

Blue Ribbon Inclusive Teaching Task Force Report

On February 28, 2023, the Faculty Senate approved the formation of the Blue Ribbon Inclusive Teaching Task Force with the following charge:

The Inclusive Teaching Blue Ribbon Task Force will evaluate and recommend best practices for promoting an inclusive learning environment so that all students at William Paterson University have equal access to a high-quality education, regardless of their background or identity. This includes but is not limited to, examining existing policies and procedures, researching innovative approaches, and engaging with students, faculty, and staff to identify areas for improvement. The Task Force's goal is to produce recommendations that can be implemented across campus.

Task Force Members:

- Lydia Albuquerque (Nursing)
- Wendy Christensen (Sociology, Criminal Justice, and Social Work)
- Matt Crick (Communication)
- Neil Grimes (Cheng Library)
- Elizabeth Harkins (Special Education, Professional Counseling, and Disability Studies)
- O'Mari Lockhart (Academic Advisement)
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- Miranda Van Dunk (Speech Language Pathology)
- Lawrence Verzani (Economics, Finance and Global Business)
- Danielle Wallace (Community and Social Justice Studies)

The Task Force began by assessing how other institutions communicate their core teaching values to their communities (faculty, students, and the public). We considered the findings of the COVID-19 Impact Task Force, as well as the variety of teaching modalities offered at William Paterson University. We decided to focus our recommendations on the key areas of Course Design, Accessibility, Classroom Community, Student Engagement and Learning, and Assessment.

I: Course Design

Summary:

- Go where your students are - consider what background, experience, and expectations they bring to the class.
- Research the common characteristics WP students share, i.e., our students typically work more than 20 hours a week.
- In your course outline and syllabus, set clear and reasonable expectations based on the current teaching and learning environment at WP, not how it was for you as a student.
- Ensure that SLOs and Course Objectives match
- Don't overload the course with too many SLOs and Course Objectives—not everything can be taught.
- Use the Navigate notification system; it often works.
- Develop clear assessments and review assignments in class.
- Be flexible...to a point.

1. Meet your students where they are. Consider their backgrounds, experiences, and the expectations they bring to the class.
2. Become familiar with the common characteristics WP students share, i.e., our students typically work more than 20 hours a week.
3. In your course outline and syllabus, set clear and reasonable expectations based on the current teaching and learning environment at WP, not how it was for you as a student.
4. Ensure that Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) and Course Objectives match.
5. Develop your course around team exercises and team building. This is especially important with Freshmen and Sophomores.
6. Develop in-class exercises that meet specific learning goals and state the goals in the assignment. But not everything needs to be graded.
7. Do not overload the course with too many SLOs and Course Objectives. Not everything can be taught.
8. Encourage independent thinking and effort within parameters appropriate to your discipline and career.
9. During the course use the Navigate notification system to alert the student's success team that they need assistance.

10. Develop clear assessments and review assignments in class.
11. Be flexible...to a point.
12. Carefully weave discussions about careers and *life after college* into your daily messaging. Students often need to see how what they're doing in class connects with a career or life benefit in a very explicit and powerful way.
13. [Work toward decolonizing your syllabus.](#)

II: Accessibility

Summary:

- Accessibility is a way to:
 - Provide students (including those with disclosed or nondisclosed disabilities) with equitable access to course instruction, materials, and evaluations.
 - “Level the playing field” by reducing/eliminating barriers caused by the interaction between a student’s learning and the learning environment.
- Accommodations are multi-faceted (i.e., physical, sensory, cognitive, academic, etc.).
- Five ways faculty can enhance the academic and cognitive accessibility of their course:
 - Accessibility Statements on Syllabus
 - Choosing or Creating Accessible Course Material
 - Virtual considerations
 - Testing Accommodations
 - Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

Accessibility considerations increase comprehension and retention for all students, not just for students who are disabled. Accommodations should be reasonable; if they are done with integrity, they do not alter the requirements of a course or program. They do not guarantee student success and nor do they provide an unfair advantage.

