



## **Microaggressions and Microaffirmations Series**

### **PART 1: Defining Microaggressions and Microaffirmations**

In 2015 the UC Office of the President held a workshop on fostering inclusive excellence for UC department chairs and deans. They published this list of example microaggressions, which subsequently received some backlash from across the political spectrum. This is an example of the highly political context in which microaggressions take shape and gain importance. Indeed, in a climate in which [overt demonstrations](#) of racist, homophobic, xenophobic, ableist and misogynist views are not uncommon on college campuses and elsewhere, awareness of more subtle forms of exclusion like microaggressions becomes increasingly important. What follows includes information to help instructors avoid microaggressions when possible, and identify and respond to them when they occur.

#### **Defining Microaggressions**

Although the term was first coined by Pierce in 1978, Sue et al. published a landmark 2007 study that defined microaggressions as “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative...slights and insults” (p. 271). Microaggressions are often unintentional or automatic, come from well-meaning people, and may leave everyone involved uncertain about what happened. However, it is more important to consider the way a person may experience a microaggression than it is to consider the intent behind the sentiment.

While the research on microaggressions is ongoing (Bartlett, 2017, Lilienfeld, 2017), students, faculty, and staff on college campuses do report experiencing these daily “indignities” (Sue et al., 2007). In an effort to help you avoid potentially invalidating your students’ experiences, we provide this resource series.

#### **Microaffirmations**

As a positive strategy to prevent microaggressions, you can use “microaffirmations,” or small acts that foster inclusion, listening, comfort, and support for people who may feel isolated or invisible in an environment (Rowe, 2008). These can include welcoming facial expressions, making concerted efforts to use students’ correct names, pronunciations, and pronouns, affirming students’ feelings and experiences, and rewarding positive behaviors. Consider using “affirming messages” such as these from Powell, Demetriou, and Fisher (2013):

- “I’m glad you’re here,”
- “I see you’re making progress in this area,”
- “I’m concerned about you. Please come visit me in office hours,”
- “What do you think you did well in this class/situation/assignment?”
- “What will you do differently next time?”
- “Have you thought about utilizing \_\_\_\_ (campus resource)? Many successful students find this resource helpful.”
- “I notice that you’re interested in \_\_\_\_\_. Have you considered participating in \_\_\_\_\_ (opportunity/program/organization)?”

#### **Additional Resources**

The following are a few additional resources that can help you understand and approach microaggressions:

- [“How to Be an Ally to Someone Experiencing Microaggressions”](#)
- [“Microaffirmations in Higher Ed Advising”](#)
- [The Microaggressions Project](#)
- [Recognizing Microaggressions and the Messages They Send](#)
  - From [“Fostering Inclusive Excellence: Strategies and Tools for Department Chairs and Deans.”](#) 2015.



### **Citation**

Center for Educational Effectiveness [CEE]. (2018). Microaggressions and Microaffirmations Series. *Just-in-Time Teaching Resources*. Retrieved from <https://cee.ucdavis.edu/JITT>

### **References**

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