

Resource Guide

Avoiding Microaggressions in the Classroom

Microaggressions are brief and commonplace verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to individuals based on their marginalized group membership. These messages have lasting, negative psychological impact on the target person and group. Microaggressions include: *microassaults*- name-calling, avoidant behavior, and purposeful discriminatory acts; *microinsults*- remarks that convey rudeness, insensitivity, or are demeaning a person's social group, identity, or heritage; and *microinvalidations*- communications that exclude or negate the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of marginalized groups. (Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso; and Sue)

On the whole, microaggressions are not being perpetrated by spiteful and bigoted instructors who want to intentionally hurt students from diverse groups, but rather are committed at the subconscious level by well-meaning and caring instructors. Despite the unintentional nature of most microaggressions in the classroom, the negative impact on students is real, resulting in a hostile and unwelcoming classroom environment.

Below are some beginning steps to avoiding and addressing microaggressions in the classroom.

How Faculty Can Avoid Committing Microaggressions

- Reflect on your own attitudes, stereotypes, and expectations.
- Confront your own hesitations.
- Do not expect students to be experts on any experiences beyond their own and do not make them speak for the experience of an entire group of people.
- Assume that the groups that you are talking about always are in some way represented in the classroom.
- In those cases when students do have the courage to contact you and point out that they were offended by a remark that you made or an action that you undertook, listen to them.

How to Address Student-Perpetrated Microaggressions in the Classroom

- Establish standards of responsibility and behavior for working collectively with others.
- Challenge the discriminatory attitudes and behavior, rather than the person.
- Teach students that impact is more important than intent.
- Stop unintentional microinsults and ask students to rephrase or rethink comments.
- Provide accurate information to challenge stereotypes and biases in the moment whenever possible.

Resources

Sue, Derald Wing, et.al. "Racial Microaggressions and the Asian American Experience."
Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, 13: 2007.

Sue, Derald Wing. *Microaggressions in Everyday Life*. Wiley, 2010.

Solorzano, Daniel, Miguel Ceja, and Tara Yosso. "Critical Race Theory, Racial Microaggressions, and Campus Racial Climate: The Experiences of African American College Students." *The Journal of Negro Education*, 69: (2000) 60-73.

For more information or to discuss how you might incorporate these ideas into your courses, contact the Reinert Center at ctl@slu.edu.