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1. Provide students (including those with disclosed or nondisclosed disabilities) with equitable access to course instruction, materials, and evaluations.

2. “Level the playing field” by reducing/eliminating barriers caused by the interaction between a student’s learning and the learning environment.

Accommodations are multi-faceted:

- Physical
- Sensory
- Cognitive
- Academic

There are several proactive steps faculty can incorporate into their course design that can enhance the accessibility of their course.

Accessibility Statements on Syllabus

Course syllabi should contain information regarding the accommodation process. This is an opportunity to set the tone for how you view accessibility in your course. Questions to consider: *Is accessibility simply a requirement that must be checked off? Is accessibility a priority that reflects your willingness to work with students to ensure they can fully participate in your course?*

Example Statements:

Accessibility Statement that is Compliant:

If you are a student with a disability, or think you may have a disability, and need accommodations please contact The Accessibility Resource Center. You may refer to the ARC’s website for contact and more information: [Accessibility Resource Center](#). If you are already registered with ARC, please deliver your Accommodation Letter to me as early as possible in the semester so we can discuss your approved accommodations.

Accessibility Statement that is Inclusive and Equitable:

Anyone who anticipates they may encounter exclusionary barriers related to the format, materials, or requirements of this course please meet with me to explore potential options. I am open to creative solutions if the objectives of the assessments or course activities are not compromised. Individuals who identify as having a disability may also opt to collaborate with the [Accessibility Resource Center](#) to discuss a range of accommodations to address any barriers in this course. If accommodations have already been extended to you, I am eager to meet with you so that, together, we can co-create a plan that leverages your strengths while supporting your needs.

General Guidelines

- Accommodations are not required to be applied retroactively, although that is something you could consider.
- Contact the person listed in the Accommodation Letter if you have questions about a student’s accommodations.

- Discuss this statement during class; use it as an opportunity to encourage students to work with you to ensure your course is accessible to them.
- Offer to talk with the student further after receiving an Accommodation Letter.
- Syllabi statements cannot
 - include a deadline for students to submit Accommodation Letters. Accommodations can be implemented at any point during a semester.
 - state they do not apply to the course or that they will not be provided.

Choosing or Creating Accessible Course Material:

Videos: If you use video or video clips as part of your class, add captions proactively.

Textbooks/ Course Readings

- **Alternate Formats:** Printed materials (e.g., e-text, audiobooks).
 - If possible, select one with an accompanying study guide.
 - Record and post lectures with transcriptions.
 - Use original copies or copies that are “clean”. Generational copies (copies made from copies) may cause fuzziness that makes it impossible for software to read.
 - **Voice output software:** Some students will rely on scanning and listening to printed material. *Pending the format, conversion can take up to several weeks.*
- **Captions:** Image descriptions (i.e., alt text that describes the image and its purpose). A screen reader reads aloud this description.
 - Add information that gives context. *Don't write something in the alt text that a user can't learn from seeing the image or reading the caption or title. Don't repeat the information already provided.*
- **Mobile-friendly materials:** Save files in two formats, e.g., its original format and a PDF. *The original file format often has application features that are helpful for accessibility software. PDFs are easier to read on phones and tablets and keep the file size small.*
 - To create original documents: [Accessible content with Microsoft 365](#).
- **Open Educational Resources (OERs):** Open Educational Resources (OERs) are any type of educational materials (textbooks, curricula, syllabi, lecture notes, assignments, tests, projects, audio, video, and animation) that are in public domain or with an open license. *Anyone can legally and freely copy, use, adapt, and re-share them.*
- **Screen readers standards:** For documents, images, and links.

- **Timeliness of course material:** Early access to your syllabus can help determine accessibility needs.

