

# DEI in Online Learning

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## *Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Related Considerations*

Faculty and students face dramatically altered learning environments today as a result of the global pandemic. Compounding the sudden shift to using online technologies are significant differences in students' (and instructors') realities. In addition to vast differences in access to technology, there may be other significant stressors:

- Job losses and financial strain, with implications for housing and food security
  - Increased care responsibilities for children, parents or other family members and friends
  - Poor quality workspace
  - Changed rules governing travel, access to materials and supplies, and links with classmates, mentors, or healthcare professionals
  - Increased anxiety, sadness or traumatization
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## *Tips for Inclusion*

There are concrete ways to help meet students where they are today, facilitating their continued learning and access to courses. The following are strategies to help 'level the playing field' in challenging times.

1. Online learning offers two learning formats: [synchronous](#), and [asynchronous](#). Synchronous learning requires that students participate in course activities simultaneously in real time, such as lectures or presentations. Asynchronous learning allows for students to complete certain tasks within a set amount of time, such as posting an analysis or summary to an online discussion board. Use asynchronous learning approaches to enable students with different needs (because of language differences, time zone differences, or connectivity differences) more equal access and greater potential to learn.



2. Privately ask students about their level of access to technology, and use the results of this survey to inform the technology choices for your courses, and the lens through which you think about individual student needs.
3. Be aware of time zone differences. Students who have returned to distant homes may face greater challenges attending regularly scheduled classes.
4. Make sure to record and post lectures; it will help students in different time zones, and non-native English speakers.
5. Ensure materials are accessible and mobile-friendly.
  - a. PDFs are generally more accessible for students with disabilities who may rely on screen-readers, but may also [prevent](#) students from interacting with the text as easily.
6. Provide guidance about working remotely, including communication tools and protocols, and guard against [cyberattacks](#).
7. Design online learning environments that are inclusive of students with disabilities. Consider the challenges of online learning for these students. How will you ensure their full inclusion? When and how will you communicate with students about their accommodation needs?
8. Consider whether video is necessary in all cases, given how streaming videos require strong internet connections, and how they can deplete data plans and memory on students' (and your!) devices.
9. Record lectures so they can be downloaded and viewed by students later.
10. While technology is sometimes seen as “the solution”, it may not be the best solution. Consider simpler formats, such as emailing or discussion board posting in place of certain assignments, and offer a wider spectrum of students easier (or less expensive) access?
11. Provide transcripts and [captions of audio and video](#). This benefits not only students who are deaf or hard-of-hearing, but those who are participating in classes in noisy locations, those who don't have headphones, and those who might have English as their second language.
12. Use the chat and “hand raising” function online; it will help enable students who are less comfortable jumping into conversation the chance to participate.
13. Allow students to provide written contributions to discussion; it will ensure students who aren't comfortable with (or don't have access to) technology the chance to participate.



14. If you anticipate students may need materials from the campus bookstore, inquire as to whether the bookstore will ship materials off-campus to students. Also, note that many libraries have taken down paywalls during this crisis, increasing material availability online.
  15. Express empathy and encourage one-on-one communication with you, both for students to explain challenges and for them to express concerns.
  16. Allow flexibility in course planning, be transparent with students, and expect that mistakes and hiccups will happen!
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## *Sources*

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