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## **Strategies for Creating a Safe and Supportive Learning Environment**

### **Model Civil Attitude and Behavior**

- **Consider the personality that you project in the classroom.** Could you be seen as weak or timid? Is your teaching personality laid back, ‘anything goes,’ and permissive? Could students perceive you as condescending in any way? Or are you confident and assured, but friendly and approachable at the same time?
- **Model appropriate classroom behavior for your students,** including active listening, and civil and courteous communication. Respond positively to student contributions, and address, at the appropriate level, situations in which students have behaved disrespectfully.
- **Convey that you care about your students as learners and as people.** You can do this by verbally expressing your high expectations of them, your empathy with their learning challenges, and your willingness to help them succeed. You can also do this by making eye contact, listening intently when they are speaking, and learning their names and particular interests in the course.
- **Be sensitive to individual differences** (including background, previous educational experience, learning style, and ability/disability), and address insensitive behavior by students if it occurs.

### **Set Classroom Expectations**

- **Establish the classroom culture and tone in the first few class sessions** so that students know what is expected. Expectations can be explicitly conveyed, for example, in your syllabus, or implicitly conveyed, for example, in the way you model appropriate behavior.
- **Establish student participation guidelines and expectations.** Include appropriate ways to challenge, critique, or criticize the ideas being shared. Involve students in the process of establishing these guidelines; when students have a voice in course decisions, they assume responsibility for complying with them. Distribute guidelines to the class either on paper or online.
- **Establish expectations surrounding appropriate class communication.** Include appropriate ways to challenge, critique, or criticize the ideas being shared. It may help to embed the communication conventions of your discipline in classroom discussions, explaining to students how people in that field of study communicate when they challenge or critique viewpoints.

### **Facilitate Classroom Interactions**

- **Provide opportunities for students to share their ideas and participate in multiple ways.** Not all students feel comfortable participating in whole class discussion, so consider mixing up your activities, allowing students to participate

individually in writing, in small groups, in whole class discussions, and in one-on-one conversations with the instructor.

- **Respond to student contributions with respect and encouragement** by pointing out when they bring up interesting points or questions, and by using their names. Dismissing or putting down student contributions by saying things like, “Didn’t you prepare for class?” or “Your classmate already addressed that,” will discourage participation from all students.
- **Encourage students to get to know one another.** If the class incorporates group work, encourage students to introduce themselves to each other in their groups and to share an interesting fact about themselves. This can put students at ease with peers and facilitate greater interaction.
- **Provide clear instructions for group work.** When students know what they need to do during group work, there are fewer opportunities for distracting or off-topic conversations.