Virtual considerations:

- **Increase interaction via collaboration tools:** Sometimes classes require direct student interaction; consider ways to replicate that or create virtual interactive opportunities.
- **Provide raw data for analysis:** Consider showing how data can be collected and provide raw sets of data for example analysis. *This approach is not as comprehensive as having students collect and analyze their own data, but a supplementary activity.*
- **Take part of the lab or class online:** Many activities require students to learn through physical practice but consider ways to go online (e.g., video demonstrations, online simulations, other pre- or post-lab work).
 - **Investigate virtual tools:** Online resources can replicate some classroom or lab experiences (e.g., virtual dissection, night sky apps, video demonstrations, simulations). These vary widely by discipline. Check with textbook publishers or sites such as [Merlot](#).

Zoom: Allows hosts and participants to see each other, share screens, chat, use a whiteboard, and record.

- **Audio Transcription:** Zoom provides for free! *It only supports English.*
- **Breakout Rooms:** Be mindful of accommodations. Students with live captioning and sign language interpreters will need to be assigned the same rooms.
- **Chat:** Read chat comments aloud so all participants, including those calling in, can be included.
 - Assistive technology allows participation in chats, but some links may not be accessible.
 - Send links from the chat by email to all students before or after the meeting.
 - Save the chat after the meeting; share how and when it will be available.
- **Muting students:** Muting video and allowing audio alone will not allow D/deaf and hard of hearing students to actively participate.
 - Do not force mute audio. *This feature blocks the D/deaf and hard of hearing students from being able to pin the interpreters.*
 - If you choose to mute participants' videos, interpreters will need to be designated co-host status so they can remain on screen.
- **Polls:** Zoom polls can be anonymous but are not accessible to screen readers, so you might use [PollEverywhere](#)
 - Notify students verbally before starting a poll.
 - Allow enough time. *It may take additional time to access the poll for some students.*

- Be aware of limitations, e.g., students who call in will not be able to use the feature.
- **Screen Sharing:** Read aloud what is on the screen when going over course material, media, or using the whiteboard.

General Zoom Tips:

- [How-to videos, Zoom for Education](#)
- Allow ample time and be respectful of any challenges. *It may take some students longer to participate (e.g., un-muting, participating in polls, etc.).*
- Don't require students to turn on their cameras. *This can create a barrier to participation (anxiety, verbal processing, connectivity challenges, etc.).*
- If you are using other types of technology during class, ensure it is accessible with audio and visual access.
- Plan for access in advance.
- Post materials before or after class for students to review.
- Provide information on where recordings are located and how long they will be available.
- Think through access needs outside of synchronous lectures and discussions. *Group projects, labs, tutoring, office hours, and time to practice presentations require access.*
- Use **Spotlight Speaker** to limit distractions during class/recordings. You can set up to nine speakers.
- Use **Show/Hide Non-video Participants** if students are not comfortable being recorded. *This hides participants' name or profile picture on the Zoom display if their video is off.*

Testing Accommodations

Sometimes formal testing accommodations are required. In this case:

- Accommodations are approved after submitting documentation of their disability and meeting with the Accessibility Resource Center.
- Approved accommodations are listed in the Accommodation Letter, available through [Accessible Learning at WPUNJ](#).
- Instructors are required to implement the accommodations.
- Instructors should discuss testing accommodations and how they will be provided.

Other times testing accommodations are put in place to ensure a student can accurately demonstrate their knowledge of what they are being tested on. These address barriers to any student's ability to show what they know. Ask yourself: *What is the objective of the assessment? Is it to test their ability to decode or process information quickly, or is it their ability to understand the material provided?*

General Testing Tips

- Consider flexible assessment formats (beyond traditional tests and papers, e.g., videos, presentations, posters).
- Consider “no risk” content accommodations for everyone, e.g., simple calculators, scratch paper, open resources, notes, if you are not measuring a student’s mastery of basic skills. Ask yourself: *Are you expecting students to memorize key terms, or can you provide them? Is memorization necessary in the ‘real world’ according to your discipline?*
- Consider “no risk” environmental accommodations for everyone, e.g., extra time, speech-to-text, word prediction, screen-reading technology.
- Share the connection between course content, activities, assignments and assessments, and learning outcomes, specifically what students are doing, why they’re doing it, and how these will help them learn and grow. Revisit these outcomes on a regular basis.
- Supply students with study questions that demonstrate the format as well as the content of the test. Explain what constitutes a good answer and why.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL): An evidence-based framework to improve and optimize teaching and learning for all people. There are three [UDL principles](#), according to [CAST](#).

