modifications: The instructor views this diversity as an asset and the scenario as a perfect opportunity to help all learners feel welcome in the discipline. The instructor implements a values affirmation exercise for learners before assessments and affirms the identities of these students on a personal level, as well as validates their lived experiences, to minimize stereotype threat. The instructor also integrates a variety of examples of those who contribute to the field and are of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Learners Identifying as LGBTQ+

Findings: Some students completing the “Who’s in Class?” form identified as LGBTQ+.

Modifications: The instructor, out of a genuine desire to support all learners, completed Safe Zone training. During the course the instructor affirmed the identities of all students, including those who were LGBTQ+. They respectfully used pronouns and also carefully integrated readings in the curriculum from diverse authors, including those that identified as LGBTQ+.

Learners With Seemingly Similar Backgrounds

Findings: When an instructor implements the “Who’s in Class?” form they find that those students who respond do not exhibit a lot of noticeable variation in sections I through V of the instrument. Most students

fall in major demographic group categories of privilege. Minimal information is provided in the open-ended questions of the form as well.

Modifications: The instructor decides to follow-up on the form on students' course-specific prior knowledge, conducts a few formative assessments, and finds significant variation. To benefit all students, and particularly those with limited prior experience with the material, the instructor posts a variety of tutorials and activities on foundational material on the LMS that students can freely review at any point. The instructor also integrates a variety of readings from diverse authors, fields, and perspectives in the course.

Additional Recommendations

Instructors Can Tailor the Form

There may be additional items you may want to know about your students. Instructors can therefore add questions and tailor the form accordingly.

Instructors Are Encouraged to Use Other Means to Better Understand the Attributes Learners Bring to the Course

The “Who’s in Class?” form is one tool to help instructors design more inclusive instruction, but it need not be the only one. Inclusive instructors can also use additional feedback mechanisms, such as assessing prior knowledge, as illustrated in the previous example focused on learners with seemingly similar backgrounds or, as discussed in chapter 4, essential office hours. Typically information regarding accommodations will be provided by accessibility services; however, some students may choose not to disclose disabilities through formal institutional procedures and only mention them on the form anonymously.

Instructors Should Delete Student Response Data After the Course Ends

Student responses, though anonymous, should be used during the course solely for the purposes of the instructor designing an inclusive learning experience. Also, the tool was not meant for instructors to store student responses for the long term, but rather delete them at the conclusion of the course.

Reflection Questions

- How could you utilize or adapt this tool for courses that you teach?
- With whom could you partner as you administer the tool to discuss your action plans and obtain feedback?



Key Points

- Understanding the diverse attributes that students bring to the classroom is critical for inclusive course design and implementation of inclusive teaching approaches.
- By adapting and administering a tool such as the “Who’s in Class?” form early on in a course, instructors can have a better sense of such attributes and tailor instruction to ensure that it is equitable and fosters a sense of belonging.

