

## Imbedding Cultural Sensitivity in the Legal Writing Curriculum

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Our students are black and white, Latino and Latina, Asian and Native American. They are rich, poor, and middle-class. They are women and men who span a 30-year age range; abled and other-abled; gay, straight, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered. They come from a host of religious backgrounds and no religious affiliation at all. And, standard law school curriculum falls short in embracing and educating the vast array of students we have before us.

Recently, groups of students of color created videos to communicate their law school experiences. The videos candidly portray the racial stereotyping suffered by the students and underscore the isolation experienced by many students of color. The compelling portrayal makes clear, once again, that law school administrators and faculty must respond to the needs and differences of a wide range of students. We must become more culturally competent and we must educate our students to become more culturally competent, too.

When I first set out to create a more inclusive classroom curriculum geared towards cultural competence, I sought specific steps; what template could I use to create more inclusivity in my teaching? What I found were more questions and few concrete answers. Cultural inclusivity and competence is not created quickly and there is no “one size fits all” method of inclusive teaching. With that caveat, there are “ways of being” that can enhance inclusivity and foster cultural competence in the classroom.

First, we must be self-aware. We must acknowledge our own biases and stereotypes. We cannot hide behind the “there’s not a racist bone in my body” myth. Awareness of our own implicit biases can enable us both to overcome bias and to more fully understand our students. Taking one or more of Harvard’s implicit bias surveys is one way to become aware of our own hidden biases. With that self-awareness then comes the challenge to be comfortable with being uncomfortable. Open dialogue about cultural differences including race, gender, and class can be difficult. Overcome the fear of saying the wrong thing. You might-you might say the wrong thing. Then, name it- name the discomfort; name the difficulty.

Next, we must educate ourselves. Talk to your students; talk to your colleagues. Look at “I am Harvard” and UCLA’s “33.” Read Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* or Serena Patel’s *Preparing Law Students for Practice in Our Multicultural World*. Work to understand the social and structural environments factors that influence learning. Pay attention to imbedded curriculum.

Finally, we must be purposeful in our course construction. We must employ a wide array of teaching pedagogies that respond to all students’ learning styles. Select texts and other reading materials that reflect a wide range of human experience. Our guest speakers should include lawyers and judges from a full range of racial, ethnic, sexual orientation, and religious backgrounds and practice areas. Use hypotheticals, fact patterns, and client simulations that include gay and lesbian clients and judges with Latino or Asian surnames. Think; think about your students, their experiences, and the lawyers you want to help them become.