General UDL Teaching Tips

- Break complex activities and assignments into small, manageable steps.
- Clearly outline expectations at the beginning of the course (e.g., grading, material to be covered, assignment due dates, attendance expectations).
- Give assignments orally and in written form.
- Make implicit expectations explicit.
 - Scaffold or model how to successfully participate in an activity or complete an assignment, e.g., model how to analyze an article or break down an essay into manageable steps.
 - Give students time to practice this in class with your guidance prior to them doing it independently.
- Present new or technical vocabulary on a large screen and a handout. Provide examples.
- Provide adequate opportunities for questions and answers, including review sessions.
- Record lectures for later review.
- Start and end each lecture with an outline of material [to be] covered.
- Take short breaks, pending the length of the class.

III: Classroom Community

Summary:

1. All students benefit from inclusive, culturally, and ethnically diverse curricula.
2. Co-create a positive learning community where students can thrive:
 - a) Develop classroom rules together.
 - b) Assign tasks to encourage students to get to know one another.
 - c) Build rapport by learning names and pronouns.
3. Maintain a positive classroom environment by taking responsibility to address challenging classroom moments.
4. Inclusive online learning relies on a number of factors that correlate positively to a sense of community.
 - a) Create virtual spaces for formal and informal interactions.
 - b) Break students into smaller communities of practice.
5. Sharing aspects of who you are as a person is beneficial for building relatability and trust in the classroom.

1. All students benefit from inclusive, culturally, and ethnically diverse curricula. Developing a classroom community increases cognitive learning, engagement, and better learning outcomes.
2. Co-create a positive learning community where students can thrive:
 - a) Work with students create and agree upon classroom rules or classroom guidelines together. Students will feel valued and learn the value of collaboration. Create a space where questions are welcome.
 - b) Assign tasks to encourage students to get to know one another. Students who know one another and get to know their professors are more likely to seek help outside of class.
 - c) Build rapport by learning names and pronouns.
 - d) The [Community Canvas framework](#) provides three foundational components for building and running a new community: identity, experience, and structure.
3. When inviting students to participate, do not rely on stereotypes or assumptions about student membership in demographic groups. Likewise, do not ask a student who has identified as part of a group to speak for that entire group.

4. Share your interests and passions for the material with your students. Describe the learning process and challenges students may face. Ask for anonymous feedback during the semester to assess classroom climate during the semester.
5. Maintain a positive classroom environment by taking responsibility to address challenging classroom moments.
 - a) Microaggressions (defined in Sue et al. as “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group”), offensive comments and behaviors, can be turned into teachable moments by asking students to reflect on their assumptions and positions.
 - b) Encourage students to keep discussions focused on issues and ideas, not on individuals.
 - a) When difficult moments occur, give time and space in class to name and discuss the anxiety in the room. Avoid attributing motives or intentions behind the person voicing or committing the offensive or alienating act—rather, focus on the comment, behavior, or attitude itself, and acknowledge the effect it has on others.
 - b) When difficult moments occur, give time and space in class to name and discuss the anxiety in the room. Avoid attributing motives or intentions behind the person voicing or committing the offensive or alienating act—rather, focus on the comment, behavior, or attitude itself, and acknowledge the effect it has on others.
 - c) Encourage students to use “I” statements when discussing difficult issues (for example, “I think that comment minimizes the issue,” or “I feel hurt by that line of thought, and here’s why..”), which can help to build and maintain a healthy student rapport.
6. Inclusive online learning relies on several factors that correlate positively to a sense of community. These include increased social presence of the instructor, student-student interactions, clear guidelines and rules, and pedagogical caring.
 - a) Increase social presence by providing students with frequent opportunities to engage in varied interactions with faculty such as through virtual office hours, emails, chats, etc.
 - b) Create communities of practice by breaking larger online groups into small groups (10 or fewer students) to discuss ideas and work cooperatively on completing assigned tasks to encourage engagement and connection among students. Provide clear instructions for the goals and tasks they are to complete collaboratively.
 - c) Develop clear guidelines for asynchronous discussions. Students who dominate the conversation or have an authoritative communication style can jeopardize the camaraderie of a discussion group. Respectfully

challenge student comments when they marginalize or devalue another student or group's perspective or experience. When necessary, utilize "offline" chats with aggressive students to address the matter.

- d) Conduct regular check-ins with students who are falling behind and those who are doing well. Reach out to students who have disappeared from/stopped completing asynchronous coursework. If students miss a deadline, start the email by asking how they are doing. Communicate concern for student well-being beyond the course and actively share information about university resources that can support students. Send encouraging or congratulatory notes to students who do well on an exam or assignment.
7. Sharing aspects of who you are as a person is beneficial for building relatability and trust in the classroom.

IV: Student Engagement & Learning

Summary:

1. Opportunities for anonymous student engagement
2. Provide points for participation
3. Experiential and Hands-on learning opportunities
4. Peer learning opportunities
5. Use of structure in note-taking

1. Opportunities for anonymous student engagement
 - a. Use of technology/polling for engagement and feedback
 - b. Use of low-tech strategies like writing ideas on index cards or pieces of paper and swapping them for other students to read
2. Provide points for participation
 - a. Can use technology
 - b. Can give each student an index card with their name on it, to receive credit they will participate and then hand in their card at the end of class. This makes it easier for the students and instructors to keep track.
3. Experiential and Hands-on learning opportunities

- a. Include learning topics and examples relevant to students to increase engagement
 - b. Explain benefit of the topic of study
 - c. Include real life examples/case studies to boost critical thinking, flexibility, and practical knowledge outside of theory
4. Peer learning opportunities
- a. Think-pair-share
 - b. Assign roles for the group including reporter, scribe, time/turn facilitator
 - c. Join student clubs to build connections
5. Use of structure in note taking
- a. Use of agenda for learning objectives in the beginning of the class to prime students for class focus
 - b. Provide skeletal outlines or graphic organizers with spaces to fill in
 - c. Leave blanks on slides or use visuals on slides to have students focus on that point for their notes
 - d. Have students take five minutes at the beginning of the semester to exchange emails with a student sitting next to them so that if they miss a class they can get notes from that student.

V: Assessment:

Summary:

1. Design assessments as opportunities for feedback, improvement, and learning.
2. Develop incremental and overlapping content assessment methodologies to maximize long-term understanding, learning and recall of material.
3. Develop authentic assessment opportunities that minimize the use of packaged assessment materials connected to a single textbook or product and connect assessment methods and specifics to specific learning outcomes.
4. Consider Universal Design for Instruction principles to address accessibility in assessment around due dates and times, methods of in-class participation, time expectations on exams, and economic access to course content.
5. Assess personal unconscious bias prior to delivering feedback, designing learning experiences, and course assessments including participation/engagement.

Design assessments as opportunities for feedback, improvement, and learning. Assessment provides a chance to improve understanding through feedback and clarification of content. Without feedback and an opportunity to correct understanding, grading becomes a reward/punishment process, not a learning process. Focusing on assessment as a chance for development makes collegiate-level content more accessible for students with a range of educational histories.

This can be accomplished by:

- Returning complete graded assessments (exams, papers, projects) to students so items can be reviewed using course material with academic support/tutors.
- Consider providing answer keys, particularly for intensive skill-based / problem-based content (e.g. Mathematics). Without accurate corrective materials, feedback and grades on assessments have less potential to improve future performance.
- Consider grading and returning final “term” papers instead of assigning them to be due at the end of the semester.
- Consider feedback loop assessments where correction, utilization of support, draft and edit processes are included in the assessment process.

Develop incremental and overlapping content assessment methodologies to maximize long-term understanding, learning and recall of material. Practice and recall are critical components necessary for memory and retention of material understanding. Frequent assessment (recall demand) produces stronger long-term understanding and memory of content and provides more opportunities for improvement.

This can be accomplished by:

- Utilizing frequent small-scale assessments instead of a midterm / final exam structure
- Vary content to include cumulative components throughout the semester instead of only in final summative exams.
- Consider multiple applied written assessments throughout the term over a single “term” paper. Or engage students in the writing and editing process throughout the term on a single summative paper, where feedback and process is provided throughout the term.
- Utilize recall practice within class sessions to prime learning, improve retention of key material, and connect classroom experiences within external reading.
- Utilize low-stakes, micro assessments, and experiences to support comprehension, prevent misunderstanding, and assist students in developing stronger metacognitive skills.
- Formative and diagnostic assessments can be used to assist students in identifying areas for improvement, improving self-regulation and learning skills, and helping students direct learning efforts.
- In class micro assessments prime for learning, improve recall, provide feedback regarding instruction, and create learning communities within classrooms.

Assess your own unconscious bias prior to delivering feedback, designing learning experiences, and course assessments including participation/engagement. Universal Design for Instruction principles can be used to minimize possible impacts in many areas.

Particular areas to consider include:

- Accented speech, speed/fluency of speech (in English) often negatively affect individuals' ratings of spoken content. This effect can also impact ratings of students' written output, particularly if the written output is seen as "too proficient" as compared to spoken language. This will also impact students' willingness to speak in class and affect perceptions of their participation in class.
- Students showing socially extroverted/sophisticated behaviors can be rated as more proficient in class interactions or more engaged in class overall. Shy/introverted students may receive poor participation grades and poor ratings of their class engagement or understanding based on more reserved social behaviors.
- Verbal and non-verbal forms and terms of respect vary widely across cultures and can be misinterpreted negatively by majority culture.
- Perceptions of student competence and engagement can be negatively impacted by clothing quality, appearance, and other visible markers of poverty.

Develop authentic assessment opportunities that minimize the use of packaged assessment materials connected to a single textbook or product. Packaged standardized exam item pools and similar published materials utilize artificial grammatical complexity to create item difficulty. In addition, consider alternatives to expensive online homework tools or provide alternative options to maximize accessibility.

This can be accomplished by:

- Incorporate the application of course content as an assessment methodology as a method to develop complex understanding of material, and reduce concerns related to online academic dishonesty.
- Develop course-specific exam items, and assessment tools that are directly related to course learning outcomes; vary item and answer sequencing to address cheating concerns between semesters.
- Utilize non-profit and OER problem sets, and homework items for content areas where daily/weekly practice is critical and generation would be difficult.

Consider Universal Design for Instruction principles as they relate to assessment. Universal Design principles direct us to design learning experiences as innately accessible so accommodations are not needed because accessibility was considered as part of instructional design. This can be accomplished by:

- Engage in a range of in-class assessment methodologies to provide opportunities for all students to respond and engage in class discussion and material (ex. Written questions instead of oral; multiple submission methods)

- Consider whether demonstrating content mastery requires timed examination; consider whether application of content requires memory with no use of external resources.
- Consider how due dates/times impact students with varied external demands or experiences; plan alternative options based on student needs.
- Reconsider implementing no makeup regardless of circumstance missed exam/assignment policies and rationale; also no-excuse limited absence policies. Utilize policy that establishes boundaries but acknowledges the impact of health and other circumstances.
- Consider the accessibility of online tools, homework platforms, and other materials prior to utilization.
- Consider the economic accessibility of course materials and whether alternative OER or non-profit options are available.

VI: Resources

General Resources:

- [Quality Matters Review Standards for Higher Education](#)
- [Seven Principles For Good Practice in Undergraduate Education](#)
- [Have We Gotten Student Success Completely Backward?](#)
- [EAB Defining the Faculty Role in Student Success](#)
- [Leading Groups Online](#)
- [Using Design for Equity in Higher Education for Liberatory Change](#)
- [Teaching a Sea of Students](#)

Course Design:

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